THE PRIMACY OF LOVE

The Relation Between Agapeic Love and Nonviolent Direct Action in the Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.

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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."

--Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach"
To

JANICE WILLIAMS LAKE

wife and friend
I declare that this thesis is the result of my own independent research.

Signed_

Date 14 April 1984
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the integral relationship between Martin Luther King's conception of Christian love and his ideas on nonviolent resistance—a pivotal issue in his moral philosophy. Chapter One is a general introduction presenting the subject matter and major sources of research utilized in this study. Considerable attention has been given throughout the thesis to King's unpublished writings and speeches as well as his published works.

The second chapter delineates the salient influences and schools of thought that affected King's intellectual pilgrimage to nonviolence. King was reared in a Christian home, educated in a small, liberal arts college and then earned two degrees beyond the bachelor's level in theology. He enjoyed grappling with philosophical issues and possessed a deeply devout evangelical faith. It is impossible to understand King's conception of love or philosophy of nonviolence without a firm grasp of the social and intellectual influences which shaped his Christian moral philosophy.

Chapter Three gives a detailed exegesis of King's doctrine of agapeic love. Out of his fervent Christian faith, King developed a thoroughgoing theological ontology
of love, and this chapter looks at the metaphysical and dynamic character of agape in King's writings.

Chapter Four is a discussion of the social and ethical context of King's thinking on nonviolence. Given the situation of racial discrimination in America, King believed that the black community of his day had three basic options in response to their oppression: acquiescence, violent retaliation or nonviolent resistance. King's call for nonviolence must be seen over against his denial of the morality and practicability of violence and nonresistance. This chapter examines King's moral analysis and critique of the ethical choices which he believed confronted the civil rights movement.

Often King delineated what he called the basic tenets of nonviolence, explaining that nonviolence is firmly founded upon a philosophical basis. But the fundamental tenets discussed by King are actually the essential elements of his own moral philosophy. Chapter Five is a discussion of the major principles of King's Christian ethics, and particular emphasis has been given to the basic precepts of nonviolent resistance stressed by him throughout his civil rights career.

The sixth chapter deals with how King conceived of nonviolence in action. King was as concerned about the praxis of protest as he was about its theoretical basis. Chapter Six draws upon King's ideas on the steps and stages of a nonviolent campaign, supplementing the discussion with historical material relating to his own leadership of direct action.
The final chapter of this work discusses King's thinking on justice and power and delineates the dynamic interaction between agapeic love and nonviolent resistance in his thought. King's philosophy of nonviolence was founded upon his realistic view of power, democratic idea of justice and conception of Christian love. Chapter Seven analyzes the creative synthesis wrought by King linking together these important ethical values.
A special word of gratitude is owed to a number of people and institutions who made possible this research project. Professor D. B. Forrester and Dr. J. I. H. McDonald in Edinburgh University gave invaluable insight and guidance as my major advisors. Rotary International provided a one year tuition and living stipend grant in 1981, and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the United Kingdom awarded me an Overseas Research Scholarship in 1980-81. Arlington United Methodist Church in Jacksonville, Florida and Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Hugh Lake, Sr., my paternal grandparents, also helped to defray the heavy financial obligations of postgraduate education. Last, but certainly not least, I owe a profound debt of gratitude to my wife, Janice, without whose encouragement and assistance this work would not have been completed.
On December 5, 1955, Martin Luther King, Jr. stood at the pulpit of the Holt Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama to make what he later called the most "decisive" speech of his life. He was addressing a community meeting assembled to deliberate on an event which had shaken the black citizenry of Montgomery.

Five days earlier, Mrs. Rosa Parks had been arrested and charged with violating the city's segregation code when she refused to vacate her seat so a white, male passenger could take her place. A group of black leaders organized the Montgomery Improvement Association to help formulate what action should be taken in response to Mrs. Parks' arrest. The mass assembly at the Holt Street Church was an outcome of their meeting to discuss the problem, and Martin Luther King, the newly elected President of the MIA, was asked to delineate the issues confronting the black community.

King began his address by recounting the events that had taken place in Mrs. Parks' arrest and how this was one incident of abuse among many perpetrated on the black community. He said the black citizens of Montgomery were
tired—tired of oppression and humiliation; tired of segregation. Confronted with the atmosphere of abuse in Montgomery, black citizens had but one choice—protest. King reminded his audience how the black community had shown an amazing patience. Indeed, he asserted, "we have sometimes given our white brothers the feeling that we liked the way we were being treated." "But we come here tonight," he continued, "to be saved from that patience that makes us patient with anything less than freedom and justice."³

Delineating how the protest of the MIA would be categorically different from the campaigns of the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens Council, King focused attention on both the foundation and intent of his speech—loving good will. "Our action must be guided by the deepest principles of the Christian faith," he said. "Love must be our regulating ideal."⁴ After admonishing those present not to meet hatred with hate, nor violence with retaliation, King kindled the flame of inspiration and courage:

If you will protest courageously, and yet with dignity and Christian love, when the history books are written in future generations, the historians will have to pause and say, 'there lived a great people—a black people—who injected new meaning and dignity into the veins of civilization.' This is our challenge and our overwhelming responsibility.⁵

King maintained this emphasis on loving good will throughout the whole of the Montgomery campaign, a rigorous struggle which lasted approximately one year, and his call for courageous protest, guided by the principle
of love, was more than emotional rhetoric. Time and time again the authenticity of King's commitment to the Christian love ethic was tried in the dilemma of ethical choice, his words tested in the social arena. Often he explained to his hearers the exact meaning of love he meant to convey and maintained that it must be the "summun bonum," the "regulating ideal," of the Montgomery protest. In Stride Toward Freedom, King's own account of the Montgomery story, he underscores the pivotal place of Christian love in the campaign:

From the beginning a basic philosophy guided the movement. This guiding principle has since been referred to variously as nonviolent resistance, noncooperation, and passive resistance. But in the first days of the protest none of these expressions was mentioned; the phrase most often heard was 'Christian love.' It was the Sermon on the Mount, rather than a doctrine of passive resistance, that initially inspired the Negroes of Montgomery to dignified social action. It was Jesus of Nazareth that stirred the Negroes to protest with the creative weapon of love.7

The Montgomery campaign will be remembered always as a watershed event in American civil rights history. The MIA was successful in desegregating the city bus system, but what is equally remarkable is the way in which this organization, under King's leadership, kept violence and retaliation on the part of black citizens in Montgomery to a minimum.

Throughout the boycott the black community was harassed by violent and vitriolic segregationists, but King's insistence upon loving good will and nonviolence had a profound effect on the campaign. His call for rigorous
protest touched the pain and frustration of the black community. His emphasis on the centrality of Christian love touched the deep religious fervor of the black church, whose influence in the South was considerable. And King's synthesis between protest and Christian responsibility was powerful. The Montgomery Improvement Association had broad based support in the black community for its campaign, while minimizing racial animosity.

But the boycott affected more than the citizens of Montgomery. A ferment of civil rights interest was inspired and numerous desegregation campaigns initiated throughout the South. King had demonstrated the social and political viability of nonviolent resistance, especially the way in which this method could generate community cooperation. Montgomery stood as a vivid symbol to southern blacks that segregation could be resisted and eventually defeated. The bus boycott, moreover, brought Martin Luther King to national attention and also brought to national attention the philosophy and technique of nonviolent direct action as interpreted through Western eyes.

In 1959, King moved to Atlanta, Georgia and became the co-pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, the congregation his father had served for almost three decades. But King had decided to give only part of his time to pastoral duties. His primary reason for going to Atlanta was to become the first full time President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an association (originally of
Southern black ministers) established to work for civil rights. Under King's leadership, the SCLC became one of the premier civil rights organizations in the United States, and his prominence in the civil rights movement was enhanced greatly through his able leadership of this national organization.

King may have left Montgomery in 1959, but he did not leave in Alabama his deep commitment to the moral principles and social means which had brought success. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was dedicated to removing the stifling social conditions of racial segregation, but it was also dedicated to nonviolent social change. Even after assuming the presidency of SCLC, King continued to insist upon loving good will as an essential part of solving the problems of racial discrimination. King had learned in Montgomery that nonviolent resistance and unconditional concern for one's opponent were integrally woven together, and he insisted upon the importance of this in his leadership of crusades for racial justice.  

It is accurate to say that King stressed the significance of love throughout the entirety of his civil rights career—a rather unique emphasis for one engaged in the rigors of social conflict. Wherever he went, King charged people of conscience with the responsibility of overcoming evil with good, challenging them to place the ethic of love at the very center of their lives.  

There were, of course, numerous shifts and adjustments in King's understanding and application of nonviolence.
During his career, he was involved with a number of social issues, and toward the end of his life he began to confront broader issues of injustice in American society—concerns which were not confined to racial discrimination alone. King spoke out vociferously against American involvement in the Vietnam War. He was concerned with the deep deprivation of the northern ghetto and the pitiful plight of southern poor—black and white.

Late in his career, King began to move from a strict emphasis on civil rights in his leadership of SCLC to what he called "an era of human rights." In 1967, he even began to call for massive civil disobedience in American urban centers as a means of confronting the entrenched racism and profound poverty found in the United States. Such massive acts of civil disobedience, he believed, would dramatize the need for radical social reform.

What is equally striking in the record of King's final year, however, is his deep devotion to nonviolence in his call for such radical change and his continued commitment to the Christian love ethic. The last year of King's life was punctuated with speeches and writings which explain exactly what he meant by agapeic love, asserting its importance and priority in human life. On numerous occasions, King underscored his utter allegiance to the moral philosophy which he developed in his earlier writings. Even in the midst of his call for more radical tactics and new applications of direct action, King always emphasized the importance of nonviolence, always stressed the necessity of loving good will.
Martin Luther King's civil rights career, therefore, was marked by an amazing consistency in regard to his reliance upon nonviolence and his call for unconditional love as the **sumnum bonum** of the civil rights movement. From Montgomery to Memphis, from the beginning of his civil rights involvement until his tragic death in 1968, King insisted that nonviolent resistance was the only moral and practical means of social change open to the black community and that at the center of nonviolence stood the ethic of love.\(^{13}\)

The synthesis between agapeic love and nonviolent resistance in King's writings and speeches raises many philosophical and ethical questions, to be sure. Indeed, it is fair to say that on first analysis King's ideas raise more moral questions than they answer, and it is important to recognize and to grapple with these larger issues. How do King's ideas on love and nonviolence relate to Christian ethics as a whole? Upon what understanding of love did King admonish nonviolent protesters to love the violent and vitriolic opponents they faced? Is not unconditional love baffled and bewildered by the strains and complexities of modern, pluralistic social tensions? Does not such rhetoric in the final analysis serve the forces of injustice, because it is too sentimental to deal adequately with the will to power?

Looking at these issues in the larger context of
Christian ethics, one can almost hear immediately the penetratively critical voice of Reinhold Niebuhr, a theologian King deeply respected, questioning the ethical legitimacy of King's call for the primacy of love. Furthermore, Niebuhr would not be alone in his criticism. Christian ethicists are often wary of any attempt to synthesize the New Testament conception of love with a particular method of handling political conflict. And it is essential to examine how King dealt with these important ethical problems.

Though his synthesis between love and nonviolence raises many questions, King demonstrates throughout his published and unpublished works a keen awareness of these ethical issues and sought to deal forthrightly with them in both the theory and praxis of his moral philosophy. This, of course, is precisely why King discussed the meaning of agapeic love so often in his speeches and writings. He was aware of the ambiguity of the term love, and endeavored constantly to emphasize the Christian meaning of this salient ethical principle.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the integral relationship between Christian love and nonviolent direct action in King's moral philosophy. His expositions on nonviolence and love were an intentional effort to deal with the ethical problems of agapeic love when applied to rigorous social conflict. It is essential, therefore, to understand King's ideas on nonviolent protest in relation to his conception of love. His understanding of *agape*, moreover, must be analyzed in
light of his thinking on civil resistance.

Though critical analysis has been brought to bear on the topic of study, this work does not criticize King's ideas from an outside, predetermined philosophical perspective. A concerted effort has been made throughout the thesis to let King speak for King, relying heavily upon his published and unpublished writings as primary resources.

Previous research on King's thought has been done, as one might expect, from a variety of points of view. Doctoral students have written on topics as varied as his rhetorical style to the influence of personalism on his theology, and all of these investigations have shed additional light on King's life and work.

As already stated, Martin Luther King's call for nonviolent protest against injustice and Christian view of love weave their way throughout the whole of his thought and action, and consequently numerous researchers, indeed almost all serious scholars, have commented on the significance of King's doctrine of love. But the literature to date is lacking in adequate analysis of the vital interrelationship between love and nonviolence in his thought. Therefore, an analytic study focusing on this important topic is needed.

Though this study deals with a specific subject in King's ethics, an intentional effort has been made to present the general framework of his thinking. The dynamic relationship between agapeic love and nonviolent resistance is, in effect, the mortar which holds together
much of King's moral philosophy. This thesis, therefore, utilizes King's ideas on love and nonviolence as an hermeneutical key for understanding his theology and ethics as a whole.

Martin Luther King did not set out his ideas in a comprehensive, systematic manner in any one work. His life was filled with conflict and controversy, and the resources of his thought are varied. Thorough analysis of King's ideas requires one to investigate his unpublished sermons and speeches as well as his published articles and books. In this work, materials from four major archives have been utilized for research purposes.

First, the author consulted the "Martin Luther King, Jr. Special Collection," Mugar Memorial Library, Boston University. This archive is one of the most complete collections of documents from King's early civil rights career and contains many of his student papers and essays.

Second, materials were examined at the "Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change," Atlanta, Georgia. This archive, opened October 1981 in a newly constructed facility, is an extraordinary collection of King's unpublished works. The archive contains extensive materials from the time King moved to Atlanta as the President of SCLC until his death. The King Center also houses the administrative papers and records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and a number of other civil rights collections.

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Materials contained in the "Contemporary Social Action Collection," maintained by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, also were investigated. Several significant tape recordings of King's sermons and speeches are contained in this archive and have provided interesting examples of his rhetorical and homiletical style. This collection also includes several interviews of interest, including interviews with King, his wife, Coretta Scott King, Ralph David Abernathy and Wyatt T. Walker.

Documents from the "Ralph J. Bunche Oral History Collection" have afforded a wealth of information. This collection is part of the Civil Rights Documentation Project housed at Howard University, Washington, D.C. It contains numerous transcripts of taped interviews with key personalities involved in the civil rights movement. A number of these interviews are with people who were executives and advisors in SCLC, and the information contained within them has provided valuable historical material for understanding King's thought and action.

This thesis, therefore, represents extensive research into King's unpublished writings and speeches, as well as his published works sometimes printed in obscure periodicals. All together, the collections described above contain over 200,000 speeches, manuscripts, letters, tape recordings, administrative records and other documents. These materials have given greater clarity to the ideas discussed in King's major works.
To be sure, Martin Luther King's place in American history and successful leadership of nonviolent direct action call for serious academic attention. The Christian origins and ostensibly religious orientation of his thinking make his ideas especially significant for Christian social ethics. It is the author's sincere hope that this work will shed further light on the vital relationship between love and nonviolence in King's thought and add to the scholarly study of his life and work.
CHAPTER TWO
PILGRIMAGE TO NONVIOLENCE

Martin Luther King refers to the development of his understanding of nonviolence as a "pilgrimage," and this is a significant statement for it suggests, as is undoubtedly true, that King arrived at his understanding of nonviolence through a long intellectual, social and spiritual quest. His conception of nonviolent direct action cannot be traced to any one source or for that matter to any one period of his life. King's understanding of nonviolence is a conflation of ideas and concerns, a creative synthesis of thought and action, and it is important to look at the salient points in his pilgrimage—to analyze carefully the ideas which formulate his unique conception of nonviolent resistance. Below, sketched in broad brushstrokes, is a delineation of the social and intellectual pilgrimage which led King to his understanding of nonviolence.

Early Years

The home and social environment into which Martin
Luther King was born left an indelible impression upon him. Born on January 15, 1929, King was reared in the black, Auburn Street area of Atlanta, Georgia. His maternal grandfather, The Reverend A. D. Williams, was the pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, one of the largest and most prestigious black churches in Atlanta. King's father, The Reverend M. L. King, Sr., was the assistant pastor at Ebenezer until 1931 when he became pastor after Williams' death.

There is little doubt that King's life during his early years revolved around Ebenezer Church. Indeed, the church was the soil in which his life was nurtured and took root. It is difficult, however, to assess the precise manner in which this black evangelical tradition influenced his later thought, for King does not relate any particular aspect of his thinking to the fundamentalist tradition in which he was reared. In fact, King seems to have rebelled against some of the emotionalism and antirationalism of his early experience, though one catches only brief glimpses of such rebellion in the record of his childhood.²

One is aware, nonetheless, when studying King's writings and speeches, of the formative impact of the black church. Its influence is evident in the genre and style of King's oratory, his deep sense of piety and the images, phrases and symbols he uses to communicate his message. The evangelical preaching and strong leadership of King's father seminally influenced his later life. Many of the ideas which subsequently became an integral
part of King's philosophical theology were given to him originally by the black church, and this is an important aspect of his pilgrimage to nonviolence to bear in mind and a dimension of his thinking which will become clearer as this study unfolds. For now, it is important to underscore the formative influence of the Christian tradition in which King was reared.3

King's early social environment affected his later life beyond the impact and religious fervor of the black church. What seems profoundly significant in King's childhood are his encounters with what he later called the "bitter pill" of segregation and the attitudes toward racial discrimination which he experienced in his family. One does not find an embryonic champion of nonviolence in the record of King's early years, but one does encounter in his family environment a strong resistance to the institution of segregation.

King's grandfather became pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in 1894, one year before the death of the celebrated black leader Frederick Douglass—one of Martin Luther King's childhood idols.4 Williams exerted a profound influence on the Atlanta community and worked diligently to secure greater rights for black people. As one of the few members of the black community who was not dependent upon white people for his livelihood, The Reverend Mr. Williams was able, with the assistance of other important leaders in Atlanta, to help defeat a city bond issue which did not make provision for the
construction of black public high schools. As a result of this campaign the Booker T. Washington High School, the first black secondary institution of education in Atlanta, was built in the 1920's and was the place where Martin Luther King, Jr. graduated from high school.

In the midst of the controversy over the bond issue one of the local papers, The Georgian, denounced the opponents of the measure as "dirty and ignorant" protesters. Williams and others called for a boycott of the newspaper which contributed to its eventual demise.\(^5\) No doubt the story of this boycott was related to King in his childhood, and one senses a subliminal connection between this boycott and a later one which was to hurl King to national attention.

Martin Luther King, Sr. stood well within the same activist tradition inaugurated by his father-in-law at Ebenezer Church. All his life "Daddy King," an affectionate name given to him by his congregation, carried on a kind of private resistance against Jim Crow laws. He rarely rode the city buses because black people were required to sit in the back, and he is reported to have said: "Even though the law may force me to ride in the back, my mind is always up front."\(^6\)

Daddy King was a member of the local chapter of the NAACP and an active participant in a number of other advocacy groups which had brought an amelioration of some of the worst segregation laws in the city. He was particularly instrumental in securing equalized salaries for black teachers in Atlanta.\(^7\)
In *Stride Toward Freedom*, Martin Luther King relates an incident in his early childhood which typifies his father's attitude toward segregation. King records that he and his father went into a department store to purchase a pair of shoes. A sales clerk asked the two of them to please take a seat in another area of the store. Daddy King, suspecting that there was a segregated area to serve black people, responded by saying they were quite comfortable in the seats they had selected. The clerk explained that there was a special section for black people in the shoe department and again asked the two of them to go and sit in this designated area. Daddy King informed the sales clerk that he would buy shoes where he was seated, or he would not buy them at all. King recalls his father saying as they were leaving the store: "I don't care how long I have to live with this system, I will never accept it."^8

There is little doubt that such attitudes left a lasting impression upon King in his formative years. King inherited from his father a strong sense of resistance to the injustices of racial discrimination, and when he delineates his pilgrimage to nonviolence King states that one must go back to his early childhood and his experiences with racial prejudice to understand his pilgrimage to nonviolence. The existence of racial segregation in America made Martin Luther King painfully aware, even in his childhood, of the injustice of such a system.

King also asserts he learned early in life that the
inseparable twin of racial discrimination was economic injustice. He readily admits that because he was born into a middle class home, with his father having the independence and prestige of a minister and leader in the black community, he did not have to suffer the strain of poverty inflicted upon many of his friends. But King was not completely insulated from the oppressively pervasive financial hardships pressed upon the black community. "Through these early experiences," he says, "I grew up deeply conscious of the varieties of injustices in our society."

King asserts that he never really learned to adjust himself to segregated schools, restaurants, and housing; drinking fountains marked "white" or "colored," separate waiting rooms and lavatories. He recalls that when he first had a curtain drawn around him in the dining car of a passenger train he felt as if the curtain had been drawn on his "selfhood."

King experienced racial discrimination and the institution of segregation as an affront to his dignity and self-respect, and his strong feelings about racial prejudice are always the backdrop against which his thinking on nonviolence takes place. Though King's conception of nonviolence cannot be attributed to any particular incident or precise time period, it is clear that his early experiences with segregation played an important part in his motivation to develop the form of nonviolent resistance he later championed.
Morehouse College

In 1944, King passed his matriculation exams to Morehouse College in Atlanta and entered college at the age of fifteen. Morehouse was a highly respected academic institution and had a tradition for producing leaders in the black community. From the time a student entered Morehouse he was expected to pursue excellence, and academic discipline was supplemented by a daily chapel service which reflects Morehouse's close association with the black church.

King found his experience at Morehouse highly stimulating. What appealed to him above all at Morehouse was the sense of academic freedom found on the campus. King states:

There was a freer atmosphere at Morehouse, and it was there that I had my first frank discussion on race. The professors were not caught in the clutches of state funds and could teach what they wanted with academic freedom. They encouraged us in a positive quest for a salvation to racial ills and for the first time in my life, I realized that nobody was afraid.12

The influence of Morehouse College assisted King in his pilgrimage to nonviolence beyond just being a serious academic setting for study and questioning. It was during his tenure at Morehouse that King decided to enter the ministry. He had gone to college uncertain about what profession to pursue and decided to major in sociology, an acceptable academic preparation for the pursuit of law or
a number of other professions. At Morehouse King encountered in his teachers scholars who were deeply committed to the search for truth and yet possessed a profoundly personal faith. This he greatly respected, and while at Morehouse he felt confirmed in his own call to serve the Christian community as a Baptist minister.

Another decision which King made while at Morehouse, somewhat to the chagrin of his father, was to pursue further higher education, a decision which was instrumental in his development of a philosophy of nonviolence. It would have been quite possible for him to become the pastor of a Baptist church without further theological education, but King elected to study for the Bachelor of Divinity degree at Crozer Theological Seminary, a highly respected predominantly white Northern school of theology. At Crozer King came into close contact with a number of theological and philosophical ideas that eventually became an integral part of his understanding of nonviolence, and his decision to continue his religious studies at Crozer must be seen as a significant step in his intellectual pilgrimage.

Morehouse College was instrumental in King's development of a philosophy of nonviolence in one further significant way. At Morehouse he read for the first time Henry David Thoreau's celebrated essay on "Civil Disobedience." King recounts his initial reaction to Thoreau's essay by saying:

Fascinated by the idea of refusing to cooperate with an evil system, I was so deeply moved that I reread the work several times. This was my
first intellectual contact with the theory of nonviolent resistance. 13

For King, Thoreau confirmed that no moral person could simply overlook injustice. The individual, Thoreau argued, had a moral obligation not to give support to that which is morally wrong. This idea is a fundamental part of King's conception of nonviolence and will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter. For now, it is important to note that King first encountered Thoreau's essay on "Civil Disobedience" at Morehouse College and that he was fascinated by Thoreau's idea of noncooperation.

Evangelical Liberalism

After graduating from Morehouse King entered Crozer Theological Seminary to work on the requirements for his Bachelor of Divinity degree. Crozer had a reputation for being a bastion of Protestant liberalism, and since King had been reared in a rather strict Southern, fundamentalist tradition he experienced at Crozer something quite new and different. King found his exposure to liberalism both refreshing and persuasive. He encountered at Crozer a highly stimulating academic atmosphere which challenged and nurtured the intellectual development of his faith.

King asserts that liberal theology provided him with an intellectual satisfaction that he had never found in
fundamentalism. Indeed, he was so enthusiastic about liberalism that he almost accepted uncritically all it encompassed, without analyzing the full import and myriad ramifications of its theological perspective.\textsuperscript{14}

A word needs to be said at this point about the specific kind of liberalism which King so enthusiastically embraced. Kenneth Smith and Ira Zepp, in their book \textit{Search For the Beloved Community}, have demonstrated the profound influence exerted upon King by one of his teachers at Crozer: Dr. George W. Davis, Professor of Christian Theology. Smith and Zepp refer to Davis as an "evangelical liberal" and assert that it is impossible to comprehend the philosophical categories and intellectual resources of King's thought without some knowledge of Davis' theology.\textsuperscript{15} One of King's early biographers, Lawrence Reddick, records King saying of Davis:

He was a marvelous teacher, conversant with the trends of modern culture and yet sincerely religious. He was warm and Christian. It was easy to get close to him.\textsuperscript{16}

The particular brand of Protestant liberalism which appealed to King can be seen in his affection for George W. Davis. Davis' ideas not only challenged the strict fundamentalism with which King had become increasingly discontent. His thinking also appealed to King's evangelical roots. In King's view, Davis combined piety with intellectual clarity. He personified the creative synthesis between religious devotion and scholarly understanding. But beyond this, as Smith and Zepp assert,
Davis' influence can be seen in the imprint which his theological perspective left on King's thought.

In an article entitled, "In Praise of Liberalism," Davis argues that the basic meaning of liberalism is not to be found in a dogma or system of beliefs but rather in an attitude or manner of thinking. He says of liberalism:

Essentially, it is an attitude of open-mindedness towards truth from whatever quarter it comes. The liberal never thinks of truth as something 'once and for all delivered,' eternally complete, with no more of it to be discovered. On the contrary, he feels that truth is an ever-unrolling phenomenon and that men are under obligation to maintain an open receptivity to its perennial wonder and enlargement....It is an onward marching and eternally unfolding phenomenon which will be discovered continuously by him who keeps his mind open to all the facts, old and new. It knows no end.

Davis argues, therefore, that the true liberal must maintain not only an attitude of openness but also a spirit of tolerance. Moreover, Davis argues that, although liberalism is primarily a manner and spirit of thinking, it would be wrong to assume that liberal theology does not have a clear and assertive message. Davis writes:

The genuine liberal...has a positive message to proclaim. That is not to say that he is dogmatic. There is a vast difference between a clear-cut, constructive message which one is willing to defend in the light of present knowledge, and a dogmatism which sets forth the last word....

Davis summarizes the positive message of theological liberalism by stating the following points:
1. In the long run it is well with the righteous, and ill with the evil;

2. History discloses the ineradicable thirst of the race for righteousness and freedom and calls men to a dedication to the same;

3. The order, beauty, and purpose evidenced in nature, both animate and inanimate, render reasonable the belief that Mind is the explanation of reality;

4. Man is neither good nor bad by nature, but possesses dangerous capacities which may become servants of goodness or evil;

5. The life of Jesus of Nazareth reveals the mature beauty and the full possibilities of human nature;

6. Man, at his best, in such qualitative life as we find in those possessing the spirit of Jesus, is the best key to unlocking the nature of Ultimate Reality;

7. The ultimate energies of life are spiritual—faith, hope and love—and upon these alone men ultimately grow and survive;

8. As man conforms his life to the structure of reality, becoming creative as is the universe about him, he fulfills his destiny as a rational-spiritual creature;

9. Reason is to be respected and is the final test of all which claim to be revelation;

10. Since the great disclosure of modern science is that reality has evolved, the only condition upon which man will be tolerated upon the earth is that of further adaptation to the changing conditions of life;

11. The increase in the areas of human concern and neighborliness indicates that man has a chance to move on into a world community of mutuality and brotherhood.

King's views on liberalism are highly commensurate to those of Davis, and he often stresses his profound appreciation for liberal theology:
...There are aspects of liberalism that I hope to cherish always: its devotion to the search for truth, its insistence on an open and analytical mind, and its refusal to abandon the best lights of reason. The contribution of liberalism to the philological-historical criticism of biblical literature has been of immeasurable value and should be defended with religious and scientific passion.21

Like Davis, King believes that liberalism is principally a commitment to the search for truth and a manner and spirit of intellectual inquiry. But beyond this Davis' influence upon King can be seen in the positive, evangelical message of theological liberalism which Davis enunciated. King embraces in some form all eleven of the points quoted above, though he often states these points in a different way. The precise manner in which King's evangelical liberalism, as influenced by George W. Davis, is interwoven in his conception of nonviolence will become more evident as this study unfolds. For now, it is important to stress that King found Davis' theological perspective intellectually stimulating and highly persuasive. Indeed, throughout the remainder of his life Martin Luther King affirmed the basic theological precepts which Davis had taught him at Crozer Theological Seminary.22

While at Crozer, initially in a course taught by George W. Davis, King studied the theology of Walter Rauschenbusch. King relates that Rauschenbusch's book, Christianity and the Social Crisis, left an indelible impression upon him, and it is not surprising, considering
the formative influence which evangelical liberalism had upon him, that King responded favorably to the social gospel movement and the thinking of Walter Rauschenbusch.

Rauschenbusch provided King with a firmly founded theological basis for social concern as an essential component of the Christian faith. Although King is critical of Rauschenbusch for falling victim to the nineteenth century "cult of inevitable progress" and identifying the Kingdom of God with a particular social and economic system, he asserts that Rauschenbusch did a great service for the church by insisting that the gospel dealt with the whole person, not just a part of him called the soul. Religion, for Rauschenbusch, was not only concerned with the spiritual well-being of the individual, though Rauschenbusch certainly never denied the fundamental importance of the individual's relationship with God. Authentic Christianity, he insisted, must embrace a sense of social responsibility and must be concerned with the needs of others.

Rauschenbusch supported his argument by asserting that Christianity had its historical roots in the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. In Rauschenbusch's view, prophetic religion could not be divorced from communal concern and a deep regard for social justice. For Rauschenbusch the prophets pointed to the indivisibility between religion and ethics. Although the essence of religion involved the fundamental relationship between the individual and God, the true test of religion, its goal and orientation, was always directed toward social
Rauschenbusch argued that though religion is intensely personal it is not fundamentally individualistic. Rauschenbusch asserted that there was a profound social character to the religion of the prophets, and he insisted that this is the Hebrew tradition to which the Christian church is heir. ²⁴

Rauschenbusch, therefore, believed that the gospel is not only concerned with the welfare of individuals but also the economic and political forces which impinge upon the individual, and King thoroughly agreed with this idea. He writes:

...Any religion which professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the social and economic conditions that scar the soul, is a spiritually moribund religion only waiting for the day to be buried. ²⁵

Rauschenbusch provided King with a firmly founded theological basis for social Christianity and infused into his personal, evangelical faith a burning concern for social justice. The Christian faith was not only concerned with spiritual piety, it involved a deep concern for the needs of others and the social, political and economic conditions in which people lived. Rauschenbusch kindled within King the fire of ethical religion rooted in the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament.

The Search For a Means

King relates that while at Crozer Theological Seminary
he began a systematic and serious quest for a method of eliminating social injustice. Such a quest was, undoubtedly, a natural step after reading Christianity and the Social Crisis. The foundation which Rauschenbusch had established for Christian social concern and King's early experiences with the injustices of racial discrimination caused him to question and search for a method of eliminating racial inequality.

King recounts that during one of his Christmas holidays at Crozer, he studied the writings of Marx and Lenin. Although neither of these thinkers radically influenced King's thought, they are a significant part of his struggle for a social means of eliminating injustice and should be kept in mind even if for no other reason than King's rejection of their ideas.

King insists a Christian cannot wholeheartedly embrace Communism, and he often quotes Archbishop William Temple's statement that Communism is a kind of Christian heresy. What King means by this is that Communism lays hold of "certain truths which are essential parts of the Christian view of things," but at the same time it binds with them "concepts and practices which no Christian could ever accept or profess." King's critique of Communism does not reflect a thorough analysis of Marxist thought. Rather he states the weaknesses of Communism from his own Christian perspective in sweeping generalities based on theological presuppositions. It is significant, nonetheless, to note why King rejects Communism, for it
provides considerable insight into his thought. The three major criticisms around which King's polemic revolves are delineated briefly here.

The first criticism which King levels against Communism deals with Marx's dialectical materialism. Communism in King's view is based on a too materialistic view of life and history. He asserts:

According to Communist theory, matter, not mind or spirit, speaks the last word in the universe. Such a philosophy is avowedly secularistic and atheistic. Under it, God is merely a figment of the imagination, religion a product of fear and ignorance, and the church is an invention of the rulers to control the masses.28

King's Christian presuppositions forced him to disagree strongly with this aspect of Communism. In contrast to Marx, who affirmed that material forces are at the center of history, the Christian believes, King asserts, that God is "the ground and essence of all reality."29

In opposition to Communism's atheistic materialism, Christianity posits a theistic idealism. Reality cannot be explained by matter in motion or the push and pull of economic forces. Christianity affirms that at the heart of reality is a Heart, a loving Father who works through history for the salvation of his children. Man cannot save himself, for man is not the measure of all things and humanity is not God. Bound by the chains of his own sin and finiteness, man needs a Savior.30

The second criticism which King levels against Communism is what he calls its "ethical relativism." In his view the Communist system accepts no moral absolutes.

Right and wrong are relative to the most expedient methods of dealing with class war. Communism exploits the dreadful philosophy that the end justifies the means.31
In direct contrast to this, King believes, Christianity affirms absolute moral values, and he asserts that these moral absolutes are part of the structure of reality. Moreover, King insists that there must be a basic coherence and consistency between the means by which social change is pursued and the goal it seeks to achieve. Therefore, if one is seeking to inaugurate a classless society based on truth and justice it cannot be achieved through employing trickery, deceit, lawbreaking and the concealing of truth. The means by which an ideal is pursued, King argues, must be consistent with the ideal itself. He writes:

In contrast to the ethical relativism of Communism, Christianity sets forth a system of absolute moral values and affirms that God has placed within the very structure of this universe certain moral principles that are fixed and immutable. The law of love as an imperative is the norm for all of man's actions. Furthermore, Christianity at its best refuses to live by a philosophy of ends justifying means. Destructive means cannot bring constructive ends, because the means represent the-ideal-in-the-making and the-end-in-progress. Immoral means cannot bring moral ends....32

The third reason King asserts that a Christian cannot embrace Communism centers around his criticism of the Communist view of the state. King believes that the totalitarian view of the state inherent in Communism is tantamount to depreciating the value of the individual and in the final analysis glorifies the state above persons. King argues this point by asserting that in Communism man is made for the state and not the state for man. One may object, saying that in Communist theory the state is an 'interim reality,' which
will 'whither away' when the classless society emerges. True--in theory; but it is also true that, while it lasts, the state is the end. Man is a means to that end. Man has no inalienable rights. His only rights are derived from, and conferred by, the state. Under such a system, the fountain of freedom runs dry. Restricted are man's liberties of press and assembly, his freedom to vote, and his freedom to listen and to read. Art, religion, education, music, and science come under the gripping yoke of governmental control. Man must be a dutiful servant to the omnipotent state.33

King asserts that the absolute authority of the state is contrary to Christian teaching. He argues that the individual is more than "a producing animal guided by economic forces." Christianity declares that the human being is not just a means created to serve the state.35

The human being is endowed by the Creator with the gift of freedom, possessing an inherent ultimate value. King concludes:

The ultimate weakness of Communism is that it robs man of that quality which makes him man. Man, says Paul Tillich, is man because he is free. This freedom is expressed through man's capacity to deliberate, decide, and respond. Under Communism, the individual soul is shackled by the chains of conformity; his spirit is bound by the manacles of party allegiance. He is stripped of both conscience and reason. The trouble with Communism is that it has neither a theology nor a Christology; therefore it emerges with a mixed-up anthropology. Confused about God, it is also confused about man. In spite of its glowing talk about the welfare of the masses, Communism's methods and philosophy strip man of his dignity and worth, leaving him as little more than a depersonalized cog in the ever-turning wheel of the state.36

Despite these criticisms, King does make a number of positive comments about Marxist ideology and asserts that "Communism...should challenge every Christian...to a growing concern about social justice." Beyond this, King
found much favor with Marx's critique of the profit motive in traditional capitalism. 38

Throughout his life, King was uncomfortable with capitalism as an economic system. Its emphasis on materialism and its preoccupation with capital, he felt, often lost sight of the value and integrity of persons—a criticism which reflects the same moral values as his critique of Communism. King asserts:

...We must admit that capitalism has often left a gulf between superfluous wealth and abject poverty, has created conditions permitting necessities to be taken from the many to give luxuries to the few, and has encouraged small-hearted men to become cold and conscienceless so that, like Dives before Lazarus, they are unmoved by suffering, poverty-stricken humanity....Surely it is unchristian and unethical for some to wallow in the soft beds of luxury while others sink in the quicksands of poverty.

The profit motive, when it is the sole basis of an economic system, encourages a cut-throat competition and selfish ambition that inspires men to be more concerned about making a living than making a life. It can make men so I-centered that they no longer are Thou-centered.39

King insists that Marx made a contribution to contemporary society by reminding modern man of his communal responsibilities. Marxist ideology stands over against the Western tendency to judge people by their material wealth, the number of cars they own, the size of their homes. Communism reminds us, King argues, that the needs of the larger community impinge upon us. 40

King claims that in the final analysis Christians must have a dialectical view of Marxism. In other words, Marxist thought contains a partial truth to which one must
say "yes" and "no" at the same time. The whole truth is not to be found in the thesis of traditional capitalism, King asserts, nor in the antithesis of Marxism. King believes that a higher synthesis must be produced which avoids the problems of both yet reconciles the truth which each embraces.41

King believes a Christian must be critical of the profit motive inherent in traditional capitalism. Persons, not capital, must be the center of the socio-economic order. The Christian must not forget the Marxist call for social justice and the alleviation of the disparity between rich and poor and the ideal of a classless society. But similarly the Christian must be critical of Marxism's moral relativity, its materialistic view of history and its emphasis on the absolute authority of the state. Hence, King asserts:

The Kingdom of God is neither the thesis of individual enterprise nor the antithesis of collective enterprise, but a synthesis which reconciles the truths of both.42

Though King does not indicate the form and nature of this new synthesis, his views are significant for they reflect his Christian values and theological presuppositions. King did not simply search for a method of eradicating social injustice but searched for a method which was commensurate with his Christian faith, the measuring rod by which he judged all social theories. The importance of King's Christian value system in his search for an effective and moral means of dealing with injustice cannot be overstated, and his reliance on a radically
Christian perspective will become more evident as this study progresses. For now, it is significant to note that King's "dialectical" view of Communism reflects his emphasis on methods of social change which are consistent with his religious faith.

King also records that during his systematic search for a means of eliding social injustice he studied a number of other well-known social and political philosophers, such as Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Hobbes, Bentham, Mills and Locke. King states he found these thinkers stimulating, but it is clear from his writings and speeches that none of them occupy a pivotal place in his thought. On the whole, these thinkers represent little more than schools of thought which King studied, options which he considered in his quest for a theory to eliminate injustice in society. Though occasionally King quotes from the writings of these thinkers, none of them really satisfied his yearning for a means of dealing with social injustice.

King records that while at Crozer Theological Seminary he was exposed for the first time to radical pacifist philosophy in a lecture given by the celebrated Christian pacifist A. J. Muste, then director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and his reaction to Muste's views is worth noting.

King states that he was "deeply moved" by the ideas put forward by Muste, but remained unconvinced of the "practicality" of his position. King asserts that at this
point in his life he seriously questioned the application of Jesus' love ethic in social situations; he earnestly doubted the "power of love in solving social problems." King also records that his faith in love as an adequate social ethic was "shaken" further by the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, especially his *The Genealogy of Morals* and *The Will to Power*. Although King did not agree with Nietzsche's categorical denunciation of Christian love, it is clear that King was affected by Nietzsche's claim that the Christian emphasis on love and suffering was no more than an ethic of renunciation for the weak and impotent.

King was uncertain whether an ethic which centered around the love of one's enemy could confront and challenge injustice, and he questioned the practicality of an *absolute* pacifism which ruled out the use of violence, and in some cases the use of any kind of force at all, no matter what the social situation. King believed that a Christian must accept at least in theory that violence, although never an absolute good, could act as a negative good by preventing the perpetration of greater evil and injustice. Violence, he argued, could curtail the "spread and growth of an evil force. War, horrible as it is, might be preferable to surrender to a totalitarian system...."

King's views on pacifism are not entirely consistent, but what is clear and significant in his pilgrimage to nonviolence is his initial reaction to a radical pacifist position. King was unhappy with a doctrinaire pacifism
which chose to denounce violence no matter what the social circumstances. He felt a pacifist ethic ran the risk of capitulating to the ravages of injustice and often "leaned unconsciously toward self-righteousness." King believed that the appeal of pacifism and its commensurability with the Christian ethic would be strengthened if pacifists did not claim "to be free from the moral dilemmas that the Christian nonpacifist confronts." The Teachings of Mahatma Gandhi

In the throes of his questioning the social efficaciousness of the Christian ethic and his search for a method of eliding social injustice, King went to Philadelphia to hear a sermon by Mordecai Johnson, President of Howard University, who was in Philadelphia at the invitation of Fellowship House. Johnson had just returned from a study tour of India where he had delved into Gandhi's life and work. It was in this lecture that King first encountered the life and teachings of Gandhi articulated in a systematic and philosophic manner. In relating his reaction to Johnson's lecture, King states: "His message was so profound and electrifying that I left the meeting and bought a half-dozen books on Gandhi's life and work." The significance of King's exposure to Gandhi's teachings, through the Christian perspective of Mordecai Johnson, cannot be overemphasized as an important step in
his pilgrimage to nonviolence. King states that he was fascinated with the whole concept of Satyagraha and Gandhi's campaigns of nonviolent resistance. As he delved deeper into Gandhi's thought, he became less skeptical concerning "the power of love" and recognized its "potency" in the area of positive social change.51

This is precisely why Gandhi's influence was so significant. Although King had recognized the validity of Jesus' teaching to "turn the other cheek" and his admonition to love one's enemy as an ethic for personal life, he was now convinced that Gandhi had demonstrated the radical social applicability and efficaciousness of the Christian love ethic. In King's view, Gandhi lifted the love ethic of Jesus above individual interaction and applied it to a constructive program of social change. King believed he found in Gandhi's teaching and practice of nonviolence the method of eradicating social injustice for which he had been searching. He writes:

The intellectual and moral satisfaction which I failed to gain from the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mills, the revolutionary methods of Marx and Lenin, the social-contracts theory of Hobbes, the 'back to nature' optimism of Rousseau, and the superman philosophy of Nietzsche, I found in the nonviolent resistance philosophy of Gandhi.52

King's encounter with Gandhi left an indelible impression upon him. Gandhi had reacted to the oppression of his people not with pacifistic quietism, but rather with strong resistance and protest. King saw in Gandhi the ability to love one's opponent and at the same time to affirm one's own personal dignity and to strive for
greater social justice. King was convinced that people were not impotent in the face of oppression—nor did they have to adopt what he believed to be the immoral methods of Marx and Lenin to achieve social change.

Primarily, Gandhi stood as a kind of symbol for King, pointing to the power of love in the social arena. Eventually, King came to believe that nonviolent resistance, as it had been enunciated and practiced by the Mahatma, was "the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom."\(^5^3\) Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence, as seen through King's own Christian world view, welded together for King the theological presuppositions he had embraced in evangelical liberalism and the vital concern for social justice he had gained from Walter Rauschenbusch.

The Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr

While at Crozer Theological Seminary King took a course entitled "Christian Social Philosophy II," and it was in this course that he first read the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr. The course instructor, Kenneth Smith, discussed Niebuhr's thought by holding it in juxtaposition to the theology of Walter Rauschenbusch, highlighting the tension between their respective views.\(^5^4\) King recounts his receptivity to Niebuhr's writings by saying:

The prophetic and realistic elements in Niebuhr's passionate style and profound thought were appealing to me, and I became so enamored

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with his social ethics that I almost fell into the trap of accepting uncritically everything he wrote.55

Reinhold Niebuhr exerted an important influence upon King's theological perspective, for he forced King to question many of the fundamental presuppositions he had adopted from liberalism. In particular Niebuhr's writings exposed the superficiality and sentimentality inherent in the liberal doctrine of human nature. Niebuhr made King aware of the complexity and duplicity of all human motivations and opened his eyes to the pervasive reality of sin on every level of human existence. Moreover, Niebuhr pointed out the complexity of human social involvement, revealed the innate egoism involved in the life of any group and demonstrated for King the "glaring reality of collective sin."56

Despite his deep appreciation for Niebuhr's "Christian realism" and analysis of the human situation, King never seems completely satisfied with Niebuhr's anthropology. He felt Niebuhr tended to define human nature too negatively, always pointing to human sinfulness without giving proper emphasis to the human potential for goodness.

King holds in constant tension the positive message of evangelical liberalism and the rigorous doctrine of sin held by theologians like Niebuhr and Karl Barth.57 The fundamentalist tradition into which King was born also would have underscored such a strict doctrine of sin.

King does not stress, therefore, the intrinsic goodness of human nature, nor does he emphasize man's sinfulness
and utter depravity. In typical dialectical fashion, King seeks to embrace the truth of both doctrines. He states:

I am now convinced that the truth about man is found neither in liberalism nor in neo-orthodoxy. Each represents a partial truth. A large segment of Protestant liberalism defined man only in terms of his essential nature, his capacity for good; neo-orthodoxy tended to define man only in terms of his existential nature, his capacity for evil. An adequate understanding of man is found neither in the thesis of liberalism nor in the antithesis of neo-orthodoxy, but in a synthesis which reconciles the truths of both. 58

Although it is difficult to identify any purely "Niebuhrian" elements in King's theology, the significance of Niebuhr's writings should not be underestimated. Reinhold Niebuhr gave King an important theological corrective to his liberal understanding of human nature and provided a profound political depth to King's thinking on power and justice. King's thought bears the mark of Niebuhr's critical and insightful analysis, a debt which he often acknowledged. 59

**Boston Personalism**

The next stage in King's intellectual pilgrimage to nonviolence came during his doctoral studies at Boston University. At Boston King had a number of opportunities to discuss many of his vital interests with various exponents of nonviolence. His studies at Boston, furthermore, focused on the philosophy of theistic personalism which served to reinforce many of his
traditional Christian beliefs and provided an extensive philosophical framework for his continued study of nonviolence.

Specifically, King names Dean Walter G. Muelder and Professor Allen Knight Chalmers as significant influences on his intellectual development at Boston, both of whom were deeply sympathetic with the philosophy of nonviolence and demonstrated a vital interest in social concern. In King's view Muelder and Chalmers had

a passion for social justice that stemmed, not from a superficial optimism, but from a deep faith in the possibilities of human beings when they allow themselves to become co-workers with God.60

The two main influences, however, upon King at Boston were Edgar Sheffield Brightman and L. Harold DeWolf. King had come into contact with the writings of both of these men while studying theology under Davis at Crozer.61 DeWolf was King's major advisor during most of his Ph.D. studies and remained a close friend and confidant throughout his career. The similarities between DeWolf's theology and the thinking of George W. Davis are striking, and no doubt DeWolf further reinforced King's liberal evangelical convictions and assisted him in developing his understanding of theistic personalism.62

King seems to have been particularly interested in Brightman's personalist philosophy, as indicated by the number of essays he chose to write on this subject. Indeed, Brightman's presence at Boston was one of the major reasons King chose to pursue his studies at Boston
University. Brightman was an original and creative thinker who developed a comprehensive system of personalistic thought. He argued that only in personality could the coherence of reality, the essential union between idea and object, be understood. The meaning of natural phenomena, he believed, could be explained rationally only by purposive, conscious, self-willed mind. Brightman, therefore, asserted that the idea of personal theism is essential to understanding reality as meaningful and coherent. "In the broadest sense," he wrote, "personalism is the belief that conscious personality is both the supreme value and supreme reality in the universe."  

Brightman's inclusion of the term "supreme value" in his definition is significant, for Brightman asserted that moral values were intrinsic in the metaphysical structure of reality, a view which he sought to argue and demonstrate empirically. This idea is a major intersection between Brightman's metaphysics and his philosophy of religion. In Brightman's view, God is the source and sustainer of all values.

Though King disagreed with many of Brightman's ideas, he wholeheartedly embraced personalism's basic metaphysical conclusion that "...the clue to the meaning of ultimate reality is found in personality," and King maintained that theistic personalism was his fundamental philosophical position. King also found much favor with Brightman's work in metaphysics and values and deeply appreciated his philosophy of religion.
The importance of personalism in King's thought must not be underestimated. Personalism provided King with a solid metaphysical foundation for believing in a personal God, reinforced many of his traditional Christian beliefs and gave greater philosophical clarity and substance to the ideas he adopted from evangelical liberalism. Beyond this, personalism established, in King's view, a firm metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all human personality. These ideas are essential components of King's conception of nonviolence and an integral part of his understanding of Christian love.67

A brief word needs to be said about one further effect which Brightman exerted upon King. Brightman's philosophy was deeply influenced by the writings of Georg W. F. Hegel. Though it is important to emphasize that Brightman rejected much of Hegel's philosophical system, including his absolute idealism, social philosophy and ethics, what appealed to Brightman in Hegel's writings was his dialectical method of thought and his consequent claim that "truth is the whole."68

Interestingly, Hegel is one of the most frequently mentioned philosophers in King's published sermons and writings. This, however, is somewhat misleading, for King's understanding of Hegel's philosophy bears the mark of Brightman's influence. As with Brightman, it is Hegel's dialectic and emphasis on wholeness which attracted King. He writes:
There were points in Hegel's philosophy that I strongly disagreed with. For instance, his absolute idealism was rationally unsound to me because it tended to swallow up the many in the one. But there were other aspects of his thinking that I found stimulating. His contention that 'truth is the whole' led me to a philosophical method of rational coherence. His analysis of the dialectical process, in spite of its shortcomings, helped me to see that growth comes through struggle.

There is a pervasive dialectical method at work in King's writings. King never tires of holding two opposing ideas in tension, seeking to embrace the strengths of the two opposites without falling into a one-sided polemic. He moves from one side of the dialectic to the other, trying to explain an issue, in its wholeness, seeking to embrace the truth by looking at both sides.

In King's view, Hegel's philosophy affirmed the vital, essential tension inherent in any statement of truth. Hegel pointed to the wholeness of truth and asserted the necessity of embracing the conflict between opposing ideas in studying reality. King discovered in Hegel's dialectic a means of stating truth in rational coherence.

Montgomery--The Welding of Thought and Action

Even though King's educational career had brought him into contact with a study of Gandhi's life and teachings, it was not until he was in the throes of the Montgomery bus boycott that he engaged in a thorough working out of his ideas on nonviolence. Much of King's understanding of
and faith in nonviolent direct action cannot be traced to intellectual sources alone. It was in the context of the struggle for civil rights by black Americans, originally in the South, that King formulated his understanding of nonviolent resistance, and this is an important aspect of his pilgrimage to nonviolence to bear in mind.\textsuperscript{70}

When King arrived as a new pastor in Alabama, he was intellectually convinced that nonviolent direct action was a potent weapon available to oppressed people, but it was in the praxis of the bus boycott of Montgomery and later in freedom campaigns in Albany, Birmingham, St. Augustine and Selma that King learned the true meaning of nonviolence. Indeed, King claims that although he was familiar with Gandhi's life and work he did not have the slightest idea, at first, that he would later become involved in a crisis in which nonviolent resistance would be applicable.\textsuperscript{71}

King asserts that the Montgomery experience clarified his thinking about nonviolence more than all the books he had read.\textsuperscript{72} Speaking of this experience King states:

As the days unfolded, I came to see the power of nonviolence more and more. Living through the actual experience of the protest, nonviolence became more than a method to which I gave intellectual assent; it became a commitment to a way of life. Many of the things that I had not cleared up intellectually concerning nonviolence were now solved in the sphere of practical action.\textsuperscript{73}

King's pilgrimage to nonviolence is not just an intellectual pilgrimage, though one must understand the complex intellectual resources which are a part of that
journey. Nonviolence, for King, is a synthesis of theoria and praxis, applied and tested in the social arena. This vital relationship between thought and action in his life and work will be discussed in greater detail later in this work. For now, it is important to note that King's early experiences with racial prejudice, his study of theology and philosophy and his concern as a pastor for the oppression of his people all influenced his understanding of and commitment to civil resistance, and these many and varied aspects of King's pilgrimage must be kept in mind when seeking to understand his conception of nonviolence.
CHAPTER THREE
CONCEPTION OF LOVE

Now that the general framework of Martin Luther King's intellectual pilgrimage has been presented, it is appropriate to focus upon one of the most important ideas in his thought and work—the meaning of Christian love. Indeed, it is accurate to say that King's conception of Christian love stands at the very center of his thinking, and any serious student of his life and work must wrestle with his creative and somewhat unique understanding of this important ethical concept.

Critical exposition of King's conception of love requires a thorough exegesis of his statements about love, noting the different concepts associated with love in his thought and looking in detail at the special stress he gave to this salient Christian value. This is a complicated and somewhat tedious task. Even a cursory examination of King's writings reveals the intricacy and complexity of his thinking on this topic. Although he often explained what he meant by "Christian love," at times one is presented with an almost impressionistic view of love in King's speeches and writings, sketched in the broadest of brushstrokes. The constant pressures of
controversy, the leading of civil rights campaigns for social justice, coupled with his early and untimely death prevented King from organizing his thought into a comprehensive, systematic statement.¹

There exists, nonetheless, a profound, underlying consistency and coherence to King's thinking on love, and one must examine carefully the various ways he points to the place and meaning of love in his published and unpublished works, weighing his statements in the balance of critical analysis. Only then does the full depth of King's understanding come to light.

The Three Loves

Throughout his speeches and writings, King demonstrates an acute awareness of the ambiguities of the term "love." He asserts that there is always the danger that talk about love will be no more than empty words or sentimental aphorisms devoid of real or practical meaning.² In his detailed explanations of "Christian love," King seeks to avoid some of these problems by employing the Greek language as a rhetorical tool to delineate the precise understanding of love he wishes to convey.³

He often begins by stating that there are three words for love in the Greek language—eros, philia and agape, stressing that his use of the term love must be understood in the agapeic sense. King's definitions of each of these forms of love will be discussed later in this section.
For now, it is important to note his special use of this rhetorical device.

The frequency with which King employed this means of explaining his understanding of love, it should be noted, is difficult to overstate. One researcher analyzing King's rhetoric states that the members of his congregation in Atlanta were so familiar with this defining of love through distinguishing between *eros*, *philia* and *agape* that many of them could paraphrase the explanation by heart.⁴

It is difficult to name the exact source of King's understanding of the three loves, for he never cites a particular theologian. Some researchers have asserted that King's understanding of *eros*, *philia* and *agape* came directly from the writings of Paul Tillich.⁵ But this is doubtful. Though King wrote his Ph.D. thesis on an aspect of Tillich's theology and was aware of Tillich's discussion of the three loves, there are notable distinctions in their thinking on this subject.⁶ Professor L. Harold DeWolf has stated that it is easy to overemphasize Tillich's influence on King and is critical of those who name Tillich as a major intellectual influence on his thought.⁷ There are, nonetheless, interesting parallels between the way King and Tillich characterize the three loves.

King's understanding of *eros*, *philia* and *agape* probably came from several sources, as Smith and Zepp have asserted in *Search For the Beloved Community*.⁸ One of the authors
was King's instructor for a course in Christian ethics at Crozer Theological Seminary, and in this course King was exposed to several salient ethical works which appear to have had a profound effect on his understanding of love.

His writings show a direct reliance on Anders Nygren's classic work, *Agape and Eros*, and Paul Ramsey's *Basic Christian Ethics*. Again, however, there are significant differences in the way King portrays the meaning of Christian love when compared with Nygren and Ramsey.

The full meaning of love in King's thought and the relationship between *eros*, *philia* and *agape* will be clearer after examining in detail his explanation of the three loves. It should be noted at the beginning that King's expositions on this topic are not academic treatises. At times they even seem superficial, stated in the language of popular rhetoric. Yet King's discussions of Christian love exhibit an underlying coherence which must be appreciated.

Eros

The first Greek word discussed by King in his detailed descriptions of Christian love is "*eros.*" He defines *eros* as "the yearning of the soul for the realm of the divine" and asserts that *eros* is "a sort of aesthetic love" the main content of which is defined by Platonic philosophy.¹⁰

King's direct use of Anders Nygren's analysis of *eros* is strikingly apparent. Nygren says, "Eros is...the
upward tendency of the human soul; it is a real force, which drives the soul in the direction of the Ideal world." "It is Eros that sets in motion the ascending process...."11 In his major work on this subject, Nygren gives a great deal of attention to the classical Greek understanding of eros to provide a stark contrast between the nature of this form of love and the character of Christian agape. Nygren, moreover, stresses the important role Plato played in developing the philosophical conception of eros in Greek thought.

Plato was, in Nygren's words, "both the creator and the perfecter of the classical idea of Eros...."12 Though Plato did not create his understanding of eros out of nothing, it was in his writings that eros received its first systematic, philosophical treatment. For Plato, eros was, as King asserted, the yearning of the soul for the realm of the divine. It was the innate human capacity to seek after the ideal world, a divine spark or essence which pushes the human soul upward to the divine realm.

There are notable distinctions, however, between the pejorative way Nygren speaks of eros and the place of this form of love in the thought of Martin Luther King. For Nygren, "there cannot...be any doubt that Eros and Agape belong originally to two entirely separate spiritual worlds, between which no communication is possible."13 King, on the other hand, never depreciates the value of eros and even ascribes a certain legitimacy to this kind of love.
Closely related to King's notion of *eros* is his idea of self-love, and it is easy to see why *eros* is oriented toward a kind of positive self-regard in King's mind. No doubt Nygren would have concurred that there is a relation between *eros* and self-love, but unlike Nygren, King stresses that self-love has a certain legitimacy, even in a theological sense. In fact, rational, healthy self-concern, in King's view, is a component of a complete life and even a necessary part of loving one's neighbor.

King's involvement in the black community's struggle for social justice in the United States seems to have affected his view of appropriate self-love. King stresses that black people must experience a new sense of dignity and self-worth. The "black revolution" in America was, for King, a campaign to win full enfranchisement for a group of people who had been beleaguered by the limiting conditions of racial prejudice. Treating black Americans as inferior beings had taken its toll on the self-image of some black citizens. King, therefore, stresses the importance of healthy self-regard, and he did not see self-love as anathema to the love of God and neighbor. Indeed, he asserts that self-love is a necessary part of Jesus' command to love your enemies as yourself.\textsuperscript{14} "Many people are plunged into the abyss of emotional fatalism," he writes, "because they do not love themselves in a wholesome way."\textsuperscript{15}

Erich Fromm, one of the writers often cited by King, takes up this theological issue in his book *Man For Himself: An Inquiry Into the Psychology of Ethics*, and
King relies heavily on Fromm's argument to support his position. Fromm states:

> If it is a virtue to love my neighbor as a human being, it must be a virtue--and not a vice--to love myself since I am a human being too. There is no concept of man in which I myself am not included.16

Fromm argues, moreover, that sound psycho-analysis of love shows that "selfishness and self-love, far from being identical, are actually opposites."17 Self-love, he asserts, is inseparable from the love of any other self. "Love of others and love of ourselves are not alternatives. On the contrary, an attitude of love towards themselves will be found in all those who are capable of loving others."18 This is due to the nature of love, for love flows out of the strength and integrity of one's person.

> Love is a phenomenon of abundance; its premise is the strength of the individual....To love another person is only a virtue if it springs from this inner strength, but it is a vice if it is the expression of the basic inability to be oneself.19

The relation between self-love and the love of God and neighbor is a complicated issue in Christian theology. Some theologians see only utter contrast between self-concern and Christian agape.20 Others question if the term "self-love" is meaningful at all;21 while still other theologians argue that there must be some form of legitimate self-regard in Christian ethics.22

King clearly aligns himself with Fromm in arguing that ethics must recognize the legitimacy of healthy
self-respect. In his view, wholesome self-regard is part of a complete life and even a vital part of loving one's neighbor. Certainly, inordinate self-preoccupation is to be shunned, but not healthy self-respect. Though the pursuit of self-concern in Christian ethics can never be an alternative to the love of neighbor, the importance of neighbor-love in no way precludes all self-regard. Indeed, if Fromm is correct and self-love and the love of other selves are interdependent, then one may rightly speak of self-love as a moral imperative.

In one of his most widely preached sermons, "Three Dimensions of a Complete Life," King discusses the meaning of rational, healthy self-love, and his rendering of legitimate self-concern is strikingly similar to his description of eros. Though self-love and eros are not synonymous for King, the individual's "drive" for self-actualization is commensurate with the "drive" of eros. "Potential powers of creativity are within us," he asserts, "and we have the duty to work assiduously to discover these powers."23 For King, this powerful, inner drive is responsible for bringing a person's potentiality into actuality, and its presence is of profound theological significance.

Every person must have a concern for self and feel a responsibility to discover his mission in life. God has given each normal person a capacity to achieve some end. True, some are endowed with more talent than others, but God has left none of us talentless.24

For King, the drive for self-actualization is a gift from God and, therefore, must be taken with utter
seriousness. A person must seek to discover "what he is made for," and then

he should render all of the power in his being to the achievement of this....as though God Almighty called him at this particular moment of history for this reason. No one ever makes a great contribution to humanity without this majestic sense of purpose and this dogged determination.25

"Rational, healthy self-interest," this drive for self-actualization, is one of the necessary dimensions of a whole life.26 King summarizes his understanding of appropriate self-love by admonishing:

Set yourselves earnestly to discover what you are made to do, and then give yourself passionately to the doing of it. This clear onward drive toward self-fulfillment is the length of a man's life.27

Martin Luther King asserts that there is a place for rational, healthy self-love, the upward drive of eros, but self-concern must always be wedded to a radical concern for others and must never supplant one's deep devotion to God. King never depreciates eros as a legitimate form of love. It is, in his words, "a beautiful type of love."28 But King is always careful to assert that eros is not what he is speaking of when he points to the meaning of Christian love, nor is it the kind of love he emphasizes when talking about the importance of loving one's enemy.

Love, for King, was more than the yearning of the human psyche, and this precluded giving priority to eros as the highest form of love. Such acquisitive love was not, for him, the summun bonum of life.29
Philia

The second Greek word which King uses to explain the meaning of love is *philia*, but he talks relatively little about the nature and importance of this kind of love. Broadly, King's definition of *philia* focuses upon friendship. It is a relationship in which two parties share in an amiable bond of mutual caring for each other.

Beyond the simple idea of friendship, King only emphasizes two further aspects of *philia*, contrasting it with the Christian idea of *agape*. First, *philia* is an emotional kind of love based on genuine affection. One loves on this level because one "likes" or is attracted to the other person. King says, "This is the kind of love you have for those people that you get along with well...." Second, *philia* is a reciprocal kind of love. That is, a "person loves," King asserts, "because he is loved." Love on this level is based on mutual regard and an exchange of love for mutual caring.

The key point here is the motivation for loving. In the *philia* form of love, one loves because he feels affectionately drawn to the other person and knows that he will be loved in return. It is this basis of love about which King has reservations. For him, love is more than mutual regard or affectionate liking. Authentic love at
its highest level is not contingent on a reciprocal response from the one who is loved, nor does it depend upon mutual affection.

It should be noted, however, that King does not develop extensively the contrast between philia and agape on a motivational level, and the differences between these two forms of love will become more apparent after discussing the essential character of agape in the next section. For now, it is important to observe that King has serious reservations about mutuality and reciprocity as motivations for the Christian ethic.

King never depreciates philia as a kind of genuine love. Its shortcomings notwithstanding, philia is a kind of other-concern, which is, for him, an essential part of a complete life.\(^{34}\) He says, it is "a vital, valuable love."\(^{35}\) Mutual love certainly is not contrary to agape. Indeed, King asserts that one of the fundamental priorities of nonviolence is a concern to win the "friendship and understanding of the opponent."\(^{36}\)

Philia and agape share a great deal of commensurability in King's thought. Their main difference is the foundation upon which they are based, the motivation for loving. Philia is predicated on an emotional disposition, reciprocity and mutuality. Agape derives its motivations for loving from other sources.
As already stated, the most significant Greek word which King uses to articulate the meaning of Christian love is "agape," asserting that agape is "the highest level of love." And it is in his expositions of the concept of agape that one encounters the crux of King's teaching on love.

The starting point of King's understanding of agape is Jesus' command to "love your enemies," and it is significant that he begins by wrestling with the meaning of this radical moral imperative. But King is careful to point out that Jesus' love commandment raises a number of problems in defining the nature and meaning of love. With burning existential concern he asks: How is it possible to love those who oppress you?

King also emphasizes the rigorous stringency of Jesus' command. "Probably no admonition of Jesus," he says, "has been more difficult to follow than the command to 'love your enemies.' Some men have sincerely felt that its actual practice is not possible," and this, King believes, has caused some interpreters to relegate Jesus' teaching on love to no more than impractical idealism. Others, like Nietzsche, he points out, have taken their criticism a step further. Jesus' teaching to love even the enemy shows that Christianity embraces an ethic of resignation,
fit only for the weak and cowardly. 41

King, of course, does not concur with the criticism of Nietzsche and others. But he admits, in candor, that it is easy to become "sentimental" when discussing love, and that there is always the danger that an exposition on love will be no more than "empty words devoid of any practical...meaning." 42 King is critical of romantic understandings of Christian love. For him, Jesus’ command to love one’s enemy ruled out agape as an emotional disposition. "It would be nonsense," he asserts, "to urge men to love their oppressors in an affectionate sense." 43

In his writings and speeches, King tries to deal with the problems inherent in Jesus’ command to love by exploring the essential character of love, asserting that Jesus meant something fundamentally different than affection or liking another person as a friend when he taught the love of enemy. When Jesus spoke of love, King argues, he was speaking of agape, a love which is not based on sentiment. King writes:

When we speak of loving those who oppress us, we refer to neither eros nor philia, we speak of a love which is expressed in the Greek word agape. Agape means understanding, redeeming goodwill for all men. 44

When one rises to love on this level, he loves men not because he likes them, not because their ways appeal to him, but he loves every man because God loves him. 45

So for King, agape is not first of all an affectionate disposition, though he never denies that it has an emotional dimension. Love, for him, is firmly rooted in the will. It is good-will. 46 The seat of love in the
human being is not human feeling but the will to love, and this idea, King argues, is at the heart of Jesus' teaching on love. Love is a decision to love before it is an emotion, and, hence, when one encounters the love which Jesus taught, one encounters it as command.47

In a sermon entitled "On Being a Good Neighbor," King holds up the Samaritan of Jesus' celebrated parable as a paradigm of agapeic love. He asks: "What constituted the goodness of the good Samaritan? Why will he always be an inspiring paragon of neighborly virtue?" Straightway, King answers his question by saying that the Samaritan's highest virtue may be described in a single word--"altruism." "The good Samaritan was altruistic to the core."48 For King, an unselfish regard for and devotion to the interests and well-being of others is at the heart of agape. The Samaritan exemplified agapeic love, in King's view, because "he made concern for others the first law of life."49

King goes on to discuss the depth and extent of the Samaritan's altruism by pointing to the "universal" character of his concern for others. That is, the Samaritan helped someone who was not a member of his own nation but a foreigner. His altruism extended beyond the bounds of race. According to King, the Samaritan also exhibited a "dangerous altruism." He stopped to help his brother, even though it may have meant endangering his own life. He was willing to put himself at risk in the name of helping his neighbor.50 King also asserts that the Samaritan possessed an "excessive altruism." He was
willing to carry his concern for others to a radical expression of love, a giving of himself in service to his brother. 51

Completing his discussion of the good Samaritan, King links such altruism to the life of Jesus as the supreme example of agapeic love. Christ's life epitomizes the meaning of a radical concern for others.

His altruism was universal, for he thought of all men, even publicans and sinners, as brothers. His altruism was dangerous, for he willingly travelled hazardous roads in a cause he knew was right. His altruism was excessive, for he chose to die on Calvary, history's most magnificent expression of obedience.... 52

But King's conception of agape goes beyond a simple identification with altruism. In his more detailed explanations of Christian love, King is careful to delineate precisely the primary qualities of agape, and it is important to look at the different ways he describes the character of this special form of love.

First, King stresses that "agape is disinterested love." 53 By this he means that agapeic love is not interested in the benefits of love for the lover but rather is interested primarily in the good of the one who is loved. Agape is a kind of love which "seeks nothing in return" and, therefore, is a love which does not calculate the worthiness or unworthiness of the person who is loved. 54 Agape does not discriminate between enemy and friend, rich and poor, powerful and ordinary, and for this reason King says it is a "spontaneous" kind of love. 55 "It is a love in which the individual seeks not his own good,
but the good of his neighbor (I Cor. 10:24)."\(^{56}\)

King says, therefore, that agape is "unmotivated" and even "groundless" from the standpoint of the lover.\(^{57}\) "It is not set in motion by any quality or function of its object."\(^{58}\) "It begins by loving others for their sakes."\(^{59}\)

In language strongly parallel to Matthew 5:46, King stresses:

If one loves an individual merely on account of his friendliness, he loves him for the sake of the benefit to be gained from the friendship, rather than for the friend's own sake. Consequently, the best way to assure oneself that love is disinterested is to have love for the enemy-neighbor from whom you can expect no good in return, but only hostility and persecution.\(^{60}\)

Another quality of agape which King emphasizes is the radical neighbor-regarding orientation of agape. King says agape "springs from the need of the other person."\(^{61}\) "It is an entirely 'neighbor-regarding concern for others,' which discovers the neighbor in every man it meets."\(^{62}\) In the language of Kierkegaard, agapeic love is an attitude "in which you exist for others."\(^{63}\)

The supreme example of such love is seen in the act of divine agape. King asserts that we are met by God's love at the point of our greatest need. As St. Paul proclaimed, the divine act of reconciliation was done "while we were yet sinners," i.e., at the point when we most needed God's love and favor.\(^{64}\) Agapeic love is always oriented toward the need of the other.
After explaining fully what he means by Christian love, King often returns to the original context and problem which prompted his exposition—Jesus' command to love your enemies. He contends that when one properly understands what Jesus meant by love, then his words are no longer those of an impractical idealist. King writes:

I am certain Jesus understood the difficulty inherent in the act of loving one's enemy. He never joined the ranks of those who talked glibly about the easiness of the moral life. He realized that every genuine expression of love grows out of a consistent and total surrender to God. So when Jesus said 'love your enemies' he was not unmindful of its stringent qualities. Yet he meant every word of it. Our responsibility as Christians is to discover the meaning of this command and seek passionately to live it out in our daily lives.

For King there is something profoundly practical and realistic about Jesus' teaching on love. In a world threatened by potential nuclear annihilation and holocaust, he says, the choices are clear: "love or perish." "Far from being the pious injunction of a Utopian dreamer, the command to love one's enemies," he insists, "is an absolute necessity for our survival."

King's ideas on the practicality of the Christian love ethic will be discussed further later in this work. For now, it is important to recognize his interpretation of agape as a realistic ethical imperative rather than as an impractical ideal.

King's conception of love as redeeming good will, rather than as an emotional disposition, allowed him to exhort and to practice love even in the midst of raging controversy. His faith in God, he believed, compelled him
to dedicate his life to loving others—even his enemies. Hence, with dogged determination, King could say to those who sought violently to put an end to the civil rights movement he led:

We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering....Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and, as difficult as it is, we will still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hour and drag us out on some wayside road and leave us half-dead as you beat us, and we will still love you. Send your propaganda agents around the country, and make it appear that we are not fit, culturally and otherwise, for integration, but we'll still love you. But be sure that we'll wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and one day we will win our freedom.68

The Relation of the Three Loves

Since King does not systematically develop the relationship between eros, philia and agape, it is difficult to say precisely how they relate to one another in his thought. A number of clues, however, emerge in his writings and speeches.

Clearly, King does not view the three loves as categorically distinct realities. There is a measure of commensurability between them. At one point he calls them "levels of love," and his thinking on this particular matter may have been influenced by the language of Tillich's *Love, Power and Justice*.69

In his Ph.D. thesis, "A Comparison of the Conceptions
of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman," King quotes Tillich's well-known work with favor: "...I have learned, while elaborating these lectures, that there are not types but qualifications of love." King also paraphrases Tillich by saying "there are not types of love, but qualities of love." His later discussions of the meaning of eros, philia and agape seem to reflect a similar understanding. The three loves are not distinct categories, but related qualities.

King exegetes the meaning of eros and philia primarily as a rhetorical tool to provide a contrast for his real focus of attention---the meaning of agape. And this is why it is so important to view the three loves in relation to one another when analyzing his ethics.

Clearly, when King speaks of love he is not talking about the soul's quest for the realm of the divine, affection or friendship. The highest level of love, he asserts, is firmly rooted in an act of the will. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that King's conception of love has nothing whatsoever to do with love as eros or philia. He gives priority to agape, but does not preclude healthy self-regard or friendship as legitimate human activities. King never depreciates the value of love as yearning or mutual caring.72

There is no question, however, that for King agape is the foundation of his understanding of Christian love, the supreme paradigm of how one ought to love. Agape is the highest of all loves and the substance of any authentic act of caring. In grateful obedience, King believes,
every Christian is called to love even the enemy-neighbor, recognizing that every member of the human family is a child of God—cared for by the ever-loving Father.

The Theological Foundations of Love

By now it is patently clear that King's ideas about love are firmly and explicitly founded upon his Christian theological presuppositions. Indeed, his teaching about agape makes little sense without the theological superstructure to support its claims. And King discusses often the theological basis of love, relating the ethical imperative of agape to the very character of God.  

King accepts that the essential nature of divine personality must be understood in terms of God's love. "The God that we worship," he insists, "is not some Aristotelian, 'unmoved, mover' who merely contemplates upon himself; he is not merely a self-knowing God, but an other-loving God...." 

Time and time again King returns to the image of a loving father to express the essential character of God. Like the prodigal son of Jesus' parable, when we turn to God we encounter the loving embrace of a Father who loves his children. King writes:

God...is not outside the world looking on with a sort of cold indifference. Here on all the roads of life, he is striving in our striving. Like an ever-loving Father, he is working through history for the salvation of his children.
In fact, so central is this idea of a loving God in King's thought that it is the pivotal concept by which other theological ideas are judged. For example, "the thought that God intends for a child to be born blind or for a man to suffer the ravages of insanity is sheer heresy," he says. Such a claim pictures God as a fiendish "devil" rather than as a loving father.76

Although King emphasizes constantly the essential character of God as that of a loving father, he does not oversimplify this idea, relegating God to some optimistic concept of sentimental love. Divine personality is somewhat dialectical in character. In a sermon entitled "A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart," King says:

The greatness of our God lies in the fact that he is both tough-minded and tender-hearted. He has qualities both of austerity and gentleness. The Bible, always clear in stressing both attributes of God, expresses his tough-mindedness in his justice and wrath and his tender-heartedness in his love and grace. God has two outstretched arms. One is strong enough to surround us with justice, and one is gentle enough to embrace us with grace. On the one hand, God is a God of justice who punished Israel for her wayward deeds, and on the other hand, he is a forgiving father whose heart was filled with unutterable joy when the prodigal returned home.77

God "is tough-minded enough to transcend the world; he is tender-hearted enough to live in it."78 King concludes his delineation of the character of God by saying, "we can be thankful that our God combines in his nature a creative synthesis of love and justice...."79

The key to King’s understanding of the nature of God in this statement is to be found in the word "synthesis," and
as already intimated in this work he often employs this same dialectical method in trying to understand the complexities of life.80 In King's view, God is not soft-minded, leaving behind his claims for justice and righteousness; nor is he "a cold, passionless despot sitting in some far-off heaven...."81 Rather "...God combines in his nature a creative synthesis of love and justice which will lead us through life's dark valleys and into sunlit pathways of hope and fulfillment."82

The theological foundations of love in King's thinking will be clearer after examining other significant ways in which he deals with the relation between agape and Christian thought.

The Cross

To understand fully the theological foundation and character of love in King's thought, it is necessary to come to terms with his teaching on the cross. Indeed, properly speaking, King's theology could be characterized as a theology of the cross. He asserts that the real meaning of Christian love and indeed, the Christian faith itself, is found in the crucifixion.

Calvary is a telescope through which we look at the long vista of eternity and see the love of God breaking into time. Out of the hugeness of his generosity, God allowed his only begotten son to die that we may live.83

For King, the cross is "the magnificent symbol of love
conquering hate and of light overcoming darkness."\(^84\)

Jesus' life, death and resurrection, in King's view, proclaimed a higher law—the cross affirmed a nobler way. Christ was convinced that the way of \textit{lex talionis} would only intensify the presence of hatred and animosity. Jesus, therefore, "did not seek to overcome evil with evil," King asserts. "He overcame evil with good. Although crucified by hate, he responded with aggressive love."\(^85\)

For King, this was the lesson of the cross. Jesus' death taught the only way ultimately to defeat evil. He writes:

> What a magnificent lesson! Generations will rise and fall; men will continue to worship the god of revenge and bow before the altar of retaliation; but ever and again this noble lesson of Calvary will be a nagging reminder that only goodness can drive out evil and only love can conquer hate.\(^86\)

The cross, for King, symbolizes the redeeming love of God active in the world. "Often love is crucified and buried in the grave, but in the long run it rises up and redeems even that which crucifies it."\(^87\) So important is this idea in King's thought that he returns to it time and time again; indeed, the cross becomes a symbol of the kind of love which he seeks to illumine. The power of love is demonstrated in that "love confronts evil without flinching...." It is not "soft, anaemic...sentimental." "Such love overcomes the world, even from a rough-hewn cross against the skyline."\(^88\)

Yet, in his characteristic fashion, King is careful not
to oversimplify or detract from the radical edge of the cross in Christian life. He writes:

I can never turn my eyes from the cross without also realizing that it symbolizes a strange mixture of greatness and smallness, of good and evil. As I behold that uplifted cross, I am reminded not only of the unlimited power of God, but of the sordid weakness of man. I think not only of the radiance of the divine, but also the tang of the human. I am reminded not only of Christ at his best, but of man at his worst.89

King does not leave the meaning of the cross only in the past with the life of Jesus. Its significance for Christians is imprinted on everyday life.

...We are greatly mistaken if we think that Christianity protects us from the pain and agony of mortal existence. Christianity has always insisted that the cross we bear precedes the crown we wear. To be a Christian, one must take up his cross daily, with all of its difficulties and agonizing and tragedy-packed content, and carry it until that very cross leaves its mark upon us and redeems us to that more excellent way which comes only through suffering.90

For King, the cross stands as the central symbol of God's redeeming love for humanity, and for that reason it calls responsible Christians to follow the way of the cross in their everyday lives. As Christian tradition affirms, God in his infinite love conquered the evil of sin through the suffering and death of his son. So for King, the present evil of racial injustice can only be defeated by the way of suffering--the way of the cross.91
King asserts that agapeic love and forgiveness are inextricably bound together.\textsuperscript{92} The reality of divine agape, which for King is the foundation of all authentic loving, is primarily a love that readily forgives. He writes:

 Few words in the New Testament more clearly and solemnly express the magnanimity of Jesus' spirit than that sublime utterance from the cross, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' This is love at its best.\textsuperscript{93}

True love not only seeks the good of the neighbor, but it forgives the wrongs of the past. And King was convinced that "the darkness of racial injustice" would be dispelled "only by the light of forgiving love."\textsuperscript{94}

For King, forgiveness is not an occasional or fleeting act. "It is a permanent attitude."\textsuperscript{95} Speaking to members of the black community who had endured the ravages of racial injustice, King underscores the importance of forgiveness by admonishing: "With Jesus on the cross, we must look lovingly at our oppressors and say, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'"\textsuperscript{96}

Forgiveness and the love of one's opponent are, for King, integrally interrelated. He insists that in order to love one's enemy a person "must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love."\textsuperscript{97} For King, it is impossible even to begin to love one who has done wrong against you without the precondition, acted over and over
again, of forgiveness, and he asserts that forgiveness must be initiated by the one who has been wronged. As Kierkegaard wrote many years before: "Long, long before the enemy considers seeking reconciliation, the lover is already reconciled with him."\textsuperscript{98}

The one who has inflicted injury may ask for forgiveness, to be sure, but his asking is not the condition or prerequisite for forgiveness. King utilizes again the image of the loving, forgiving father in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son to convey his message:

The wrongdoer may request forgiveness. He may come to himself, and, like the prodigal son, move up some dusty road, his heart palpitating with the desire for forgiveness. But only the injured neighbour...can really pour out the warm water of forgiveness.\textsuperscript{99}

Yet forgiveness does not mean a naive overlooking of an evil act. The call to forgive is not a call to put a false label on ill-treatment.

It means, rather, that the evil act no longer remains as a barrier to the relationship. Forgiveness is a catalyst creating the atmosphere necessary for a fresh start and a new beginning. It is the lifting of a burden or the cancelling of a debt. The words 'I will forgive you, but I'll never forget what you've done' never explain the real nature of forgiveness. Certainly one can never forget, if that means erasing it totally from his mind. But when we forgive, we forget in the sense that the evil deed is no longer a mental block impeding a new relationship.\textsuperscript{100}

King goes on to assert that forgiveness always includes, therefore, an effort to restore and maintain relationship. It is inconsistent with the fundamental nature of forgiveness to say "I will forgive you, but I
will no longer have anything to do with you."

Forgiveness means reconciliation, a coming together again. Without this, no man can love his enemies. The degree to which we are able to forgive determines the degree to which we are able to love our enemies.101

God is Love

Throughout his writings and speeches, King explicitly identifies love as a metaphysical reality rooted in the very character of divine personality. But frequently he takes this idea a step further equating agapeic love and the nature of God. King never tires of quoting or paraphrasing the First Epistle of John:

'Let us love one another; for love is [of] God and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.'102

This understanding of God as love is the supreme metaphysical category in King's thought. It is the spring out of which his theology and ethics flow, the touchstone or measure by which all ideas are judged. "Love is somehow the key," he writes, "that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality."103

But King does not leave the reality of love merely in the character of God or in any sense removed from human life. The love of which the writer of I John speaks "is a vital movement, a form of existence, an actualisation of God in this world."104 God is loving, and therefore love
is at the center of the created order. All being and worth, for King, are founded upon this radical metaphysical idea. "He who loves," King writes, "has discovered the clue to the meaning of ultimate reality; he who hates stands in immediate candidacy for non-being." 105 So, for King, the idea of God as love is a bringing together of the most fundamental philosophical and theological dimensions of reality. He writes:

Over the centuries men have sought to discover the highest good. This has been the chief quest of ethical philosophy. This was one of the big questions of Greek philosophy. The Epicureans and Stoics sought to answer it; Plato and Aristotle sought to answer it. What is the summum bonum of life? I think I have discovered the highest good. It is love. This principle stands at the center of the cosmos. As John says, 'God is love.' 106

The nature and character of God, in King's view, call for certain ethical demands in the human realm. God is love, and he is known through loving others. In turn, we are part of God and he is part of us through acts of self-giving love. 107 In King's words, love is, therefore, "the greatest of all virtues." 108

The radical theological foundation upon which King builds his understanding of love is clearly evident throughout his writings. Indeed, God's love for each person is, for King, the impetus, motivation and source of all authentic love—even for the enemy-neighbor. 109 One loves not for the benefits to himself, but because he is eternally met by God's unmerited favor. The love of neighbor is a response of profound gratitude. Agape, King asserts, is an "ever-owing love." 110
The meaning of agape is so tied to its theological basis for King, so contingent on the nature of God himself, that in essence "it is the love of God operating in the human heart."\textsuperscript{111} Agape is an overflowing love, a love which constantly owes its being to the source from which it springs.\textsuperscript{112} And so King says, "when you rise to love on this level, you love all men...because God loves them."\textsuperscript{113} Agape is founded upon the recognition that God loves the neighbor. Even his enmity does not eclipse this fact. So salient is the theological idea of agapeic love in King's writings and speeches, therefore, that it emerges as the supreme ontological category and the primary ethical imperative of his thought.

The Character of Love

Martin Luther King almost always speaks of love in dynamic terminology. There is a vitality, a forcefulness, a dynamism to the nature of love in his thought. Love, he says, is "the most durable power in the world."\textsuperscript{114} "Love casts out fear."\textsuperscript{115} "Only love can conquer hate."\textsuperscript{116} Love, he asserts, releases the creative energies of life.\textsuperscript{117}

King's depiction of love in this way is tied to his view that love, as a dynamic, metaphysical reality, is firmly rooted in the character of God. Love is the strongest of all powers in the world because it is related to the One who created the world and continues to be at
work in the world through his loving nature. King, therefore, never tires of admonishing those with whom he comes into contact to let love be their guiding principle. "In a world depending on force, coercive tyranny, and bloody violence," he asserts, "you are challenged to follow the way of love. You will then discover that unarmed love is the most powerful force in all the world."118

King points out a number of ramifications of love as a metaphysical reality, and a further word needs to be said at this point about the character of love as it is delineated in his writings. Often King employs images and phrases which help to define the nature of love but which he does not systematically explicate in any philosophic terms. At times, King's treatment of these characterizations seems almost superficial, but any serious exposition of his conception of love must look in toto at the ways he discusses this important reality.

Love as an Unifying Force

King believed that love is an unifying, integrating force at work in the very structure of reality, and he appeals to this dimension of reality whenever he seeks to delineate the meaning of agapeic love. In contrast to hate, love "builds up and unites."119 Hate confuses, paralyzes, distorts life; "love harmonizes it."120 Love reconciles discord and brings life into a cohesive whole,
and it unites all persons as members of the human family. King writes:

Whether we call it an unconscious process, an impersonal Brahman, or a Personal Being of matchless power and infinite love, there is a creative force in this universe that works to bring the disconnected aspects of reality into a harmonious whole. 121

This unifying principle is for King one of the creative powers of love which stands at the center of the created order. Love, in his view, drives the cosmos and makes reality coherent. "When I speak of love, I am not speaking of some sentimental and weak response," he says. "I am speaking of that force which all the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life." 122

King says relatively little about how this unifying force is at work in reality. He does not describe in detail a metaphysical system which supports his claim. But the existence of this unifying principle is appealed to again and again throughout his sermons and speeches. King entreats harmony and unity, even in the midst of racial tensions, because he believes that the power of love as an unifying force is at work in reality.

Love as a Community-Creating Power

For King, not surprisingly, love is an intensely communal reality. It does not only realize itself in community but seeks to create and restore community as well. Smith and Zepp assert that this relationship
between love and community is one of the fundamental theological concepts in King's thought. And no doubt, in his development of the vital relation between community and love, King delineates one of the preponderant dimensions of agape in the New Testament. As Gene Outka asserts: "Love has to do with social community and not only personal communion."

This is one reason why King insisted that "agape is not a weak, passive love." Rather, agape is a creative, powerful reality. "It is love in action."

Agape is love seeking to preserve and create community. It is insistent on community even when one seeks to break it. Agape is a willingness to go to any length to restore community. It doesn't stop at the first mile, but it goes the second mile to restore community. It is a willingness to forgive, not seven times, but seventy times seven to restore community.

King goes on to relate this dynamic, community-creating and restoring reality to God's action in the world. God's involvement in history is concerned with creating fellowship and restoring fractured community. King writes:

The cross is the eternal expression of the length to which God will go in order to restore broken community. The resurrection is a symbol of God's triumph over all the forces that seek to block community. The Holy Spirit is the continuing community creating reality that moves through history.

One of the metaphors which King uses to draw attention to this relation between love and community is expressed in his phrase "the beloved community." This metaphor shows the close relation between the reality of love and
its community-creating dimension in King's thinking, though he spends little time developing precisely what he means by the "beloved community." Its use is more visionary or symbolic, representing a wholesome, integrated communion of mutual caring among all persons. To be sure, King saw this community-creating and restoring dimension of agape as one of the fundamental aspects of its character. Indeed, "he who works against community," he asserts, "is working against the whole of creation." Community, in King's view, is the concern and call of the God whose nature is love. Agape is the only "cement" that can hold broken community together. So integrally interrelated is the call for love with the call for community that, in King's words, "when I am commanded to love, I am commanded to restore community, to resist injustice, and to meet the needs of my brothers."

The Transforming Power of Love

King identifies love as a transforming power. Far from being a static reality, he says, "love transforms with redemptive power." It can "bring about miracles in the hearts of men." But, again, King does not discuss in any great detail how this transforming power is at work in reality. He simply asserts, "love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend." And here King shows the optimism of his liberal,
In a sermon entitled "Loving Your Enemies," King illustrates the transforming power of love by citing an historical example in the life of Abraham Lincoln. When Lincoln was campaigning for the presidency, one of his arch rivals was a man named Edwin M. Stanton. Stanton constantly ridiculed Lincoln, trying to degrade him before the public. He made fun of Lincoln's appearance and did all in his power to discredit Lincoln's abilities as a leader.

After Lincoln was elected President, he was seeking to form his cabinet, and he decided upon Stanton for the important position of Secretary of War. Lincoln's advisors were shocked. They reminded Lincoln of the unkind and ignoble things Stanton had said about him. Lincoln said that he was aware of what Stanton had said and done, but nevertheless felt he was the best man for this key position. Stanton became a member of Lincoln's cabinet and rendered an important service to his country and to his President during those difficult days of American history.

King then recounts how the nation was shocked at the news of Lincoln's assassination and how many laudable things were said about him at the time of his death. But King asserts that it was Stanton who most complimented Lincoln for the leadership he provided the country in such trying circumstances. "Standing near the dead body of the man he had once hated," King writes, "Stanton referred to him as one of the greatest men that ever lived and said,
'He now belongs to the ages.'"137

King then asserts that there is an important lesson in this historical illustration—a lesson which underscores the transforming power of love. He writes:

If Lincoln had hated Stanton both men would have gone to their graves as bitter enemies. But through the power of love, Lincoln transformed an enemy into a friend. It was this same attitude that made it possible for Lincoln to speak a kind word about the South during the Civil War when feeling was so bitter. Asked by a shocked bystander how he could do this, Lincoln said, 'Madam, do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?' This is the power of redemptive love.138

This characterization of love and the historical example cited by King as evidence of its validity raises a number of theological problems. Reinhold Niebuhr is extremely critical of this sort of understanding of Christian love, arguing that no idea of transforming an enemy into a friend should be put forth as the motivation for loving or forgiving an enemy. Such an idea, he asserts, is alien to the New Testament. Niebuhr writes:

Nothing is said about the possibility of transmuting their enmity to friendship through the practice of forgiveness. That social and prudential possibility has been read into the admonition of Jesus by liberal Christianity.139

It should be remembered that King's use of the above historical reference to Lincoln and Stanton is as an homiletical illustration and must be understood as such. King, of course, never states that love always will transform an enemy into a friend. He asserts that love, as neighbor-regarding good will, in contrast to retaliatory hate, is the only power capable of
transforming enmity into friendship. To be sure, Jesus never promised that agape would make enemies friends, and any understanding of love which asserts its "transforming power" as a motive for loving has misrepresented Jesus' command to love one's enemies. But Martin Luther King certainly understood the suffering, sacrificial nature of agapeic love stressed so heavily by Reinhold Niebuhr, and his thinking on this subject is no superficial triumphalism.

There is, of course, an aspect of love as a transforming power which is commensurate with New Testament teaching. Love is redemptive, indeed, as King asserts. The cross of Christ throughout Christian history has stood as a paradoxical symbol of God's victory over evil. In this sense, love does transform. The death of God's son is also the work of redeeming grace. Though the New Testament never speaks of this as the changing of enemies to friends, it never precludes the possibility. The transforming power of love is present in the literature of the Bible, but it is always proclaimed as promise, always couched in the language of eschatological hope. Martin Luther King believed profoundly in the transforming power of agapeic love and lived in the reality of its hope.

The Weapon of Love

Another metaphor which King uses to characterize love
is that of a "weapon." "Love," he says, "is mankind's most potent weapon for personal and social transformation." More will be said about this aspect of King's thought in discussing his conception of nonviolence, but for now it is important to indicate that King identifies love as a powerful instrument which can be used to combat evil.

King admonishes those concerned about social justice to take love seriously as a means for social change: "As you press on for justice," he writes, "be sure to move with dignity and discipline, using love as your chief weapon. Let no man pull you so low that you hate him. Always avoid violence." Here one encounters the strange mixture of King's militancy and pacifism. His Christian commitment called him to love others and to seek their well-being, but it also carried at the same time the moral obligation actively to resist evil and to seek justice. Love for King was not a pious injunction; it was, at least in part, an instrument for achieving social change. Love meant being concerned about the well-being of others and at the same time actively resisting wrong and seeking a more just social order. So for King love was instrumental, potent enough to bring about personal and social reform.

Underscoring this mixture of militancy and good will, King writes:

We did not hesitate to call our movement an army. But it was a special army, with no supplies but its sincerity, no uniform but its determination, no arsenal except its faith, no currency but its conscience. It was an army that would move but not maul. It was an army that would sing but not slay. It was an army
that would flank but not falter. It was an army to storm bastions of hatred, to lay siege to the fortresses of segregation, to surround symbols of discrimination. It was an army whose allegiance was to God and whose strategy and intelligence were the eloquently simple dictates of conscience.143

Although King was intentional about developing the militant edge of nonviolence, he always stressed that it was, nevertheless, "a weapon fabricated of love."144 He writes:

...The great instrument is the instrument of love. We feel that this is our chief weapon, and that no matter how long we are involved in the protest, no matter how tragic the experiences are, no matter what sacrifices we have to make, we will not let anybody drag us so low as to hate them. Love must be at the forefront of our movement....145

In succeeding chapters of this work King's understanding of Christian love will be related to other aspects of his thinking—especially his understanding of nonviolent resistance. But one thing remains clear: From the beginning of his public ministry, until the day he was murdered in Memphis, the Christian idea of agape occupied a preponderant place in King's thought. Indeed, it is impossible to understand adequately in any comprehensive sense King's approach to social action, his dedication to civil rights or his understanding of theology and ethics without a clear grasp of his conception of love.
CHAPTER FOUR
NONVIOLENCE IN PERSPECTIVE

Thus far in this work the intellectual and social sources of King's pilgrimage to nonviolence have been delineated and an exegesis of his conception of Christian love has been presented. It is now appropriate, even necessary, to discuss the social and ethical context of King's thinking on nonviolence; i.e., to note what New Testament scholars call the sitz im leben in which his ideas were formulated. King, like most social thinkers, shaped his thought and action in terms of a particular social situation and in the context of specific ethical choices. King's thinking on nonviolence did not take place in a social vacuum, and to appreciate fully his thinking on nonviolent resistance it is important to consider his ideas in situ.

As mentioned above, even though King's educational career had brought him into contact with a study of Gandhi's life and teachings, it was not until he was in the throes of the Montgomery bus boycott that he engaged in a thorough working out of his ideas on nonviolence. This is not to say that King's ideas on nonviolent resistance are only immediately relevant to civil rights
in the United States. He certainly believed nonviolence to have a profound importance beyond the struggle for freedom by black people in his own country. Nevertheless, the deeper one delves into King's conception of nonviolence, the more integrally his thinking relates specifically to the struggle for civil rights by black Americans.

It is important constantly to bear in mind that King's ideas on nonviolence are not abstract, detached postulations or social theories. Indeed, it is impossible to understand his conception of nonviolence in its integrity, grasping its subtlety and depth, apart from its integral relationship to civil rights. Any treatment of King's thinking on nonviolent resistance must take seriously the social context in which his ideas were conceived and nurtured and must consider carefully the ethical choices which he believed confronted the black community.

King often delineates his understanding of nonviolence in terms of three basic options which he believed an oppressed people may pursue in reaction to their domination. Though King discusses these three options in general and historical terms, they are specifically focused on the vital choices facing the black community of his day. Firstly, King says that a subjugated people can follow a course of nonresistance, choosing to acquiesce to injustice and simply seek to appease the oppressor. Secondly, he states an oppressed people can choose to use force against their oppression, striking against their
adversary with violent retaliation. Thirdly, King asserts that an oppressed people can seek to defeat their subjugation by reacting with the strong, disciplined protest of nonviolent resistance, and it is here that one encounters the real thrust and crux of King's argument.\(^3\)

To understand fully King's thinking on nonviolence it is necessary to have a firm grasp of these three options, for King does not argue for the legitimacy of nonviolence, morally or tactically, in isolation. Rather, it is in the context of these other choices that King argues for nonviolent resistance as the best means available to black Americans to achieve political enfranchisement and greater social justice. A more coherent understanding of King's conception of nonviolence will be facilitated by looking at each of these options and seeking to understand them in terms of King's call for nonviolent direct action.

Nonresistance

As mentioned above, one of the means of coping with oppression which King discusses is what he identifies as "acquiescence."\(^4\) He states that some people "feel that the only way to deal with their oppression is to resign themselves [to] becoming conditioned to things as they are."\(^5\)

King asserts that at times black people have coped with the injustices inflicted upon them by acquiescing to those in power. Often, he says, black people have grudgingly,
yet passively, accepted the social conditions in which they found themselves without raising a voice of protest. King asserts that the roots of this behavior pattern are found in the institution of chattel slavery, a highly effective means of oppression which stressed and instilled in black people that the only intrinsic value they possessed was demonstrated by appeasement. Hence, some members of the black community adjusted themselves to the ravages of racial discrimination by adopting a demeanor of submission and nonresistance. King states:

For many years the Negro tacitly accepted segregation. He was the victim of stagnant passivity and deadening complacency. The system of slavery and segregation caused many Negroes to feel that perhaps they were inferior. This is the ultimate tragedy of segregation. It not only harms one physically, but it injures one spiritually.6

In King's view, some black people have simply given up the struggle for freedom altogether or postponed any call for social change; their only solace being found in quietly hoping, sometimes against hope, that time will change the existing social situation and heal the wounds of oppression. King admits that there is a kind of "freedom" inherent in acquiescence; what he describes as "a freedom of exhaustion."7 But this is not true freedom at all.

King believes that those who argue for nonresistance and hope that time alone will solve the problems of racial discrimination seriously underestimate the recalcitrance of a privileged group to give up its privileges, an idea which he undoubtedly gained originally from the writings
of Reinhold Niebuhr but which was substantiated again and again in his own experience. King knew that full freedom and political enfranchisement for black people would not come without radical social change and strident effort on the part of committed members of both the black and white communities. In King's view, while black people were without the basic affirmation of civil rights and the availability of political and economic power, there would be no real progress in race relations.

King was convinced that acquiescence was an unrealistic and morally unacceptable means of dealing with injustice, for it yields no substantial effects and never confronts or challenges the fundamental causes of racial discrimination. He believed people of conscience must stand up with moral courage and protest against the injustices of racial prejudice wherever they are found.

King asserts:

If the moderates of the white South fail to act now, history will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.

Nonresistance is actually a denial of any kind of courageous stand against injustice. It does not challenge the social conditions which cause oppression, and in the final analysis it is a capitulation to a social order which is morally untenable and therefore tantamount to participation in the maintaining of an unjust status quo.

King writes:
It is a cowardly way, for the individual who adjusts to an evil system is at that moment a participant in that evil system, and he must take some of the responsibility for the perpetuation of the unjust system.  

For King, acquiescence is "the method of surrender," and his denunciation of acquiescence is condemned in the strongest terms of his moral philosophy. As much as King deplores violence, he feels there is only one thing worse—cowardice.

King's critique of nonresistance also includes a profound theological dimension. He believes that a person is morally obligated to work for the freedom which God has given to every individual. To deny the God-given gift of freedom, for King, would be unconscionable and tantamount to a denial of one's own creation. Even hardship and suffering do not obviate the moral responsibility to accept and to strive for freedom. "Freedom is not free," King asserts. "It is always purchased with the high price of sacrifice and suffering."

It must be said, however, that despite his strong criticism of acquiescence as a cowardly method of surrender, King is careful not to shun all appeals for moderation. He is sympathetic to any call for reasonable, disciplined restraint. But King is cautious about what lies behind such calls for moderation. He had heard the plea for gradual change placed before the black community as a stumbling block and had experienced such appeals for moderation as the cynical tactic of those who sought to perpetrate injustice. King knew from experience that slow
change often meant no change. He states:

...If moderation means moving on toward the goal of justice with wise restraint and calm reasonableness, then moderation is a great virtue that all men must seek to achieve in this tense period of transition. But if moderation means slowing up in the move for justice and capitulating to the whims and caprices of the guardians of a deadening status quo, then moderation is a tragic vice which all men of goodwill must condemn.17

King argues, moreover, that the South, indeed the nation as a whole, has seen the dawning of a "new Negro," and this phenomenon, he believes, eliminates any legitimate call for nonresistance.18

It is...sociologically true that once an oppressed people rise up against their oppression there is no stopping point short of full freedom....Realism impels us to admit that the struggle will continue until freedom is a reality....19

For this reason, "the issue," for King, "is not whether segregation and discrimination will be eliminated but how they will pass from the scene."20 There is, therefore, in King's reading of events, an impelling sense of momentum to civil rights. Nonresistance is no longer a viable option, for the mandala of progress cannot be turned back.21

King is careful to say, however, that progress is not inevitable. Time alone will not solve the problem of racial injustice, and King is highly critical of those who put their faith in what he calls "the myth of time."22 He is convinced that the defeat of segregation calls for strong measures that will require dedication and strident effort. Black people must not passively wait for
deliverance. "We know through painful experience," he argues, "that freedom is never given voluntarily by the oppressor, it must be demanded by the oppressed."23

Violent Retaliation

Another option which King discusses as open to oppressed people in reaction to their domination is "violent retaliation." King consistently spends a great deal of time discussing and criticizing violence as a program for social change in his enunciation of nonviolence. This is significant for the use of violence in King's day was very much a question of debate. He focuses on violence as one of the issues with which the black community must contend, and in a real sense King's critique of violence forms the foil against which his advocacy of nonviolence is delineated.

King views retaliatory violence—in the form of riots, the destruction of property, and aggression against authority figures such as the police—as a desperate reaction on the part of a subjugated people to the subtle yet devastating violence perpetrated in the injustices of segregation, and he insists that such a reaction to racial oppression is understandable. Racial discrimination demeans the black community. It violates the personhood of black people, and it is easy to see why some respond with vehement anger and advocate violence.24
But King insists that no matter how understandable such a reaction is, it is also tragic. In the final analysis, he believes, violence only serves to release pent up emotions and ultimately does not solve the social problems which are caused and maintained by the "violence" of racial discrimination.\(^{25}\)

King is resolute but not completely dogmatic in his views toward violence, and this is a subtlety of his thought important to appreciate. There is a profoundly contextual dimension to King's statements on violence. His views on the subject are nearly always related to his burning concern for the freedom of his people.

King expressly argues against violence as a method for eliminating social evil for two basic reasons: Firstly, he argues that violence is immoral for it violates certain ultimate and fundamental moral precepts. Secondly, King denounces violence as impractical for in the end it does not produce desired results.\(^{26}\) To comprehend fully King's abhorrence of violence, and therefore an important aspect of his abiding faith in nonviolence, it is necessary to have a firm grasp of both of these criticisms.

"Violence is immoral," King states, "because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible."\(^{27}\) Intrinsic in King's critique of the immorality of violence are his ethical values and Christian presuppositions. As observed in the previous chapter, the love of one's enemy is an essential element of King's conception of Christian love and is an
integral part of his religious faith. It is not surprising, therefore, that King's moral criticism of violence focuses upon the teachings of Jesus, particularly the Sermon on the Mount. 28

King's moral denunciation of violence pivots around two of the most salient values which thread their way through the entirety of his thought: love and community. These, of course, are not two categorically separate values but rather, for King, two facets of the same reality. As already intimated in this work, there is incorporated in King's understanding of Christian love an essential communal character, for Christian love seeks to initiate and maintain community. In King's view, violence can never fulfill the command of love, for even if it could be justified in certain specific contexts, violence can never fulfill the call for community and rarely, if ever, expresses concern and good will for one's neighbor.

King, therefore, never embraces the idea that love is purely an internal attitude. 29 For King, one cannot love one's enemy in attitude internally, while at the same time externally perpetrating violence against him. Jesus' command to turn the other cheek and love one's enemy is, for King, Christ's categorical rejection of violent retaliation as a moral means of dealing with conflict.

Beyond this, King's condemnation of hatred, the emotional soil out of which violence springs, is also rooted in his first-hand experience. He says:
I have seen hate expressed on the countenances of too many Mississippi and Alabama sheriffs to advise the Negro to sink to this miserable level. Hate is too great a burden to bear.30

In King's view hate destroys the foundation of community and distorts one's perception of reality. Though he spends little time developing the philosophical concepts and complex psycho-social relationships which stand behind his thinking, King firmly believes that hatred is not only destructive to the one who is hated but injurious as well to the one who hates.

Like an unchecked cancer, hate corrodes the personality and eats away its vital unity. Hate destroys a man's sense of values and his objectivity. It causes him to describe the beautiful as ugly and the ugly as beautiful, and to confuse the true with the false and the false with the true.31

King saw violence, even as a retaliatory reaction to the violence of others, creating a descending spiral of reaction and counter-reaction which is extremely difficult to break. Hence, retaliation, in his view, does not really solve the problem of violence. Rather, such violence only intensifies its own reality and perpetuates its own binding problems. As Gandhi had written years before: "Counter-hatred only increases the surface as well as the depth of hatred...."32 King asserts:

To meet hate with retaliatory hate would do nothing but intensify the existence of evil in the universe. Hate begets hate; violence begets violence; toughness begets a greater toughness.33
King is even more specific and rigorous in his denunciation of violence as *impractical*, although one must be careful not to view his ideas on this topic divorced from the moral arguments already presented. There is, after all, for King, no bifurcation between morality and practicality. That which is immoral is in the long run impractical. But there is also in King's critique of violence a concrete pragmatism focused specifically on the black community's struggle for civil rights.

King was keenly aware of the fact that in his day black Americans made up a small minority of the population in the United States, and this situation he felt made violence as a policy for social change highly impractical.\(^{34}\) Black Americans were without sufficient political and economic power to wage successfully a violent test of force. Such a campaign would only mean defeat or even annihilation. Moreover, the use of violence, King believed, would undermine the integrity and credibility of the call for civil rights and social equality, alienating members of both the black and white communities, and undoubtedly would add strength and power to those reactionary forces in the wider social arena which perpetrate oppression. Words and acts of violence would simply confirm the fears of the white community. King believed experience from the past has shown that violent uprisings are swiftly and effectively put down, and it is the black community which pays the price.\(^{35}\)

Though King's critique of violence is heavily influenced by his moralist perspective, he is not simply
enunciating platitudes. Deeply embedded in King's view is the idea that violence is intrinsically "self-defeating." He speaks of violence as "crippling" and points out that "time is cluttered with the wreckage of individuals and communities that surrendered to hatred and violence." For this reason King admonishes those who seek positive social change to pursue that aim by means which are commensurate with the goals they endeavor to achieve. He asserts:

As we struggle for justice and freedom we must not struggle with falsehood, hate, malice, or violence. We must always avoid bitterness. We must never succumb to the temptation of using violence in our struggle. For if we do this unborn generations will be the recipients of a long desolate night of bitterness and our chief legacy to the future will be an endless reign of meaningless chaos.

King, like Gandhi, pointed to the incoherent, self-defeating contradictions inherent in any violent act. If one takes up what Gandhi called "the doctrine of the sword" he may admittedly gain "momentary victory," but ultimately success in any campaign which seeks to bring freedom and justice must avoid violence. Hence, for King, there exists a profoundly practical dimension to Jesus' words: "He who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword." In King's view Jesus was not simply enunciating in this statement a pious aphorism but rather asserting a basic truth about the self-defeating character of violence. King's thinking at this point is representative of his frequent combining of the practical and moral in his thought. For King that which is immoral
ultimately cannot be thought of as practical.

King also makes an important distinction between the goal and intent of the "racial revolution" in America and other revolutions whose aim is to overthrow or to seek independence. After all, "practicality" must be viewed in the context of goal and intent; i.e., political action must be planned and evaluated in terms of its ability to achieve desired results. Because the civil rights movement sought integration—a community life together between blacks and whites—then violence was a questionable program for achieving this goal. King insists that the "Negro revolution" is a revolution to "get in" not overthrow, and this has a profound impact on the means by which such social change should be pursued.

He argues:

...The Negro revolution is seeking integration, not independence. Those fighting for independence have the purpose to drive out the oppressors. But here in America, we've got to live together. We've got to find a way to reconcile ourselves to living in community, one group with the other. The struggle of the Negro in America, to be successful, must be waged with resolute efforts, but efforts that are kept strictly within the framework of our democratic society. This means reaching, educating and moving large enough groups of people of both races to stir the conscience of the nation.

This is an extremely important dimension of King's views on the impracticality of violence. When King asserts that violence breeds malice and destroys brotherhood he is articulating a practical concern as well as a moral ideal which relates integrally to his vision of an integrated society—a vision which is always in the
background of his denunciation of violence. Since violence, for King, is completely incommensurate with the goal of a truly integrated society, he is highly skeptical of its ability to produce positive social change.

The high value which King places on community is not just an ethereal value. The very point of civil rights and the goal of nonviolence, in his view, is to effect positive inter-group living and to bring about a truly integrated society. Since the purpose of the black community's struggle is integration rather than the defeat or humiliation of the white community, King argues that retaliatory violence as a method for effecting positive social change is impractical. Violence, he believes, is counter-productive to the fundamental intent of civil rights, and he admonishes those who work for the advancement of freedom not to defeat the purpose of civil rights "by methods that contradict the aim of brotherhood."  

King was also keenly aware of the complexities involved in racial conflicts, and he believed these problems further rule out the use of violence. In King's view, many of the intricate problems in race relations stem from the fear of the white community toward integration--often extremely irrational fears. Violent retaliation as a response to social injustice simply intensifies the white community's fears and then further complicates the problems associated with integration.

Any constructive program of social change, King argues, must pursue and initiate a campaign of full citizenship
rights completely cognizant of and sensitive to the fears present in the larger community and seek to mitigate the anxiety of concerned white people. Violence would only substantiate the white community's worries about racial integration and intensify the whole fear-element present within race relations. King, therefore, argues that the results of any campaign centering on retaliatory violence would be disastrous.

King's moral and social analysis of violence led him, not surprisingly, to a denunciation of war as a form of waging and solving conflict, though one must constantly bear in mind that his ideas on war are not a systematic, carefully analyzed point of view. Rather, King's statements about war are extrapolations of his deep suspicion of and skepticism toward violence as a means for social change.

King never denies that violence in one sense has a kind of legitimacy. Historically, it has been used by some endeavoring to bring greater freedom and democratic reform. "Violence," he writes, "has often brought about momentary victories." But King quickly argues that this must be put in proper perspective. Though countries and groups often have engaged in violent conflict when seeking independence, history demonstrates, King argues, that violence in and of itself cannot be seen as a lasting, creative program. Any constructive campaign for freedom or democratic reform is founded upon cooperation, not divisiveness. Even though violence may win momentary
victories, King insists that it "can never bring about permanent peace and it ends up creating many more social problems" than it solves.\textsuperscript{46} For this reason the infusion of violence greatly increases the risk of defeating any just and noble cause for which it is employed.

Beyond this, two important factors must be kept in mind when seeking to understand King's statements on war. Firstly, the nuclear arms race between East and West deeply influenced King's views. He accepted in theory the argument that at one time war provided a negative good; i.e., it could act to counter the greater injustice and evil of a totalitarian regime. But King was firmly convinced that the destructive and annihilating potential of modern nuclear weapons ruled out the possibility of war being justified even as a negative good. He writes:

\begin{quote}
In a day when Sputniks, Explorers and Geminies are dashing through outer space, when guided ballistic missiles are carving highways of death through the stratosphere, no nation can finally win a war. It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence, it is either nonviolence or nonexistence.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

War must be finally eliminated or the whole of mankind will be plunged into the abyss of annihilation.\textsuperscript{48}

Another factor which must be kept in mind when analyzing King's views on this subject is America's involvement in the Vietnam War during many of the years King was active in public life. King felt strongly that the United States had no moral justification for being engaged in such a conflict, and he vociferously criticized the United States' involvement.\textsuperscript{49} Vietnam embodied and
symbolized for King the futility and complete meaninglessness of war. Often King's categorical denunciation of the Vietnam War in the midst of his soaring rhetoric led him to a categorical denunciation of war as a means of handling conflict. The waging of violence to resolve disagreement was a paradox which King found utterly meaningless.

King's resolute views on violence often came under sharp criticism by more "revolutionary" members of the black community. Many of King's critics--especially advocates of Black Nationalism and those involved in the Black Power movement--felt that King's views on violence were too doctrinaire, and they argued that his denunciation of violence even excluded the use of self-defense. Though it is easy to see how his critics reached this conclusion, it represents a misreading of King's views and does not recognize the complexity and deeply contextual dimension of his statements on violence.

King readily accepts self-defense as a moral and legal right in principle.50 He states:

The principle of self-defense, even involving weapons and bloodshed, has never been condemned, even by Gandhi, who sanctioned it for those unable to master pure nonviolence.51

But King's views on self-defense are not handled in an abstract manner. He is more concerned with the practical outcome of any campaign which vigorously affirms the right of defensive violence. He argues:
I think that the minute you have programmatic action around defensive violence and pronouncements about it the line of demarcation between defensive violence and aggressive violence becomes very thin. The minute the nomenclature of violence gets in the atmosphere people begin to respond violently, and in their unsophisticated minds they cannot quite make the distinction between defensive and aggressive violence.52

King felt strongly that focusing on self-defense in the context of a policy for social change missed the essential point. The struggle for, and eventual attainment of, full political and economic enfranchisement, King argues, is the best kind of "self-defense" for black people. To focus upon retaliatory violence--even "justified" retaliation--is to confuse the issue. Civil rights and equal treatment under the law, permanent social change and the development of moral character are the only lasting and adequate means of true protection for the black community.53

King argues that the black community must approach self-defense in terms of this wider context.54 The protection of one's own home and family against the lawlessness and oppression of organizations like the Ku Klux Klan and White Citizens Council has little or no positive effect in changing the social conditions which produce and allow such violence and oppression. King asserts:

There must be some program for establishing law. Our experience in places like Savannah and Macon, Georgia has been that a drive which registers Negroes to vote can do more to provide protection of the law and respect for Negroes by even racist sheriffs than anything we have seen.55
Though King embraced the right to defend life and property, in the final analysis he believed violent self-defense, like any act of violence, is counter-productive to true progress. Real protection for black people, he argued, must involve a program of radical, nonviolent social change.

Nonviolent Resistance

King's understanding of nonviolence and its relation to agapeic love will be discussed further later in this work, but now it is important to look at his views on nonviolent resistance in the context of the choices which he believed confronted the black community of his day. King's sharp criticism of acquiescence as cowardly and ineffectual ruled out its use as an adequate response to racial oppression. Similarly, his denunciation of violent retaliation as immoral and self-defeating eliminated its use as a realistic option. King insists that nonviolent resistance is the best means available to the black community for challenging social injustice and winning civil rights, and his argument for nonviolence often is sketched against the backdrop of his opposition to nonresistance and retaliatory violence.

In a real sense, King's social analysis of acquiescence and critique of violent retaliation are used as rhetorical
tools, foils against which his strong advocacy of nonviolence is delineated. But King's discussion of these two options is not only a rhetorical device. After all, they were, in his time, very much issues of debate, real choices with which the black community was confronted. This is significant, for King advocates nonviolent direct action as a choice among other choices. He does not argue for nonviolence isolated from other options, but rather wishes to show the legitimacy of nonviolent resistance in the context of other methods of social change. King's argument against acquiescence and denunciation of violent retaliation must be kept in view, therefore, when seeking to understand his conception of nonviolence.

For King, nonviolent resistance was a superior moral and tactical choice because it combined into a creative synthesis the militancy intrinsic in retaliation and the moderate appeal inherent in acquiescence. This is why King calls nonviolence "a higher synthesis."\(^{57}\)

There is in King's conception of nonviolence a dynamic, dialectic tension of polar opposites. King asserts that as an exponent of nonviolence he sees himself standing between the extremes of a do-nothing acquiescence and the violent militancy of Black Power and Black Nationalism.\(^ {58}\) In King's view nonviolent direct action is both militant and at the same time moderate in its effort to eliminate social injustice, yet it avoids the extremist perils of both nonresistance and violent retaliation.

This is why King never admonishes black people to
suppress the discontent arising out of their experiences with the injustices of racial prejudice. Contrary to acquiescence which calls for the suppression of hostile emotions, nonviolent resistance in King's view provides "a healthy way to deal with understandable anger."\(^{59}\)

Nonviolence does not call for the repression of hostility, nor does it encourage the sudden, corrosive release of anger in a desperate act of frustration which produces no lasting results—as can be seen in riots. In King's view, nonviolent direct action is a creative synthesis which offers a new option in contrast to the quietism of acquiescence and the angry hatred of violence. King states:

Nonviolent resistance...provides a creative force through which men can channelize their discontent. It does not require that they abandon it, for this kind of discontent is sound and healthy. Nonviolence simply saves it from degenerating into morbid bitterness and hatred. Hate is always tragic. It is as injurious to the hater as it is to the hated.\(^{60}\)

For the large majority, however, nonviolent, direct action has emerged as the better and more successful way....Nonviolence offers a method by which they can fight the evil with which they cannot live.\(^{61}\)

King was convinced that nonviolence is not only an effective technique for social change, but a method of protest which edifies those involved in the struggle. It is a "weapon which ennobles the man who wields it."\(^{62}\) In King's view nonviolence provided a creative means by which black people could direct the energy of their discontent into a method of social transformation—a method which is personally and collectively enriching.
King saw nonviolent resistance not as a passive means of protest but rather as a strong, assertive plan of action. He agreed with more revolutionary members of the black community that vigorous, forceful measures were necessary to overcome racial discrimination. He says, "powerful action" is needed "to combat the disease of segregation."\(^\text{63}\) King, therefore, vehemently disagreed with those who constantly argued against assertive action, convinced that time alone would heal the wounds of racial prejudice.

In King's view nonviolent direct action is much more than just the refusal to use violence. Above all, it is a positive means of effecting social change. As Gandhi had declared years before, nonviolent resistance "is a movement that aims at translating ideas into action."\(^\text{64}\) "...It means the pitting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant."\(^\text{65}\) King, like Gandhi, understood nonviolence to be assertive and positive in character.\(^\text{66}\)

King is fond of saying that racial progress will not "roll in on the wheels of inevitability."\(^\text{67}\) Racial understanding and the building of an integrated society would be created only by the toil of concerned members of both the black and white communities.\(^\text{68}\) Real progress in race relations, King argues, requires dedication, assertive action, struggle and even rigorous suffering.

This is why King is so adamant about the need for members of the black community to stand up and protest against segregation. The passive acceptance of injustice would not solve the problem; waiting for things to change
would not bring social improvement. In King's view, civil rights would come to the black community only through diligent, hard work and a willingness by black people to suffer. He asserts:

Philosophers all the way from Heraclitus of Greek philosophy to Hegel of modern philosophy have insisted that growth comes through struggle. It seems to be both historically and biologically true that there can be no growth and birth without birth and growing pains.69

Though King constantly underscores the importance of assertive action, he is always careful to point out that violent retaliation, though aggressive and assertive, is not a productive means of bringing racial justice. In King's view the call for integration may demand struggle, commitment, perhaps even suffering—but it does not require violence. Such retaliatory measures only serve to alienate the majority of law-abiding, decent citizens—both black and white—and are ultimately detrimental to the moral power and suasion necessary to mount such a cause. He asserts:

This is no time for romantic illusions and empty philosophical debates about freedom. This is a time for action. What is needed is a strategy for change, a tactical program that will bring the Negro into the mainstream of American life as quickly as possible. So far, this has only been offered by the nonviolent movement. Without recognizing this we will end up with solutions that don't solve, answers that don't answer and explanations that don't explain.70

King was completely resolute, to be sure, in his pronouncements about nonviolent direct action being the only tenable means of social change available to the black
community of his day, but it is difficult to say whether he saw nonviolence as an absolute answer to the problem of war in international relations—though at times his sweeping rhetoric would lead one to think so.

Certainly, King's deep faith in nonviolence was not founded upon a naive, dogmatic pacifism which dismissed the complexities of ethical decision-making. He was completely committed to nonviolence in the circumstances in which he worked, and his resolute rhetoric was representative of his utter allegiance to the moral values inherent in the nonviolent philosophy of action.

But King did not call for the condemnation of violence at all cost. Cowardice and apathy, in his view, are far more reprehensible morally than the use of violence. In principle he upheld the ethical legitimacy of self-defense and refused throughout his civil rights career to join a pacifist organization.

It was not the just war theory which King rejected; it was, rather, the practical reality of war, the results of violent retaliation, which he found untenable—both morally and practically. Though King believed the philosophy of nonviolence had an important contribution to make in international relations and urged the leaders of the world to find a solution to the problem of war, his conception of nonviolence must be understood fundamentally in an American civil rights context. Only then does the full logic and inner coherence of his thinking come to light.
More will be said later in this work about how nonviolent direct action is applied as a technique for social change. But for now it remains clear that King believed nonviolent resistance was the best means open to the black community for eradicating racial injustice. Nonviolence, he believed, "provided a powerful and creative approach to the crisis in race relations."\(^\text{71}\)

As time went on, King's confidence in and commitment to nonviolent resistance as an effective means of producing positive social change grew, and he eventually came to accept nonviolence not simply as a method of protest but as a "way of life."\(^\text{72}\) Nonviolence was for King the creation of a new option which avoided the perils of retaliatory violence and nonresistance while combining their strengths. Nonviolent resistance aggressively asserted the just protest of the oppressed, yet did so with moral dignity and disciplined restraint. Through nonviolent direct action, King argued, the nation had seen the dawning of a new era in race relations. No longer were black people content with oppression and no longer were the segregationists of the South able to contain the black community's stride toward freedom.
CHAPTER FIVE
TOWARD A CHRISTIAN MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Although Martin Luther King conceived of nonviolent resistance as a plan of action and a strategy for radical social change, he was careful to point out that nonviolence is firmly founded upon a philosophical foundation, and often King sought to delineate what he called the "underlying philosophy" of nonviolence.\(^1\) It is this philosophical basis which provides much of the coherence and logic in King's thinking, and a clear understanding of the basic precepts of nonviolence is of paramount importance for an adequate understanding of King's thought as a whole.

Though the precepts which King discusses in his writings and speeches are put forward as the philosophical basis of nonviolence, it is clear on closer scrutiny that these ideas deal with much more than just the basic concepts behind nonviolent resistance. King constantly draws on the resources of Christian theology and personalistic philosophy to solidify the philosophical foundation he seeks to establish. Often he redefines and reinterprets Gandhi's ideas through Western and Christian eyes. Although King discusses the tenets presented in
this chapter under the rubric of nonviolent resistance, it is fair to say that what King delineates as the basic philosophical precepts of nonviolence are actually the fundamental tenets of his own moral theology.

It is important constantly to bear in mind that King never discusses the theoretical basis of nonviolence divorced from the idea of nonviolent resistance as a philosophy of social change, and throughout his writings and speeches King maintains a constant and deliberate tension between the theoria and praxis of nonviolence as a strategy for eliding social injustice. Even in his more philosophical discussions, King does not deal with nonviolence as an abstract, detached social theory, and any serious discussion of the theoretical basis of nonviolence in his thought must underscore that nonviolent resistance is primarily a philosophy of action—a method of protest, oriented toward transforming the social scene.

It should be noted also that King's philosophical discussions of nonviolence are not presented in a precise, systematic manner, but rather are sketched in the broadest of brushstrokes, couched in the rhetoric of popular appeal. This chapter does not seek to systematize King's moral theology into an academic treatise. Rather, it endeavors to sketch in a coherent manner the basic tenets of nonviolence as they emerge in King's thought as a whole. In a sense, the ideas presented in this chapter, each one taken from King's writings and speeches, are little more than the pegs upon which the collage of his
moral philosophy is hung, and for that very reason a firm grasp of these basic tenets is of great importance. They are the fundamental supports upon which his thinking rests.

Moral Courage

King's call for nonviolence is an appeal for radical and rigorous protest against injustice—without malice, hatred or violence. Hence, King often emphasizes, throughout his writings, that moral courage is the first tenet of nonviolent resistance. This method, he asserts, is not "for the weak and cowardly." Like Gandhi before him, King insisted that nonviolence does not operate from a position of weakness, nor is it chosen out of an inability to use violence. Precisely the opposite is true. The foundation of nonviolent resistance is moral strength; it is rooted in the moral courage of refusing to retaliate.

For this reason, King is careful never to depreciate the intensity and difficulty of struggle involved in nonviolent protest. Because nonviolence calls for a greater degree of courage and discipline, it initially may mean greater struggle, sacrifice and suffering. He asserts:

Wherever segregation exists we must be willing to rise up in mass and protest courageously against it. I realize that this type of courage
means suffering and sacrifice. It might mean going to jail. If such is the case we must honorably fill up the jailhouses of the South. It might even lead to physical death. But if such physical death is the price that we must pay to free our children from a life of permanent psychological death, then nothing could be more honorable. This is really the meaning of the method of passive resistance.6

The fact that the nonviolent resister is committed to not retaliating with violence does not make nonviolence a program of capitulation or even a "safe" method of protest.7 Nonviolent direct action is a program which seeks to protest rigorously against injustice. It needs to be "bold and brave," King insists, because it "faces the vicious and evil enemy squarely."8 "The strong man," King asserts, "is the man who can stand up for his rights and not hit back."9

This same conviction that nonviolent resistance is founded upon moral courage was the basis of Gandhi's assertion that he could not preach nonviolence to a coward, for nonviolence is "the summit of bravery."10 The fundamental importance of moral courage was poignantly expressed by the Mahatma:

Wherein is courage required—in blowing others to pieces from behind a cannon, or with a smiling face to approach a cannon and be blown to pieces? Who is the true warrior—he who keeps death always as a bosom-friend, or he who controls the death of others? Believe me that a man devoid of courage and manhood can never be a passive resister.11

Fundamental to King's conception of courageous protest was his understanding of noncooperation. As intimated earlier in this work, King insisted that an individual is

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morally obligated to stand up and protest against injustice wherever he finds it.\textsuperscript{12} He believed that whatever a person does, he is morally bound to see that he does not cooperate with social wrong, and this idea of noncooperation stood near the very center of King's conception of nonviolent resistance.\textsuperscript{13}

Not surprisingly, King attributes his ideas on noncooperation to the writings of Henry David Thoreau, whose famous essay "Civil Disobedience" King read in his days at Morehouse College. As a result of reading Thoreau, King states he "became convinced then that non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good."\textsuperscript{14} What attracted King to Thoreau's thesis was his "insistence that evil must be resisted" and that no individual could lend support, or even give passive allegiance, to an unjust system.\textsuperscript{15} Thoreau argued:

\begin{quote}
It is not a man's duty, as a matter of course, to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous, wrong; he may still properly have other concerns to engage him; but it is his duty, at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support. If I devote myself to other pursuits and contemplations, I must first see, at least, that I do not pursue them sitting upon another man's shoulders. I must get off him first, that he may pursue his contemplations too....What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

It should be noted that there are significant differences between King's and Thoreau's thinking on noncooperation. Thoreau allowed for violent resistance against enormous and recalcitrant social wrong, as is evident in his defense of John Brown's attack on the
Federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry (1859).\textsuperscript{17} He also
couched the thrust of his argument in a much more negative
framework than King, focusing on an individual's
obligation not to cooperate with injustice.\textsuperscript{18}

Despite these differences, the idea of noncooperation
is an integral part of King's thinking on nonviolent
resistance. "Basic to the philosophy of nonviolence," he
asserts, "is the refusal to cooperate with evil."\textsuperscript{19}
However, King's idea of noncooperation is by no means a
purely negative concept. His understanding of
noncooperation is inextricably linked to his belief that
the individual is confronted with the moral obligation to
cooperate with moral good, and hence the pursuit of the
good is a vital part of King's social ethics. As he
states, ".non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral
obligation as is cooperation with good."\textsuperscript{20}

Gandhi also emphasized the importance of noncooperation
and spoke of it as a positive moral obligation, and in
some ways, King's ideas on noncooperation are closer to
Gandhi than to Thoreau. For Gandhi, "co-operation with a
just Government is a duty," but "non-co-operation with an
unjust Government is equally a duty."\textsuperscript{21} He wrote:

\begin{quote}
In my humble opinion, rejection is as much an
ideal as the acceptance of a thing. It is as
necessary to reject untruth as it is to accept
truth...Weeding is as necessary to agriculture
as sowing.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

Beyond this, both King and Gandhi spoke of
noncooperation not only as a moral obligation but as an
extremely effective means of creating social change.\textsuperscript{23}
King seems to have wholeheartedly embraced Gandhi's idea that tacit consent is a necessary part of the political rule and order of any government. Gandhi wrote:

I believe, and everybody must grant, that no Government can exist for a single moment without the co-operation of the people, willing or forced, and if people suddenly withdraw their co-operation in every detail, the Government will come to a stand-still.24

In my opinion any non-co-operation is bound to do some good. Even the Viceregal door-keeper saying, 'Please Sir, I can serve the Government no longer because it has hurt my national honour,' and resigning is a step mightier and more effective than the mightiest speech declaiming against the Government for its injustice.25

No doubt Thoreau would have concurred, for "when the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished."26

The two-edged sword involving cooperation with justice and noncooperation with injustice is one of the fundamental tenets of King's understanding of nonviolent resistance, and the importance of this idea cannot be overestimated. In King's view, direct action does not wait for changes in the social order, or even in the law, to begin working for a more just society, nor does a nonviolent resister rely on executive action to initiate change. The individual is morally obligated, he argues, to cooperate with the good and to refuse cooperation with evil, irrespective of the position taken by various social institutions. To be sure, a nonviolent resister may choose to wait patiently for some form of federal action
or may pursue a strategy which postpones certain types of campaigns or may follow a more moderate line of action in seeking to eliminate injustice. But King insists that the posture of social institutions, including the law or a particular government, does not "obviate the necessity for people themselves to act." 27

Legislation and court action, in King's view, can only declare rights, but justice and equality can never be delivered thoroughly by legal measures alone. It is, therefore, a nonviolent resister's responsibility to live out and to assert fundamental human rights. According to King, it is only when people begin to act that rights which are affirmed on paper are given lifeblood.

The Negro will only be truly free when he reaches down to the inner depths of his own being and signs with the pen and ink of assertive selfhood his own emancipation proclamation. 28

To change society for a higher good often requires the catalyst of courageous direct action, not just legislation and court decisions. 29

King calls those of moral responsibility to carry the mantle of creative protest. "Let us be those creative dissenters," he admonishes, "who will call our nation to a higher destiny, to a new plateau of compassion, to a more noble expression of humaneness." 30 "This dissent," King argues, "is America's hope." 31
The Call To Conscience

Martin Luther King conceived of nonviolent direct action as a call to conscience. The purpose of nonviolence is to arouse the conscience of the individual as a member of the community at large, and thereby to bring penetrating moral questions into sharp focus. The orientation and thrust of direct action, therefore, is aimed at the moral potential within the human personality. Sit-ins, mass demonstrations, acts of civil disobedience are all part of the nonviolent strategy to dramatize injustice within the social structure, challenging opponents and members of the community at large to respond with good will. Hence, King's writings convey a close identification between nonviolence and the call to conscience.

Conscience and Moral Potential

The importance of King's emphasis on the moral resources within the human personality as an essential part of nonviolence is difficult to overstate. King insists that this moral dimension, the human potential to choose in moral circumstances, is an important part of what makes the human being human. The essence of human nature is found in the human being's capacity to recognize and ability to respond to moral reality. Indeed, the
potential for moral choice and the making of moral decisions is at the heart of human dignity and worth. For this reason King contends a man "dies when he ceases to stand up for that which is right." A person who will not die for something "isn't fit to live." 33

Once again, King's thinking seems to have been profoundly influenced by Thoreau and Gandhi. For Thoreau the making of moral choices, i.e., the right and obligation to abide by one's conscience, is at the heart of what it means to be a human being. "If a plant cannot live according to its nature," Thoreau wrote, "it dies; and so a man." 34 Gandhi also emphasized conscience as an essential part of nonviolence. He often spoke of the "still small voice within" and argued for the moral legitimacy of refusing to do what is repugnant to one's conscience. 35

But perhaps the most significant influence on King's thinking at this point came from the moral philosophy of Edgar Sheffield Brightman. The starting point and source of Brightman's ethics was the universal sense of moral "ought" or obligation in human experience. 36 Indeed, Brightman conceived of ethics as that branch of philosophy which sought to formulate into a normative system of principles the moral sense of ought experienced in human existence. For Brightman, the moral resources within the human personality were an essential part of what it meant to be human. "A person," he contended, "is a self capable of moral experience." 37 Beyond this, Brightman also stressed that human conscience was an important part of
ethics, though he insisted that such personal moral experience required rational criticism. 38

It is clear that King embraces in his conception of nonviolence the idea of moral "ought" as a universal part of human experience, and he believes that this sense of moral obligation is related to the very structure of metaphysical reality. Although he never delineates the sources of his moral philosophy in any precise, systematic manner, one is aware, when analyzing King's writings and speeches, that there is a metaphysic of morals underlying his thinking on nonviolence. King's heavy emphasis on the importance of conscience is firmly rooted in his overall view of reality. He asserts:

I refuse to accept the idea that the 'isness' of man's present nature makes him morally incapable of reaching up for the eternal 'oughtness' that forever confronts him. 39

For King, conscience is that aspect of the human personality which mediates between the moral sense of ought with which the individual is forever confronted and the will of the individual which must choose in the face of such moral obligations. 40 King's emphasis on conscience is an emphasis on the moral resources within the human personality and the moral "oughtness" with which the individual is confronted. For King, a person is not only capable of making moral decisions, but he must choose in the face of moral values which are an integral part of the metaphysical structure of reality.

King recognizes the inextricable link between morality
and freedom of choice. In many ways, King's understanding of freedom is conceived fundamentally in this moral context. With Kant and Brightman, King affirms that morality presupposes, and indeed necessitates, the freedom to choose the good. 41 "The very character of the life of man," he asserts, "demands freedom." 42 King, therefore, concluded that freedom, i.e., the capacity to deliberate and choose alternatives, must be seen as an essential part of human nature:

The essence of man is found in freedom. This is what Paul Tillich means when he affirms, 'Man is man because he is free,' or what Tolstoy implies when he says, 'I cannot conceive of a man not being free unless he is dead.' 43

King denounces racial discrimination as morally wrong "because it deprives man of freedom, that quality which makes him man." 44

What is freedom? For King, freedom is first and foremost the ability and opportunity to deliberate and weigh alternatives, but freedom is not only the capacity to choose. It must always express itself in decision. 45

King writes:

The word 'decision,' like the word 'incision,' involves the image of cutting. Incision means to cut in, decision means to cut off. When I make a decision, I cut off alternatives and make a choice. The existentialists say we must choose, that we are choosing animals, and that if we do not choose, we sink into thinghood....46

For King, freedom is not merely an abstract reality but vitally related to human life. Freedom is the capacity to choose and the necessity to decide. It is, therefore, a
requisite part of moral responsibility, in King's view, and integrally related to what it means to be human. The decision-making process ultimately determines who we are; it is the means by which identity is carved out.47

King's appeal to conscience incorporates both freedom and "ought." For King, the conscience is that aspect of the human personality where moral obligation and the freedom of choice relate to one another. This is significant, for nonviolent direct action against injustice seeks to arouse the conscience of an individual by pointing to the moral ought intrinsic in the claims put forward by the civil resister. Direct action then insists that an individual make a decision in the face of such searching moral questions.

The Human Potential For Goodness

It is evident that intricately woven into King's conception of nonviolence is his understanding of the human personality, and it is important at this point to mention the way in which King's conception of morality and freedom informs his understanding of human nature. King believes, and constantly asserts, that there is within the individual the potential for goodness, and that the nonviolent disciple is, therefore, optimistic about human nature.48 King is convinced that "man is neither innately good nor...innately bad" but has "potentialities" for good
and evil, and he specifically points to this view of human nature as an important part of the philosophy of nonviolence. There exists in King's thinking, therefore, a creative tension between the evangelical emphasis on human sinfulness and the liberal stress on human potential—an aspect of his thought which no doubt was influenced by the teachings of George W. Davis and L. Harold DeWolf.49

Though King says the nonviolent resister is "optimistic" about human nature, he insists that this is no superficial or sentimental optimism. King does not argue that there is a degree of "goodness" inherent in every human being. Rather, he asserts that the individual's capacity to make moral judgments, a person's potential to choose the good, is of fundamental importance for nonviolence. To be sure, King affirms that every human being possesses an innate "worth" and "dignity" and "value.50 But for King "goodness" is a matter of moral decision; it is not intrinsic but involves the individual's exercise of will.51 King does not affirm the inherent goodness of human nature, but he does assert that every human being has the potential to choose what is good and right. And this capacity for moral choice, he claims, is essential to the philosophy of nonviolence.

The crux of King's moral view of human nature is found in the human personality's capacity for good and evil. Just as an historical figure like Hitler can lead men and women to the darkest and lowest depths of human nature, a person like Gandhi can lead them to the highest summit of
morality and goodness.\textsuperscript{52} Often in this regard King speaks of human nature as "dual," but he means this in a very special sense.\textsuperscript{53} There is no dichotomy within the human personality, for King, but there is a dichotomy of potential. The choices with which the individual is confronted are often dual in nature. Indeed, these moral choices are such an integral part of what it means to be human that in one sense one can speak of human nature itself as dual, at least \textbf{in potential}. A human being is torn between the choices of good and evil, but at the same time he is confronted with the awesome freedom and necessity to decide.\textsuperscript{54}

Though King is highly critical of a sentimental optimism which asserts the innate goodness of human nature, he finds great hope in the very fact that the individual is capable of choosing the good. A nonviolent resister respects a person's ability to choose, and therefore respects his ability to change. No matter how often or how profoundly a person chooses to serve the causes of injustice, in King's view, he is always free to decide for the good. A nonviolent resister must recognize constantly the redemptive potential of the individual and respect the ability and right of his opponent to change.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{Conscience and Social Action}

A greater understanding of \textit{how} nonviolent resistance
works in a social setting will be discussed in further
detail in the next chapter, but it is important to note
here the way in which King's "call to conscience" relates
to his ideas on social action. King conceives of
nonviolent resistance as a means of arousing the
conscience of the individual--both members of the
community at large and individual opponents as well. It
does this by bringing penetrating moral questions into
sharp focus, and thereby confronting the individual with
the necessity of making a moral decision in the face of
these searching questions.

King emphasizes that a moral justification undergirds
any social order, just or unjust, and he, therefore, sees
nonviolent direct action focusing attention on the
vulnerable moral defenses of those who seek to perpetrate
injustice. Nonviolence attacks the moral foundation upon
which the opponent's act of oppression is based. The
segregationist, in King's view, stands before the
community at large carrying the heavy burden of social
wrong and guilt. Through the strong protest of direct
action, he believed, the institution of segregation
ultimately would crumble, for nonviolent resistance would
reveal its social inadequacy and moral bankruptcy.

For this reason, King insisted that nonviolent direct
action must depend upon moral resources to be successful.
The nonviolent resister must exhibit in his own action the
good will which he seeks to elicit from his opponent.
Though King felt political action was essential for the
full achievement of civil rights, he argued that the
racial problem in America would not be solved by political means alone, for it was not only a political problem. Racial discrimination, in King's view, was also a profound moral issue, and its eradication, therefore, depended upon moral resources.  

King believed that the nonviolent resister's absolute commitment to nonviolence demonstrated to the community at large and to his opponent the sincerity and legitimacy of the claims put forward in his protest. Such unilateral good will, King asserted, would elicit the essential moral support of good-willed members of the community at large--both black and white. Nonviolence, therefore, seeks to implement just law by appealing to the conscience of the great decent majority who through blindness, fear, pride or irrationality have allowed their consciences to sleep.  

In other words, nonviolent protest endeavors to convince members of the larger community to become the allies of a just cause.

A rigorous commitment to nonviolence, of course, does not guarantee that the community at large, nor one's opponent, will respond positively to the call for justice. But King believed that the likelihood of moral choice was greatly increased when conflict was waged through a strict adherence to nonviolence, for it injected into the social situation the highest possible degree of moral rationality. Nonviolent resistance forces the individual to make a moral decision in the face of the vital questions raised by direct action; it confronts a person with the fact that he must decide. Nonviolence
focuses upon the individual's resources for ethical decision-making by challenging him to choose justice, truth and good will.

Moral Coherence

One of the most significant and fundamental tenets of nonviolence to emerge in King's writings and speeches is his discussion of the relation between ends and means, and he points to the philosophical dilemma between the goal of social action and the method of achieving positive social change as one of the most important ethical debates in human history. In King's view, nonviolent resistance is founded upon an essential consistency between the means by which any campaign for social justice is pursued and the end it seeks to achieve. King argues that there must be a basic moral coherence between ends and means, and he is wary of any attempt to consider ends or means apart from one another.

King's insistence on an essential affinity between ends and means sharply differs from preponderant Western social philosophies which focus attention on the importance of political aims, relegating the consideration of means to a less significant place, and King recognizes that his thinking on this matter is contrary to most political philosophies of the West. Joan Bondurant has observed:
Political thought has heretofore made requisite these two irreducible essentials: reflection upon the ends of political action, and the means of achieving them. It is to this basic dichotomy that the ultimate failure of historical schools of political theory may well be traced. Traditional political thought, assuming a separation of ends and means, has proceeded to eclipse means consideration by emphasizing concern for ends.63

However, King believes that the separation of ends and means yields disastrous social consequences; that there is a fatal flaw inherent in emphasizing the goal of political action and relegating the means of achieving such social aims to a place of secondary importance. Such a view inevitably bifurcates purpose and method and sees the objective of social action only as a distant goal, divorced from the means by which that end is to be sought. Hence, King points out, Alexander, Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, Napoleon, and even Adolph Hitler could all speak of peace as a distant aim detached from the method by which each of these conquerors sought to achieve the goal of a more just and peaceful world order.64

King argues that such political philosophies never actually achieve the noble goals they set out to accomplish because they fail to see that the "end is pre-existent in the means."65 Ends are not detached aims, but inherently related to the means by which they are pursued. In the long run, there exists no dichotomy between objective and method. Nonviolence recognizes, in King's view, that moral ends can be realized only through the pursuit of moral means. Purpose and process cannot be separated. The use of destructive means will not yield
constructive ends. King writes:

...We will never have peace in the world until men everywhere recognize that ends are not cut off from means, because the means represent the ideal in the making, and the end in process, and ultimately you can't reach good ends through evil means, because the means represent the seed and the end represents the tree.66

Many of King's ideas on the relation between ends and means were taken in toto from Gandhian philosophy, and without question Gandhi's thinking on this subject is one of his major contributions to political thought.67 Gandhi was convinced that the means ultimately determined the end, and for that reason he focused his thought and action on the means by which political goals were to be achieved. "As the means, so the end," Gandhi wrote.68

If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later. When once we have grasped this point, final victory is beyond question.69

Hence, Gandhi insisted that a nonviolent resister's "first concern is not the effect of his action. It must always be its propriety."70

Jawaharlal Nehru also has pointed to Gandhi's philosophy of means and ends as the essential difference between his approach and that normally pursued in politics. He has stated: "it is not realised that the ends must inevitably come out of the means and are governed by those means."71

Conflicts are, therefore, seldom resolved. The wrong methods pursued in dealing with them lead to further conflict. The mistaken belief still persists that violence can end a conflict or that war can bring salvation to the world.72
If political action is to achieve the goal after which it strives, there must exist an underlying consistency between process and purpose, a basic coherence between method and objective. Gandhi stressed the commensurability of ends and means in political action to such a degree that he asserted they were "convertible terms."73

Means and ends in Gandhian satyagraha are distinguishable only temporally. Both means and ends partake of a continuous process. The means precede the end in time, but there can be no question of moral priority. Truth is inseparable from non-violence, and the method of achieving and clinging to the truth is non-violence. Non-violence becomes both the means and the end, and the terms become convertible.74

It should be stressed that King's emphasis on the importance of moral means does not diminish the significance of moral goals in his philosophy of nonviolence. Indeed, King asserts that the use of moral means for immoral ends is as unconscionable as the use of unjust means to achieve noble ends—a statement with which Gandhi undoubtedly would have concurred.75 For King, the morality of one's objective and of one's method are both of utmost importance.76

King argues that there should be no dichotomy between theory and action in the philosophy of nonviolence.77 Similarly, he stresses throughout his writings and speeches that means and ends are actually two sides of the same coin, and therefore the "means must be as pure as the end."78 This, he believes, is one of the most important contributions made by the philosophy of nonviolence: It
makes it possible to secure "moral ends through moral means." For King, nonviolence, as a philosophy of action, seeks to realize positive social aims by rigorously adhering to an equally positive and moral method of social change.

Similar to his ideas on the coherence of ends and means is King's insistence on the commensurability between individual and group morality, and although he does not develop extensively his ideas on this subject, they are, nonetheless, part of his conception of nonviolence and need to be mentioned at this point.

King's vision of moral coherence involved not only a rigorous consistency between ends and means, but also an essential affinity between social and individual ethics. "There is no reason to believe," Gandhi had written years before, "that there is one law for families and another for nations." In King's view, an absolute distinction between individual and group morality undermines the integrity of ethics and creates a schism in moral behavior. "One cannot be Dr. Jekyll in one aspect of...life," he argues, "and Mr. Hyde in another."

Social and individual life, in King's view, must embrace an underlying moral unity. Gandhi's social and political application of "Universal Love," he believed, revealed a fundamental moral truth, an unifying principle which saved moral life from the cruel contradiction created in separating social ethics from individual morality.
King's views on this subject, it should be noted, are not stated in a systematic manner and even reflect a certain amount of superficiality. To be sure, he never argued naively for a complete identification between personal and social ethics. Yet, King was suspicious of those who would rationalize away the social applicability of the Christian ethic, and this is reflected in his discussions of nonviolence.

Fundamentally, King's statements on moral coherence are founded upon his philosophical presupposition that ethical values are absolute and an intrinsic part of the structure of reality, an idea which he received from the moral empiricism of Edgar Sheffield Brightman. King's views on the metaphysics of morals will be discussed later in this chapter. For now, it is important to note that King argues for an essential unity and correspondence between individual and group ethics, especially in the context of pursuing lasting and authentic social change. The establishment of real and permanent community, King believes, involves the recognition of objective and immutable moral values which are applicable to both individuals and groups.

The Aim and Orientation of Nonviolence

Whenever King gives a detailed explanation of the major tenets of nonviolence, he always makes clear the general
aim and orientation of nonviolent direct action as a form of protest. Nonviolence, he contends, "does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent."82 Admittedly, nonviolent protest is practiced in a conflict situation, but the ultimate goal of such struggle, King insists, is not to win victory over one's opponent. "We do not wish to triumph over the white community," he writes. "That would only result in transferring those now on the bottom to the top."83

In King's view, the nonviolent resister fervently hopes that through his strict adherence to nonviolence he will be able to win the understanding and perhaps even ultimately the friendship of his opponent. King stresses that sit-ins, boycotts, mass marches are not ends in themselves and must be employed with utmost caution.84 The white community must be able to see that such methods are not an attack on them personally, retaliating against the violence of racial oppression, but rather are expressions of protest and noncooperation against racial injustice. Although this subtle distinction, admittedly, may be difficult for one's opponent to perceive while in the conflict situation, it must always be kept foremost in the nonviolent resister's mind.

The ultimate purpose of nonviolence is to win the understanding of the larger community, indeed if possible of one's opponent, without acquiescence to injustice or falling victim to retaliatory violence. A nonviolent resister works to create an atmosphere in which conflict can be dealt with openly and forthrightly, maximizing
rationality and minimizing bitterness. The ultimate goal of direct action is the creation of a reconciled community at peace with itself.

The nonviolent resister must always seek what is just and fair for the whole of the community at large, without sacrificing the legitimate and just claims of either party in a conflict situation. Nonviolence aggressively seeks victory, to be sure, but it does not endeavor to triumph over the opponent. The victory for which it seeks is the establishment of a more just social order. The objective of nonviolence, as Bondurant has asserted, "is to win the victory over the conflict situation...to persuade the opponent, not to triumph over him."\(^{85}\)

For this reason, Gandhi stressed that nonviolent struggle was "a stupendous effort at conversion."\(^{86}\) The nonviolent resister's first objective is to convince, not coerce. At times coercion may be part of the strategy of direct action, to be sure, but it is not its primary goal or orientation. The aim of nonviolence is to persuade the community at large—and if possible one's opponent—of the legitimate demands put forward by the nonviolent protester, while remaining open to the just claims advanced by one's opponent. King did not believe, of course, that this guaranteed the successful resolution of social conflict, but he was convinced that through a strict adherence to this basic principle of nonviolence reconciliation and justice, in the face of opposing forces, were more real possibilities.
It should be mentioned here that King also emphasizes nonviolence makes a distinction between the person and his deeds; i.e., it distinguishes between the sin and the sinner. King sees this as a logical consequence of seeking to win victory over the conflict situation, rather than seeking to triumph over the people involved in the struggle. In direct action, King claims, "the attack is directed against forces of evil rather than against persons who happen to be doing the evil." It attacks the structures of social injustice rather than the people endeavoring to maintain those structures.

Again, King is enunciating here a fundamental principle of Gandhian satyagraha, but at the same time he is drawing on his own Christian resources. Both the Hindu and Christian traditions undergirded Gandhi's teaching when he stressed:

Man and his deeds are two distinct things. Whereas a good deed should call forth approbation and a wicked deed disapprobation, the doer of the deed, whether good or wicked, always deserves respect or pity as the case may be. 'Hate the sin and not the sinner' is a precept which, though easy enough to understand, is rarely practised, and that is why the poison of hatred spreads in the world.

It is significant that whenever King delineates the basic precepts of nonviolence he is careful to specify and make clear the aim and orientation of nonviolent protest. The nonviolent resister does not seek to triumph over his opponent, but endeavors to remain open to the opponent's just demands. The victory for which the nonviolent disciple seeks is the just and conciliative resolution of
the conflict situation. In the midst of the rigor and struggle of the Montgomery bus boycott, King summarized his message in this way:

We are not out to defeat or humiliate the white man, but to help him as well as ourselves. The festering sore of segregation debilitates the white man as well as the Negro. And so our struggle in Montgomery is not to win victory over the white man....And if there is a victory it will be a victory not merely for 50,000 Negroes, but a victory for justice, freedom and democracy.91

Love and the Principle of Non-Injury

King insists that a nonviolent resister must endeavor earnestly to avoid inflicting injury upon his opponents while seeking to combat the forces of injustice.92 Nonviolence, he contends, is based on a rigorous and consistent principle of non-injury, and here he seeks to reinterpret from a radically Christian perspective the meaning of Gandhi's teaching of ahimsa, which literally means "no harm."93

Though King often stresses the importance of non-injury in his detailed discussions of nonviolence, he did not believe the rigorous application of this principle would eliminate all suffering in the use of direct action. Often a nonviolent resister, and perhaps even his opponent, must endure intense struggle and make severe sacrifices. Nevertheless, a nonviolent disciple must make
sure his use of direct action is not a subtle and surreptitious form of retaliation. Though suffering may emerge in the conflict situation, the rigorous and consistent application of the principle of non-injury, i.e., the nonviolent resister's earnest effort to avoid injuring his opponent, is axiomatic in King's view and must stand at the very center of civil resistance.

Without question, King's principle of non-injury bears the mark of Gandhi's influence, though somewhat surprisingly King refers to the Gandhian doctrine of *ahimsa* very infrequently. This may be because the concept would have required such a technical explanation that King simply immediately reinterpreted into more Christian categories what he understood to be the basic thrust of Gandhi's teaching of *ahimsa*. In any case, for King the Gandhian "concept of non-injury parallels the Hebraic-Christian teaching of the sacredness of every human being."\(^94\) Gandhi's doctrine of *ahimsa* was, to be sure, distinctly Hindu in character, while King's principle of non-injury is founded ostensibly on his Christian and personalist presuppositions.\(^95\) The precise manner in which King understood and utilized Gandhi's interpretation of *ahimsa* is not completely clear, but it is evident that King caught the true spirit of much of Gandhi's teaching on this subject and made full use of it in formulating his own philosophy of nonviolence.

King does not define non-injury in strictly negative terms, but conceives of this principle in a positive and radical manner. He asserts that the nonviolent disciple
does not only refuse to retaliate with violence, but he also refuses to hate his enemy. He is not only unwilling to injure those who harm him, but he responds to the inflicting of such violence upon himself with good will.\textsuperscript{96}

King seems indebted to Gandhi's own example of extending his conception of \textit{ahimsa} to a positive principle. Unlike some Jain interpreters, Gandhi never conceived of \textit{ahimsa} as a dogmatic doctrine which condemned harming any form of life and then dismissed the complexities and relativities of human existence. For example, Gandhi believed one could conceive of dire situations when even killing could be done in the name of \textit{ahimsa}, and he himself was severely criticized for violating \textit{ahimsa} when he exterminated a diseased calf to put the animal out of its misery.\textsuperscript{97} "To allow crops to be eaten up by animals," Gandhi believed, "in the name of \textit{ahimsa} while there is a famine in the land is certainly a sin. Evil and good are relative terms."\textsuperscript{98} For Gandhi, \textit{ahimsa} meant more than just a refusal to harm living organisms:

\textbf{Ahimsa} is not the crude thing it has been made to appear. Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of \textit{ahimsa}. But it is its least expression. The principle of \textit{ahimsa} is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. It is also violated by our holding on to what the world needs.\textsuperscript{99}

King's own interpretation of the principle of non-injury emerges in his speeches and writings with profound clarity. He is always careful to point out that the nonviolent resister
avoids not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. The nonviolent resister not only refuses to shoot his opponent but he also refuses to hate him.100

Beyond this, King's positive interpretation of non-injury is always carried to its most radical, Christian conclusion, moving even beyond Gandhi's understanding of 
ahimsa. Non-injury is not just the refusal to injure in a physical or spiritual manner; ultimately, it means caring about the well-being of one's opponent. For King, the principle of non-injury is essentially an affirmation of the Christian conception of love, for, as he asserts, love is the "highest expression of non-injury...."101 No doubt, this is why King's writings and speeches are punctuated with his detailed explanations of agape rather than dwelling on the less positive idea of "non-injury."

An exegesis of King's understanding of Christian love has already been given in this work, and the integral relation between love and nonviolent resistance will be discussed further in a later chapter. It is important to note here that the nonviolent emphasis on non-injury, in King's view, enjoins the civil resister to love his opponent. Not in an affectionate way, to be sure, but in terms of the reconciling good will which is the essence of agapeic love.102

A nonviolent resister, according to King, not only seeks to avoid harming his adversary, he is called to be concerned about the needs of his opponent, to seek good will even for his enemy. Though intense struggle and conflict may arise out of nonviolent direct action, the
nonviolent disciple is called upon to work for community and reconciliation with those who oppose him. With Gandhi, King asserts that the principle of non-injury, "this whole ethic of love," stands at the very foundation of nonviolence.\(^{103}\)

King's emphasis on non-injury as an integral part of nonviolent direct action raises many questions, to be sure. The application of such a principle to conflict situations of protest is fraught with problems, and a word needs to be said at this point about how King deals with the strenuous tensions created in combining a rigorous method of protest and the principle of non-injury.

It should be noted that there is manifest in King's writings a consonant ambivalence towards methods of coercion. King recognizes the need for rigorous pressure to effect changes in the structures of society--changes which he believed would allow for greater justice. But one must be careful, in King's view, not simply to coerce one's opponent into capitulation by threatening to inflict hardship and suffering upon him.

The withdrawal of one's cooperation can, and often does, exert extreme pressure on the opponent, and neither Gandhi nor King contended that the opponent would not have to endure intense suffering when direct action was employed. But the nonviolent resister must make sure that his opponent's suffering is a result of the opponent's recalcitrance, not simply a surreptitious means of reprisal. This is a fine yet important distinction. King
occasionally withdrew from campaigns of social pressure or modified his objectives as a sign of sincerity and good will, seeking to demonstrate that his actions were not a subtle form of retaliation.\textsuperscript{104}

In \textit{Stride Toward Freedom}, King records his struggle over the issue of boycotts, questioning whether or not they are ever an ethical course of action. King recounts:

\begin{quote}
I had to recognize that the boycott method could be used to unethical and unchristian ends. I had to concede, further, that this was the method used so often by the White Citizens Councils to deprive many Negroes, as well as white persons of good will, of the basic necessities of life. But certainly, I said to myself, our pending actions could not be interpreted in this light. Our purposes were altogether different.\textsuperscript{105}
\end{quote}

King contends that the Montgomery Improvement Association was not trying financially to punish the bus company; i.e., to retaliate against their discriminatory practices. Rather, the boycott method as used by the MIA was an effort "to put justice in business" not to put the bus company out of business.\textsuperscript{106}

King seems comfortable with boycotts as a method of direct action only when such boycotts are fundamentally an act of withdrawal of cooperation from an unjust system which violates human dignity. Boycotts should not be used to attack businesses for their unjust practices. The buses in Montgomery were boycotted out of the conviction that black people could no longer give support to the segregationist business practices of the bus company. In language deeply reminiscent of Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience," King reasons:
...In order to be true to one's conscience and true to God, a righteous man has no alternative but to refuse to cooperate with an evil system. This I felt was the nature of our action.107

Hence, King asserts that the term "noncooperation" is a more appropriate description of the course of action taken by the Montgomery Improvement Association.108

King's discussion of economic boycotts under the rubric of noncooperation does not ameliorate the complex problems created in combining a principle of non-injury with rigorous methods of social protest. It is fair to say, however, that King was generally uncomfortable with boycotts because of their tendency to be used as retaliatory measures. Even if one does not affirm his thinking on the use of socially coercive measures, it is evident that King consistently sought to live by the principle of non-injury and nonretaliation as strenuously as he enunciated that principle. Even in the midst of raging conflict, King consistently endeavored to understand and to practice his conception of Christian love as a fundamental part of nonviolence.

Creative Suffering

Closely related to King's views on non-injury, indeed one of the fundamental presuppositions of nonviolence, is the idea of creative suffering. Not only does the nonviolent resister seek to avoid injuring his opponent,
he also shows an amazing willingness to accept suffering without retaliation, to accept the violence perpetrated by his opponent without striking back. "Rivers of blood," King quotes Gandhi as saying, "may have to flow before we gain our freedom, but it must be our blood."\textsuperscript{109}

The nonviolent resister is willing to accept violence if necessary, but never to inflict it. He does not seek to dodge jail. If going to jail is necessary, he enters it 'as a bridegroom enters the bride's chamber.'\textsuperscript{110}

Again, King's views bear the unmistakable mark of Gandhi's influence, but at the same time there are distinct differences in their respective understandings. Gandhi affirmed that suffering was the "essence" of nonviolence, and he called a life of sacrifice the "pinnacle of art."\textsuperscript{111} The Mahatma's views on suffering were profoundly Hindu in character and founded upon his conception of salvation as inextricably linked to renunciation. Sacrifice, in his view, was "the pinnacle of art" because it led to true joy in a religious sense. In Gandhi's words, "indulgences lead to destruction. Renunciation leads to immortality."\textsuperscript{112}

King's views on suffering do not carry the same deep sense of renunciation evident in Gandhi's thinking on this topic, though King does state that "self-denial" is often necessary for positive social change.\textsuperscript{113} The basis of King's view is his conviction that progress is always wrought through struggle and sacrifice, an idea which he adapted from his exposure to Hegel's philosophy via Brightman's personalism.\textsuperscript{114} "History is a fit testimony,"
King writes, "to the fact that freedom is rarely gained without sacrifice and self-denial."\footnote{115} He further asserts:

There is rarely ever any social gain without some individual pain. I am afraid that too many of us want the fruits of integration but are not willing to courageously challenge the roots of segregation. But let me assure you that it does not come this way. Freedom is not free. It is always purchased with the high price of sacrifice and suffering.\footnote{116}

For King, a willingness to suffer courageously for one's convictions may serve as a powerful social agent. One's readiness to face hardship and risk life may act as a creative instrument for positive social change.\footnote{117}

Speaking to those gathered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., King affirms his conviction that suffering can work toward a positive end:

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.\footnote{118}

King specifically relates his understanding of suffering to the Christian presuppositions out of which he speaks. The redemptive value of unearned suffering, in his view, is the "true meaning of the cross," one of the most important symbols in King's moral philosophy.\footnote{119} For King, the life and death of Jesus is an eternal example of creative suffering, and he claims that the redemptive value of Christ's death demonstrates the redemptive value of all unearned suffering in God's economy.
To believe in nonviolence does not mean that violence will not be inflicted upon you. The believer in nonviolence is the person who will willingly allow himself to be the victim of violence, but he will never inflict it upon others. He lives by the conviction that through his suffering and cross bearing, the social situation may be redeemed.120

No doubt King's ideas on creative suffering are drawn from a number of intellectual sources, but his view is strikingly similar to a statement made by Edgar Sheffield Brightman in the Crozer Quarterly:

It is safe to say that no one at any stage of Christian development has ever read the story of Good Friday and of Easter without seeing in it the drama of faith in the spiritual value of sacrifice. Out of voluntary submission to undeserved suffering come resurrection and redemption. Here is a universal faith essential to all Christians everywhere.121

King not only speaks of suffering as creative and efficacious for social reform, he further asserts that a willingness to suffer the violence of others is an essential part of Jesus' command to love. For King, the highest expression of Christian love is self-suffering, to take violence upon oneself rather than retaliating against one's enemy. Nonviolence emphasizes the creative value of such suffering and asserts that it may be used for positive, social progress.

The Moral Law

In elucidating the fundamental tenets of nonviolence,
King appeals to the importance and supremacy of "moral law" and asserts that "all reality hinges on moral foundations." For King, nonviolence asserts "something about the core and heartbeat of the cosmos." Nonviolence, he insists, "is based on the conviction that the universe is on the side of justice."

King's thinking at this point bears the mark of two of the most salient influences upon his intellectual development: George W. Davis and Edgar Sheffield Brightman. For example, Davis' writings are punctuated with expressions like the "reality of moral law" and the "moral foundations of reality." Often he appealed to phrases like the "moral order" and the ethical "demands of the universe" to lend support to his arguments. It is clear that for Davis the Christian faith involved a firm "faith in the morality of the universe," an idea which King constantly underscores. "In the long run," Davis wrote in his article delineating the basic beliefs of liberal theology, "it is well with the righteous, and ill with the evil." This idea is the crux of Davis' conception of moral law, and he believed it to be a fundamental part of Christian theology.

King's discussion of the moral foundation of reality also indicates the influence of his teacher Edgar Sheffield Brightman. In his book *Moral Laws*, Brightman sought to articulate what he identified as an experientially verifiable system of moral ideal principles. Indeed, Brightman defined ethics as that "science" or philosophy which dealt with the moral sense
of "ought" or obligation in human moral experience, and Moral Laws endeavored to work out a system of universal principles "to which the will ought to conform in its choices." 128 Brightman, therefore, argued that ethics is not only possible but necessary. 129 Ethics seeks to connect into a coherent whole the various principles which emerge out of human moral experience. 130

The basic position which Brightman held is reflected in his statement:

Idealists hold that moral experience points to an objective moral order in reality, as truly as sense experience points to an objective physical order, and most idealists believe that the objective experience of both orders can be understood rationally only if both are the activity or thought or experience of a supreme mind that generates the whole cosmic process and controls its ongoing. 131

It is not necessary to deal with the particular ethical system of moral laws which Brightman worked out. Martin Luther King never discusses Brightman's Moral Laws as an ethical system. But Brightman's conclusion that moral laws are objectively and fundamentally real is of paramount importance, and this conclusion would have been reinforced further by the teaching of Professor L. Harold DeWolf. King's thought reflects a heavy reliance on the idea that ethics is both objectively possible and a necessary part of philosophical inquiry.

For King, the idea that reality rests upon a moral foundation is a pivotal presupposition of the Christian faith—but a presupposition which withstands rigorous philosophical investigation. King does not delineate a
detailed philosophical superstructure to support his conception of moral law, nor does he formulate a system of ethical precepts. Nevertheless, King is absolutely convinced that ethical imperatives are part of the very structure of the universe. King's statement that "all reality hinges on moral foundations" is a metaphysical assertion founded upon his deeply personal religious faith. His conception of moral law is, therefore, a conscious combining of orthodox Christian ethics, especially from an evangelical liberal perspective, and the metaphysics of theistic personalism.  

This is significant, for the purpose of nonviolent direct action, in King's view, is to bring local laws and customs in line with the reality of moral law. Nonviolence as a means of securing justice is a technique which relies upon this metaphysical moral foundation. King claims that there are certain ethical imperatives which are inherent in the very structures of reality and, therefore, demand fulfillment. He calls upon the people of America to cooperate with the black community's struggle for justice because it is undergirded by these fundamental moral principles. "Justice and freedom," King argues, are "ethical demands of the universe."

The nonviolent resister, in King's view, asserts that though the forces of injustice and violence rage around him, he will remain loyal to that greater and more noble moral power which undergirds reality itself. The focus and intent of nonviolence is not primarily political in nature, although it is intensely interested in political
reality. Nonviolence depends on more than political power. It hinges upon moral forces as well, and the moment it ceases to do so it loses the power and suasion upon which it depends, becomes cut off from its root and all progress ceases. Often King summarizes this important aspect of nonviolence, in the full flight of his soaring rhetoric, with the following peroration:

Before the victory of brotherhood is achieved, some will...face physical death, but we shall overcome. Before the victory is won, some...will be called Communists, and...will be dismissed as dangerous rabblerousers and agitators merely because they're standing up for what is right, but we shall overcome. That is the basis of this movement,...there is something in this universe that justifies Carlyle in saying no lie can live forever. We shall overcome because there is something in this universe which justifies William Cullen Bryant in saying truth crushed to earth shall rise again. We shall overcome because there is something in this universe that justifies James Russell Lowell in saying, truth forever upon the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne. Yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown standeth God within the shadows, keeping watch above his own. With this faith in the future, with this determined struggle, we will be able to emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man, into the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice.137

The Communal Character of Human Existence

King's vision of an integrated society and his belief in the brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God led him to affirm the interrelatedness of all human life as an
important part of nonviolence. Indeed, for King, human nature cannot be understood fully without an appreciation of the fundamental social character of human existence. Human life reaches its full potential only in community and is, therefore, essentially social in character. King writes:

In a real sense, all life is interrelated. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.... This is the interrelated structure of reality.138

King's formal thinking on the communal nature of human existence began with his study of Walter Rauschenbusch's theology of the Social Gospel at Crozer Theological Seminary. In reading Rauschenbusch, King became absolutely convinced that social concern was an essential component of the Christian faith. His teacher, George W. Davis, also stressed the essential social character of human life:

The spirit of all mature religion is that I am my brother's keeper and my brother is my keeper. For the fully religious man nothing less than the world can be his parish.139

...God intends human life to achieve solidarity. The structure of man and of the universe is set against all rank individualism, which ever seeks to feather only its own nest. Against that the very stars spite.140

But in many ways King's ideas go beyond those of Rauschenbusch and Davis. He claims that the interrelated nature of all human life is intricately woven into the very "structure of reality," an idea which he gained from theistic personalism. Both Edgar Sheffield Brightman and
Albert Knudson, a first generation Boston personalist and revered teacher of Professor DeWolf, emphasized the inextricable link between the personal and social aspects of human life. "Men are born to live together," Knudson wrote, "and apart from this togetherness would not be truly human."\(^{141}\) He also stressed that the Christian view of the world "is a world of mutually dependent beings. It is a social world, a world of interacting moral beings; and in such a world love is necessarily the basic moral law."\(^{142}\)

For Brightman, the social structure of reality was grounded in the very nature of divine personality:

For personalism, social categories are ultimate. Although the Divine Personality does not require other persons for his sheer existence, his moral nature is love, and love needs comradeship. God, then, is not a solitary, self-enjoying mind. He is love; he is the...Great Companion.\(^{143}\)

In Brightman's view, religion is a human response to God's initiative to create fellowship. This is why he advocated cooperation as an important part of his theology and ethics. Religion, for Brightman, is both cooperation with God and cooperation with humanity.\(^{144}\) True religion fosters a cooperative spirit among human beings, working for inclusive and genuine community.

For Martin Luther King, community is the goal and intent of all authentic religion. Love, as the essential character of the One who creates and sustains all reality, enjoins fellowship as an ethical imperative. Such love inextricably links the individual not only to God but to
other persons as well. Fundamental to human existence, in King's view, is the existence of other human lives.

King employs a number of poetic images to express his idea of the interrelatedness of all human life. He identifies the globe as a "world house" and calls for "a worldwide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class and nation." He insists "together we must learn to live as brothers or together we will be forced to perish as fools."

Though he never developed the idea in great detail, King sincerely believed that racial segregation "debilitates" both black and white people. Without question, the communal character of human existence was the basis of his denouncement of segregation and a moral value which stood behind much of his thinking on nonviolence. Moreover, his understanding of the inextricable link between the black and white communities was the foundation of his strong criticism of the Black Power movement. King, of course, was not opposed to "black power," but he felt the separatist slogans and underlying philosophy of the movement denied the interrelated structure of human community. In the final analysis, King believed in the liberation of both the oppressed and the oppressor.

King's abiding faith in the interrelatedness of human life caused him to embrace world brotherhood as an ethical imperative, an important aspect of his vision of an integrated society. King insists that the black community needs the white community and that the white community

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needs black people as well. Both, he argues, "are bound together in a single garment of destiny." 150 Only through a recognition of the communal character of human existence will a community of freedom and justice become a reality.

With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able...to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.151

This will be a great day. This will not be the day of the white man, it will not be the day of the black man, it will be the day of man as man.152

Belief in God

King readily admits that his conception of nonviolent resistance cannot be separated from his religious faith, and this is one reason why he personally accepts nonviolence as "a philosophy of life."153 It is clear, even from a cursory view of his writings and speeches, that his understanding and implementation of nonviolent direct action are integrally related to his Christian beliefs, and a firm grasp of King's religious ideas is essential for an adequate understanding of his philosophy of nonviolence.

King deeply believed in the reality of a personal God, an idea which he accepted as more than just a metaphysical category fabricated to explain complex philosophical problems. King asserts that the existence of a personal
God, a loving Father of infinite love and matchless goodness and power, is a dynamic, living reality which calls for absolute trust. King's faith in a personal God is a living faith, "validated in the experiences of everyday life."\textsuperscript{154}

So in the truest sense of the word, God is a living God. In him there is feeling and will, responsive to the deepest yearnings of the human heart: this God both evokes and answers prayer.\textsuperscript{155}

The God in whom King trusts is not some aloof force detached from human struggle. The Christian belief that the universe is on the side of justice "says to those who struggle for justice, 'You do not struggle alone....'"\textsuperscript{156}

Those of us who call the name of Jesus Christ find something at the center of our faith which forever reminds us that God is on the side of truth and justice. Good Friday may occupy the throne for a day, but ultimately it must give way to the triumph of Easter.\textsuperscript{157}

King, of course, never insisted that a disciple of nonviolence profess this same belief in a personal God.\textsuperscript{158} His was not a dogmatic religion. Nonetheless, King was absolutely convinced that human experience, in its broadest sense, led to a metaphysical affirmation of the existence of a personal, loving God, and this belief sustained him in times of trial and suffering and transformed much of his despair over the profound problems he faced into a deep sense of hope.\textsuperscript{159}

But King's emphasis on God's involvement in the struggle for justice did not lead him to a kind of naive, simplistic triumphalism. He readily admits that this
approach may lead to struggle, suffering, and perhaps even sacrifice. But if that is the price one must pay to advance a just cause, King contends, then "nothing could be more redemptive." For King, nonviolence did not mean automatic political victory and a share in the spoils of conflict. Rather his confidence in the validity of nonviolence and his deep faith in the future hinge upon his conviction that the universe is ultimately "under the control of a loving purpose."  

This is why King contends the nonviolent movement is grounded in hope. Such faith, he asserts, can give us courage to face the uncertainties of the future. It will give our tired feet new strength as we continue our forward stride toward the city of freedom.

Indeed, it is this deep faith in the future which allows the nonviolent resister to accept suffering without retaliation. It means that though the nonviolent resister is deeply sensitive to the political and economic dynamics of a social situation, he is not dependent upon the political probability of success for his confidence. As Gandhi had said years before, nonviolence is like "seeking first the Kingdom of God and everything else following as a matter of course."

Often King homiletically employs the image of the "Exodus event" as a powerful metaphor to express God's involvement in human history. Although history seems to be dominated by the recalcitrance of evil, there are glimpses in history where one encounters God's involvement
in human affairs. Couched in the rhetoric of popular appeal, King asserts that the emancipation of the children of Israel, the breaking of the Egyptian bondage of slavery, metaphorically represents the "death of evil upon the seashore." Oppression cannot ultimately succeed against the liberating design of God. The Exodus event stands symbolically as a reminder to all that "evil carries the seed of its own destruction." In the long run, the purpose of a loving providence, which demands righteousness and destroys oppression, ultimately will prevail.

In King's view the black community's struggle for social justice challenged the community at large with an opportunity to cooperate with God's call for justice, to participate in one of the great purposes of divine activity. Social justice, in King's view, would not come through human effort alone, nor would it be brought by some cataclysmic, unexpected divine event. It would be God's demand for justice etching its way upon human history which would transform the social situation, soliciting people of good will to cooperate with God's action in human life. King writes:

Racial justice, a genuine possibility in our nation and in the world, will come neither by our frail and often misguided efforts nor by God imposing his will on wayward men, but when enough people open their lives to God and allow him to pour his triumphant, divine energy into their souls. Our age-old and noble dream of a world of peace may yet become a reality, but it will come neither by man working alone nor by God destroying the wicked schemes of men....
Martin Luther King believed that God was active in human history, vitally involved in human life, and in King's view he invited human beings to participate in the fulfillment of his loving purpose. Without question, King's deeply personal faith in God was integrally related to his conception of nonviolent resistance. King did not see nonviolence strictly in the context of power politics, nor did he leave the onus for positive social change on God bringing his kingdom to this world.

It is clear from analyzing the underlying philosophy of nonviolence, in King's writings and speeches, that this method of social change was conceived by him as a dynamic effort to call individuals to cooperate with the divine imperative for justice, a creative synthesis which allowed a person to seek the noble end of authentic community through the moral means of love and non-injury. Nonviolence, he believed, permitted a person to protest courageously against injustice without resorting to retaliatory violence. King was convinced that through the creative use of this form of positive social change the creation of the beloved community was a more real possibility.
CHAPTER SIX
NONVIOLENCE IN ACTION

The idea of nonviolence as a philosophy of action inundates Martin Luther King's thinking. A nonviolent resister, in his view, must be vitally engaged in the social problems with which he struggles. King's own understanding of nonviolence came partly from his study of Gandhi, philosophy and theology—but even more directly from his firsthand involvement in the leadership of nonviolent campaigns. Indeed, the theory of nonviolent resistance is "meaningless abstraction," in King's view, if divorced from its practical application. As Gandhi had asserted, a nonviolent resister "allows his solid action to speak for his creed." Nonviolence cannot be merely "preached," but must be "practised." King readily acknowledges, moreover, that his understanding of nonviolence is integrally related to his experience in the use of this form of protest. "Time and action," he asserts, have been valuable "teachers" of the nonviolent movement.

Precisely because King placed such stress on praxis in his moral philosophy, it is essential not only to have a firm grasp of the philosophical principles upon which his
conception of nonviolence is based, but also to grapple
with the policies and procedures by which he believed
nonviolent resistance should be implemented. This chapter
focuses on the important issue of how King conceived of
the practical application of nonviolence.

In his famous "Letter From Birmingham Jail," King
answers the criticism of eight clergymen who condemned his
Birmingham campaign as "unwise and untimely" by briefly
delineating what he calls the major "steps" of a
nonviolent campaign. Nonviolent protest is not simply a
hotheaded reaction to social injustice, in King's view,
but rather a systematic means of applying strong and
disciplined pressure upon the body politic. He completely
disagreed with his critics. The Birmingham crusade was
not "unwise and untimely," he argued, for the steps
followed in a nonviolent campaign insure against imprudent
and ill-conceived action.

King's delineation of these basic steps of a campaign
is very insightful, for it provides an important clue as
to how he understood the praxis of nonviolent resistance
in an actual situation of protest. King never wrote an
extensive blueprint of nonviolent tactics, and one must
extrapolate from his thought and action, therefore, the
way he envisaged the practical use of direct action.

In this chapter, the basic steps or components of a
nonviolent campaign mentioned by King are used as a
hermeneutic key to analyze how he believed nonviolent
techniques should be put into practice. Broadly, the
discussion is structured around the policies and procedures of nonviolent protest as they emerge in King's writings and speeches as a whole. This chapter does not follow the progression of any one crusade, but presents King's thinking on the practical application of nonviolence in general terms by discussing the steps which should be taken in any campaign for social justice. 

Before focusing on the specific stages of nonviolent resistance, it should be noted that the aspects of a campaign delineated in this chapter are not isolated divisions or rigid categories, but the components of a fluid process. The praxis of nonviolence is flexible and open, and even referring to these various elements as "steps" requires some qualification. There is a sense of ebb and flow in the development of a nonviolent campaign, and those participating in a protest are never completely out of one "stage" and wholly in another. Each step along the way assumes aspects of the process which precede it and anticipates and prepares for what is to follow. 

In the same way that a military tactician remains adaptable to the conflict at hand, the leaders of a nonviolent campaign tailor each protest to the situation, while applying a consistent discipline of policies and procedures. There is a vital, dialectical tension in the philosophy of nonviolence between resolute principles and policies, on the one hand, and the flexibility to adapt to specific circumstances on the other. Some researchers have related this tension to the difference between
strategy and tactics. The general strategy of nonviolent resistance always remains broadly the same, following the steps analyzed in this chapter. But the tactics, i.e., the specific methods and actions employed, are developed out of the concrete circumstances involved and are, therefore, in a constant state of flux. It is only in this sense that one can speak of "steps" in a campaign. Martin Luther King did follow a systematic strategy in his leadership of nonviolent crusades, but the programs he developed always remained flexible and open-ended.

The idea of nonviolence being a fluid course of action and its importance will become clearer as specific aspects of nonviolent resistance are analyzed in this chapter. For now, it is important to bear in mind that the nonviolent campaign is a process which grows organically out of a social setting, rather than a mechanical method or program which is imposed upon a particular situation.

Investigation and Analysis

According to King, the first step taken in a nonviolent campaign is that of careful investigation and analysis of the social situation to discover whether or not some form of injustice is actually present. Before entering into protest a nonviolent resister should gather information about the community and assess accurately the intricate social relationships involved. If it is determined that
some form of exploitation exists, the leaders of a campaign must analyze its character: How does such exploitation relate to and interact with certain segments of the community at large? How is it maintained in the social order? How pervasive is its presence?

Although his discussion of this aspect of nonviolence is not extensive, King learned to treat such examination of the social scene with utter seriousness. A nonviolent resister, he contended, must seek to understand the social situation for what it is and carefully think through the specific context of a campaign. A thorough knowledge of the injustice against which one protests and the social environment in which it is found are of fundamental importance.

Investigation and analysis, it should be pointed out, need not be a lengthy process. Often, the existence of injustice is so obvious and the efforts of those perpetrating an unjust status quo so blatant that it is not essential to spend a great deal of time researching the presence and causes of the problem. The leaders of a campaign, in King's view, do not have to understand every minute detail of a social situation before beginning to engage in forms of protest. The need for careful study and examination, moreover, does not paralyze a nonviolent resister and render him unable to react. Indeed, acts of protest may reveal aspects of and dynamics within the community which cannot be seen through analysis alone. The nonviolent emphasis on investigation in the early stages of a campaign is simply a means to facilitate
further the call for social action which is at the heart of this method of change.

King's stress on analysis and investigation was especially important in the specific situation in which he applied his ideas on nonviolent resistance. Intricately woven into King's philosophy of nonviolence is his implicit understanding of the nature and social dynamics of racial oppression; and it is essential for one to have a firm grasp of King's conception of racism if his understanding of how nonviolent protest works against such discrimination is to be fully apprehended.12

In essence, racism in King's view is founded upon a false sense of superiority maintained by the members of one racial group regarding its perceptions of and dealings with the members of another race. At the heart of racial discrimination in America is the arrogant and false assumption that white citizens are physically, intellectually and culturally superior to black people simply by "virtue" of their being white. King calls this the myth of superiority.13

In the face of the complexities and moral morass of racial injustice and its myriad social implications, King's conception of racism seems almost simplistic. But behind his understanding is a very clear and astute insight. King's firsthand experience with segregation led him to see the powerful social force created by such "myths" and false assumptions. His direct encounter with racial oppression honed his understanding of racism to one
sharp, penetrating perception: Racial discrimination in the United States was based upon the myth of white superiority, and segregation was a means of sustaining white supremacy. The whole issue of racial injustice and its many social ramifications related in one way or another, in King's view, to this one critical insight.

To maintain the myth of white superiority in the social regime, segregationists employed forms of coercion, sometimes at the threat of violence, and imposed stifling social conditions upon the black community. These suppressive restrictions helped to reinforce to an even greater extent the myth that black people were inferior, and thus established the vicious circle of racial oppression: Black people were presupposed to be inferior and therefore treated in a discriminatory fashion; by and large they were perceived to be inferior because they had been subjected to the stifling social conditions of segregation.

In the South, an entire system of untruths about black people was perpetrated by the proponents of segregation to provide further support for their imposition of a racist regime. Perhaps the most characteristic of these myths was the segregationists' claim that black citizens were satisfied with the social conditions of segregation. Often fear tactics were used to keep the discontent and disillusionment of the black community from coming to light. And King points to how this "lie" of black complacency helped to reinforce racial discrimination by denying the impelling need for social change.
Critical analysis of racial injustice, in King's view, elucidates why nonviolent direct action is such an effective form of resistance against such oppression. Nonviolence asserts the opposition of the black community to the institution of segregation and demonstrates, he asserts, the discipline and dignity of those involved in the campaign. It reveals to the community at large that black people are not satisfied with the social status quo, and it demands substantial changes in the structures of society so that the stifling social conditions of segregation are removed.\textsuperscript{19}

Throughout his speeches and writings, King constantly stresses that the black community's own assertion of its self-respect and dignity is its most powerful weapon against racism. Confronted with the disciplined and forceful protest of nonviolent resistance, he argues, the myths perpetrated by segregationists that black people are inferior and complacent crumble before the eyes of the community at large.

King's understanding of the social dynamics of racial injustice brings to light the importance of investigation and analysis in the early stages of a nonviolent campaign. Nonviolent resistance, as pointed out earlier in this work, focuses upon the vulnerable moral justification which undergirds and sustains any social order.\textsuperscript{20} Those engaged in nonviolent protest seek to work positive social change by revealing the untruth and injustice of racial exploitation.
For this reason, King insisted that those responsible for leading nonviolent resistance carefully analyze the social context of their protest. This affords a firm grasp of the way in which injustice is maintained in the particular environment and, therefore, provides further insight into how the crusade can be best tailored to the specific situation at hand. If nonviolent direct action is to be successful, King emphasizes, those leading a campaign must have a clear understanding of the context in which their crusade takes place and an intimate knowledge of the injustice against which they protest.  

Negotiation and Dialogue

The next step in a nonviolent campaign is what King calls "negotiation." If it is determined that some form of exploitation exists in a particular social setting, then those in charge of the crusade should endeavor to discuss its presence with numerous members of and groups within the community at large. Aspects of the problems are to be taken up with leaders of the business community, various civic organizations, religious leaders and, of course, with members of the political power structure—concentrating on those most directly concerned in the matter. This brings to light the presence of injustice in an atmosphere of dialogue and alerts the community to the complaints being raised in the context of searching
for a negotiated and conciliative end to the problem.

Those who help sustain an unjust status quo—knowingly or unknowingly, actively or tacitly—should be given an opportunity to alter their involvement in the situation and to redress the grievances being put forward. The leaders of nonviolent resistance must endeavor constantly to create an atmosphere in which the maximum amount of change can take place with the minimum amount of conflict and disruption, and this necessitates an emphasis on negotiation and dialogue in the early stages of the nonviolent process. King's understanding of the focus and intent of this stage of a campaign, though not delineated in extensive detail, is nonetheless quite clear: The negotiation and dialogue phase of a crusade raises the social consciousness of the community and demands that change be initiated.

While engaged in the negotiation process, however, the leaders of a campaign should not make unreal or extravagant claims for the purpose of establishing a superior position for bargaining. The case presented should be argued as accurately as possible, remaining open to the just claims put forward by the opponent. King often stresses the importance of understanding social conflict as it relates to the community as a whole. Though he resolutely holds to his own calls for change, a nonviolent resister assumes an attitude of openness to his opponent's point of view and seeks to find the best and most honorable solution to the problem for the good of all concerned. Those who lead a campaign strive to create a
more just social order, not to "triumph" in the dispute, and it is especially important to establish this pattern of openness and willingness to dialogue in the early stages of a campaign.

Although negotiation is discussed here as a specific stage of nonviolence in action, an open willingness to resolve conflict through communication is an element which threads its way throughout the strategy of nonviolence and is of even greater importance in the more conflictual phases of a protest campaign. And the importance of dialogue and communication can be seen in King's own leadership of direct action. For him, the nonviolent emphasis on negotiation is a means of putting into practice the conciliative spirit of nonviolence, a policy implemented to make both justice and reconciliation more real possibilities in the midst of the turmoil of social contrariety.

It should be stressed that King did not place great hope in negotiation producing the kind of substantial social change needed to defeat segregation. Indeed, he clearly did not believe that negotiation alone would produce radical change. King's firsthand experience in leading nonviolent campaigns in the segregated South and his reading of the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr had made it patently clear to him that privileged groups rarely give up their privileges through discussion and are often extremely intransigent when confronted with moral appeals for change. King came to see that oppression was the very
purpose of segregation, and the white community was not going to negotiate its demise.\textsuperscript{26} Stringent protest was almost always necessary for substantial change to be produced. Though a nonviolent resister constantly endeavors to keep the channels of communication open and clear, it is never assumed that talk alone is enough. Those who follow the way of nonviolence are committed to allowing their solid action to speak louder than words.

But this did not diminish for King the importance of negotiation in the practice of nonviolence. The opportunity for change without social disruption must be built into the policies and procedures of nonviolence, and therefore negotiation is an important component of any campaign. Such an emphasis on dialogue and negotiation, in King's view, demonstrates the good will and sincerity of the nonviolent protester and underscores that if further action follows it is not an impetuous, hot-tempered response but the next step in a disciplined and forceful method of change.

\textbf{Preparation and Self-Purification}

The third step to be taken in a nonviolent campaign is what King calls "self-purification."\textsuperscript{27} If dialogue and negotiation do not initiate change and the guardians of the status quo are recalcitrant and lack good will in seeking to bring an end to the stifling social conditions
of racial discrimination, then the leaders of a campaign begin to focus on more rigorous forms of protest. King insists, however, that a nonviolent resister must not launch into direct action without carefully preparing himself and the community for this severe method of social pressure. Such remonstration may place great hardship upon members of the community at large and cause intense suffering to the individuals engaged in the crusade. A halfhearted protest against injustice may be ineffective and could even prove to be counter-productive. Those who follow this course of action, therefore, must make sure they are prepared for rigorous difficulties and sufficiently dedicated to their goal.

For King, there are two basic emphases of the self-purification process. First, this stage of a crusade stresses intense introspection by those considering direct action and the psychological readiness of those who decide actually to engage in protest. The second emphasis of this phase involves making the necessary organizational plans, charting the course of the campaign and preparing the community at large. Broadly, it may be said that this stage of a campaign focuses on the importance of preparation in the praxis of nonviolence.

Constantly, King urged the significance of serious soul-searching, the testing of one's intentions, sense of discipline and commitment to the cause. Those who lead a campaign must make sure that the carrying of the dispute to this more conflictual and disruptive form of social action is done for the good of the community as a whole.
and not strictly out of selfish or surreptitious motives. Those who involve themselves in nonviolent resistance should look inward and know themselves as well as knowing the social situation in which their protest takes place. \(^29\)

King's stress on self-purification brings to light an important aspect of his conception of nonviolence which is sometimes difficult to detect but which is always operative in his thought and actions. Though nonviolent resistance focuses on society and society's needs, it does not eclipse the profound importance of the individual and the need for personal growth. To be sure, nonviolence is oriented toward eradicating social injustice, but it also emphasizes at the same time the obligation to eliminate attitudes of self-righteousness and prejudice in the lives of individual nonviolent resisters. \(^30\)

A fundamental part of challenging the white community to re-examine its assumptions and treat black people with dignity and respect, King argues, is an open willingness on the part of the black community to re-examine its assumptions as well. \(^31\) "...We are opposed to all injustice," King asserts, "wherever it exists, first of all, in ourselves." \(^32\) As Gandhi had insisted, only those who have removed injustice from their own lives have a right to protest against it in society. \(^33\)

In King's view, therefore, nonviolent resistance is a positive, constructive program as well as an effective means of social protest. Not only do the leaders of a campaign focus upon eliminating the forces and structures of oppression, they also utilize nonviolence as a form of
social education; i.e., as a means of encouraging and edifying those victimized by racial discrimination. This is one reason why King's emphasis on preparation and self-purification is so significant. Nonviolence, he insists, does not immediately change the heart of the oppressor; first, it changes the hearts and minds of those committed to it. It imbues the individual with a deep sense of self-respect and an unshakable bravery—moral values which are at the heart of a nonviolent campaign.

The stress King gave to preparation and self-purification in the praxis of nonviolent resistance can be seen most clearly in his leadership of the Birmingham campaign. As in other crusades throughout the South, appeals were made early in this campaign to solicit volunteers for what King refers to as the "nonviolent army." King insisted, however, that no one would be allowed to participate in the actual protest demonstrations until he had convinced himself and the leaders of the campaign that he could suffer the violence of others without reprisal. Every volunteer was repeatedly asked: "Are you able to accept blows without retaliating? Are you able to endure the ordeal of jail?"

Beyond this, every member of the nonviolent army was required to sign a commitment card and give absolute allegiance to the following code of discipline:

I hereby pledge myself—my person and body—to the non-violent movement. Therefore I will keep the following ten commandments:
1. **Meditate** daily on the teachings and life of Jesus.

2. **Remember** always that the nonviolent movement in Birmingham seeks justice and reconciliation—no victory.

3. **Walk and talk** in the manner of love, for God is love.

4. **Pray** daily to be used by God in order that all men might be free.

5. **Sacrifice** personal wishes in order that all men might be free.

6. **Observe** with both friend and foe the ordinary rules of courtesy.

7. **Seek** to perform regular service for others and for the world.

8. **Refrain** from the violence of fist, tongue, or heart.

9. **Strive** to be in good spiritual and bodily health.

10. **Follow** the directions of the movement and of the captain on a demonstration.  

If a person did not feel he could make a commitment to this code of discipline, then he was, of course, welcome to participate in the campaign by helping to provide transport, run errands, fix food for volunteers, print signs or help with other various and sundry tasks. But King insisted only those who were willing to abide by this code could participate in the front line of the protest campaign.  

It is, therefore, during the self-purification stage of nonviolence that the leaders of a campaign begin to explain the philosophical basis and code of discipline upon which nonviolent resistance is founded—concentrating on those who are potential votaries of the nonviolent
army. Often King utilized evening meetings in churches throughout the community to accomplish this. Such gatherings helped to reinforce the religious character and moral motivations for engaging in social protest.42

Almost always King carried out much of the self-purification stage of nonviolence in a very public manner. This further exposed the community at large to the tenets and tactics of nonviolence and brings to light another important aspect of the preparation process. The inconveniences, disruptions and intense hardships which often emerge during direct action need to be interpreted to the community so that they are understood in a nonviolent context. Those who lead a campaign should seek to prepare the local citizenry as well as the nonviolent army for what is ahead, educating them in the principles and policies of nonviolence. Such direct and forthright communication underscores the open style of operation intrinsic to nonviolence and helps to build a higher trust level between the campaign leaders and members of the community at large.

As already indicated, in the final phases of the preparation and self-purification stage the leaders of a campaign begin to lay the necessary organizational groundwork for the steps and stages which lie ahead. Careful planning, King stresses, is of fundamental importance if nonviolence is to be effective.43 Attempting nonviolent social change without organization, he asserts, "is like trying to sail a boat without a rudder."44 Protest requires both discipline and clear direction,45
and it is partly the nonviolent emphasis on preparation and planning which provides lucid purposes and moral resolve in the more conflictual stages of a campaign.

King did not develop extensively his ideas on preparation and self-purification in his speeches and writings. But one thing remains clear: He was well aware of the rigors and strains of direct social action, and he never advised this course without intense introspection and preparedness of mind. The next step in a campaign marks a serious advance in the militancy of the protest, and those who engage in this action must make sure they are committed to their goal. In his own leadership of nonviolent resistance King always took steps to insure that those who volunteered for front line action were totally dedicated to the principle of non-injury and had a thorough knowledge of the policies and procedures of nonviolence. The importance of preparation and self-purification for King cannot be overestimated, and he was careful to build such emphases into the actual praxis of civil resistance.

Direct Action

The next step to be taken in a nonviolent campaign is what King calls direct action. \(^{46}\) Those involved in a crusade are no longer willing to pursue their objective
through verbal appeals alone. They now seek to demonstrate the importance of their cause with audacious and courageous acts of protest. Such social action, King asserts, is a strategy for bringing the grievances of the campaign before the court of public opinion; i.e., a method whereby the votaries of nonviolence present their very bodies as a means of laying the case of injustice before the conscience of the community at large. He states:

The nonviolent strategy has been to dramatize the evils of our society in such a way that pressure is brought to bear against those evil forces by the forces of good will in the community and change is produced.

This is why "demonstrations" are an important part of the nonviolent "arsenal." Direct action stirs the awareness of the community by dramatically illustrating the crisis in race relations. This brings the penetrating moral questions of civil rights, King argues, into sharp focus and forces members of the community at large to choose how they will respond to the nonviolent call to conscience.

King used a number of techniques to accomplish this. In some circumstances he applied direct action through the use of public assemblies in the form of prayer meetings, sit-ins or mass marches. In other situations he used boycotts, pickets and occasionally acts of civil disobedience. Usually, King combined several of these tactics into one comprehensive strategy, and he believed that the particular method of direct action employed
should be well defined and grow organically out of the situation itself. \(^5\)

But whatever the technique, King is always clear about the overall intent of such action. In his view, acts of social protest are ways of dramatizing the profound need for change and are utilized to place strong pressure upon the body politic to eliminate the stifling social conditions of segregation. \(^5\) Demonstrations bring to the surface the underlying crisis in social relations and force citizens to confront, forthrightly, the presence of injustice in the community at large.

King stresses, therefore, that direct action must be persistent and unyielding if it is to be effective. It must disrupt and bring the issue of racial oppression to the forefront of community life. People must not be able to avoid the penetrating import of the protest. Discussing the character of nonviolent demonstrations, King writes:

They must be of sufficient size to produce some inconvenience to the forces in power or they go unnoticed. In other words, they must demand the attention of the press, for it is the press which interprets the issue to the community at large and thereby sets in motion the machinery for change. \(^5\)

King's media consciousness is a significant aspect of his thinking and brings to light a practical reason why he advises strict adherence to the principle of non-injury while engaged in social protest. To be sure, King embraces the idea of nonviolent nonretaliation primarily out of moral conviction, but he also argues for the
tactical practicality of non-injury in the strategy of nonviolence. And his insistence on following an absolute policy of nonretaliation is founded upon his deep belief, discussed earlier in this work, that violence is both immoral and impractical. 53

King used the press for more than just communicating and interpreting the issues of a campaign to the wider social arena. He utilized the press and electronic media, often with great skill, to draw vital public sympathy to the nonviolent movement. By picturing the violence perpetrated by avid segregationists, news photographs and television cameras revealed to the community the injustice of racial discrimination. Such scenes, in King's view, made it patently clear "who was the evil-doer and who was the undeserving and oppressed victim." 54

This is one of the important reasons why non-injury is such an integral part of direct action for King. Reacting to racial injustice with retaliatory violence, he argues, only confuses members of the community at large, both black and white, and the essential public support needed for social change is evaporated. Slogans of violence, moreover, fuel the fire of reactionary forces in the white community and give a sense of moral and rational "justification" for their oppressive methods. 55

King's insistence upon nonviolent nonretaliation is, therefore, a strategic principle woven into the very fabric of his conception of nonviolent resistance. Enduring the violence of others is done in an effort to use creative suffering to persuade the community of the
validity and justice of the claims put forward by the nonviolent resister. Even while engaged in the most rigorous forms of protest, members of the nonviolent army still must adhere to the precepts upon which nonviolence is founded—exhibiting good will and appealing to the conscience of the community at large. Although direct action must be assertive and unyielding, it also at the same time must demonstrate the moral character and sincerity of those involved in the campaign.

There is in King's philosophy of nonviolence, therefore, a dynamic tension between militancy and morality, a synthesis between the refusal to retaliate and persistent resolve. As he asserts:

Negroes today are neither exercising violence nor accepting domination. They are disturbing the tranquility of the nation until the existence of injustice is recognized as a virulent disease menacing the whole society, and is cured.  

It is interesting to look at the way in which King sketches the scenario of social change through nonviolent direct action, for it reveals how he sees nonviolence operating in the social arena. Nonviolent resistance usually results, according to King, in the following course of action:

1. Nonviolent demonstrators go into the street to exercise their constitutional rights.

2. Racists resist by unleashing violence against them.
3. Americans of conscience in the name of decency demand federal intervention and legislation.

4. The administration, under mass pressure, initiates measures of immediate intervention and remedial legislation.58

In King's view, nonviolent protest creates such a ferment in the social arena that the government is unable to elude the demands of the civil rights movement. Demonstrations act as a catalyst for further federal action and create an atmosphere in which change is demanded.59 The leaders of a campaign seek to awaken the nation, and even world opinion, to the jarring, glaring reality of racial oppression and call for immediate legislation to deal with the problem.60

Of course, King did not believe direct action guaranteed success. But he did believe his firsthand experience in seeing nonviolent resistance working effectively to elide racial exploitation vindicated his confidence in the power of this form of protest. Beyond this, King points to a number of positive benefits which are directly attributable to the use of nonviolent direct action.

Ten years before the nonviolent movement, King asserts, black people seemed almost invisible. But through nonviolent protest the call for civil rights crowds into the press and dominates the conversations of white Americans. When civil rights were pursued only through the courts, black people were passive spectators, but through mass marches they became star performers, engaged in and
totally committed to the achievement of full citizenship rights. Through nonviolent direct action, King says, black citizens stood up to the oppressor and moved toward defeating him; the black community united and marched.61

He writes:

This is the social lever which will force open the door to freedom. Our powerful weapons are the voices, the feet, and the bodies of dedicated, united people, moving without rest toward a just goal.62

Nonviolent resistance paralyzed and confused the power structures against which it was directed. The brutality with which officials would have quelled the black individual became impotent when it could not be pursued with stealth and remain unobserved....Looking back, it becomes obvious that the oppressors were restrained not only because the world was looking but also because, standing before them, were hundreds, sometimes thousands, of Negroes who for the first time dared to look back at a white man, eye to eye.63

It is interesting to view King's conception of direct action in light of Richard B. Gregg's classic work, The Power of Non-Violence—a treatise with which King was familiar though he never cites this volume in any of his major publications.64 Gregg develops a powerful image in the second chapter of his book to express how nonviolence works in the social arena. He argues that nonviolent direct action is a form of "moral jiu-jitsu;" i.e., nonviolence uses the aggressor's own force and violence to undermine his sense of balance. The art of jiu-jitsu wrestling, according to Gregg, is based on the principle that an aggressor's physical force must be counter-balanced by his opponent if it is to be of any use. Without this counter-force, the aggressor's
aggression becomes the source of his own imbalance. A nonviolent resister, Gregg argues, refuses to counter-balance the force of those who perpetrated violence, and this acts in a moral way to pull the aggressor into his own imbalance and undermines his morale as he stands before the community at large. He writes:

...Nonviolent resistance acts as a sort of moral jiu-jitsu. The nonviolence and good will of the victim act in the same way that the lack of physical opposition by the user of physical jiu-jitsu, does, causing the attacker to lose his moral balance. He suddenly and unexpectedly loses the moral support which the usual violent resistance of most victims would render him. He plunges forward, as it were, into a new world of values. He feels insecure because of the novelty of the situation and his ignorance of how to handle it. He loses his poise and self-confidence. The victim not only lets the attacker come, but, as it were, pulls him forward by kindness, generosity and voluntary suffering, so that the attacker loses his moral balance....Just as in jiu-jitsu, violence itself helps to overthrow its user.65

If there are onlookers, the assailant soon loses still more poise. Instinctively he dramatizes himself before them and becomes more aware of his position. With the audience as a sort of mirror, he realizes the contrast between his own conduct and that of the victim. In relation to the onlookers, the attacker with his violence perhaps begins to feel a little excessive and undignified—even a little ineffective—and by contrast with the victim, less generous and in fact brutal. He realizes that the onlookers see that he has misjudged the nature of his adversary, and realizes that he has lost prestige. He somewhat loses his inner self-respect, gets a sense of inferiority. Of course he does not want to acknowledge it, but his feelings betray themselves in hesitance of manner, speech or glance. The onlookers perceive it, and he himself senses a further loss of public support.66

Gregg's analysis is insightful, and one can see in King's conception of direct action the way in which
nonviolent resistance challenges the "myth" of racial superiority and undermines the idea that the black community is satisfied with the social conditions of segregation. Indeed, he asserts that this is the great value of such protest—the value of "pulling racism out of its obscurity and stripping it of its rationalizations...." In King's words, nonviolent direct action "offers a unique weapon which, without firing a single bullet, disarms the adversary. It exposes his moral defenses, weakens his morale, and at the same time works on his conscience." King states:

Boycotting buses in Montgomery, demonstrating in Albany and Birmingham, the true citadels of segregation; defying guns, dogs and clubs in Selma while maintaining disciplined tactical nonviolent strategy...all this was totally confusing to the racist rulers of the South. If they allowed us to march, they destroyed their myth that the black man was content. If they shot us down or brutalized us, they told the world that they were inhumane brutes. They attempted to stop us with threats of terror and fear—the tactics that had long been effective tools of suppression. Non-violent strategies had muzzled their guns and Negro defiance had shaken their confidence. When finally reaching for clubs, dogs and guns, they found the world and the nation watching. It was at this moment that the power of non-violent protest became manifest. It dramatized the essential meaning and nature of the conflict and in magnified strokes made clear who was the evil-doer and who was the undeserving and oppressed victim. The nation and the world were jarred awake and proceeded to wipe out thousands of Southern laws, ripping gaping holes in the edifice of segregation, through national legislation.

In King's view, the black community's dedicated protest against racial injustice transforms the binding fear of segregation into courageous moral conviction and reveals the determination of black people to achieve full
citizenship rights. He asserts, therefore, that the development of a resolute, militant morale is the single most important factor in overcoming the ravages of racial oppression. Confronted with the dignity, discipline and self-respect of the black community in the form of nonviolent direct action, King argues, the myths perpetrated by segregationists that black people are inferior and complacent about segregation disintegrate before the community at large. He writes:

Nonresistance merely reinforces the myth that one race is inherently inferior to another.... The Negro's method of nonviolent direct action is not only suitable as a remedy for injustice; its very nature is such that it challenges the myth of inferiority. Even the most reluctant are forced to recognize that no inferior people could choose and successfully pursue a course involving such extensive sacrifice, bravery and skill.

I am not sad that black Americans are rebelling; this was not only inevitable but eminently desirable. Without this magnificent ferment among Negroes, the old evasions and procrastinations would have continued indefinitely. Black men have slammed the door shut on the past of deadening passivity.... These are our bright years of emergence; though they are painful ones, they cannot be avoided.

In the face of the stringent protest and social disruption of direct action, many of King's critics complained, as one might imagine, that nonviolent resistance stirred such profound dissension in the larger community, precipitating violence and hatred from avid segregationists, that it was not a morally justifiable means of implementing positive social change. If a disciple of nonviolence is truly nonviolent, they argued,
he must not act in a way which precipitates the violence of others.73 The leaders of a campaign, therefore, must bear responsibility for the "disharmony" in race relations created by direct protest. King faced such criticisms throughout the whole of his public career, and it is important to look at how he viewed such contrariety and how his understanding of social conflict relates to his overall conception of nonviolent resistance.

In King's view, those who denounce nonviolence for creating "disharmony" have ignored the history of racial oppression in American society and overlooked the appalling race relations present in local communities throughout the United States. Only a person totally removed from the plight of such discrimination could seriously criticize a nonviolent resister for disturbing the "harmonious" or "peaceful" race relations in America. What existed prior to the demand for full citizenship rights by black people was not really "peace" at all. Segregation as a system of oppression had put down the overt resistance of the black community, and a kind of "negative peace" existed--a peace bought at the price of human servitude. But true peace, King argues, "is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice."74

Direct action is a means of overcoming the entrenched and recalcitrant presence of injustice already extant in the community. King readily admits such protest disrupts and brings to light a profound underlying conflict, but he refuses to accept the idea that nonviolence breeds
enmity. "Our civil rights efforts," he contends, "have not aroused hatred, they have revealed a hatred that already existed." In Birmingham, King turned the logic of his critics against them:

In your statement you assert that our actions, even though peaceful, must be condemned because they precipitate violence. But is this a logical assertion? Isn't this like condemning Socrates because his unswerving commitment to truth and his philosophical inquiries precipitated the act by the misguided populace in which they made him drink hemlock? Isn't this like condemning Jesus because his unique God-consciousness and never-ceasing devotion to God's will precipitated the evil act of crucifixion? We must come to see that, as the federal courts have consistently affirmed, it is wrong to urge an individual to cease his efforts to gain his basic constitutional rights because the quest may precipitate violence. Society must protect the robbed and punish the robber.

If segregationists unleash violence against nonviolent demonstrators and the repulsive reality of racial oppression is revealed to the community at large, then the blame for such violence is not to be laid at the feet of those who seek to rid the community of this social "cancer." The purpose of a campaign is not to stir up hostility or animosity toward white people. Rather it is an effort to expose the latent racism in American society. King asserts:

...We who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.
In typical homiletical fashion, King relates his conception of direct action to Jesus' words: "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." He writes:

Certainly Jesus did not mean that he came to bring a physical sword. He seems to have been saying in substance: 'I have not come to bring this old negative peace with its deadening passivity. I have come to lash out against such a peace. Whenever I come, a conflict is precipitated between the old and the new. Whenever I come, a division sets in between justice and injustice. I have come to bring a positive peace which is the presence of justice, love, yea, even the Kingdom of God.'

Nonviolence, in King's view, brings a sword, but it is a sword that heals. Direct action is employed as a means of creating positive and lasting social change--without resorting to retaliatory violence or acquiescing to oppression. A nonviolent resister refuses to condone tacitly the "negative peace" of servitude. Those who follow the philosophy of nonviolence, King contends, are dedicated to positive peace-making--endeavoring to eliminate the negative forces of injustice and exploitation and working to create a community in which justice, brotherhood and mutual good will are common goals.

Resolution—Compromise and Synthesis

King is careful to point out that a nonviolent campaign does not end with direct action. The application of
rigorous methods of protest ultimately means returning to the negotiation process. The leaders of a crusade must look for ways to bring contrariety to a close and seek for a means to resolve the conflict in a fair and just manner. Responding to some of his critics in Birmingham, King stresses this vital relationship between direct action and further negotiation:

You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored....I therefore concur with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in a tragic effort to live in monologue rather than dialogue.

Clearly, protest for King is not an end in itself, but rather is a means of bringing the intransigent guardians of an unjust status quo to the point of constructive and meaningful negotiation.

The importance of negotiation, of course, works both ways. If nonviolent resistance is to distinguish itself from violent coercion as a form of social change, then those who lead a campaign must show an open willingness to arbitrate and to suspend further protest or withdraw from direct action in an effort to bring an honorable end to the conflict. King insists, although nonviolence is oriented towards social change and often causes severe disruption, the intent of such action is not to punish one's opponent, and this must be communicated in word and deed throughout a campaign. As Gandhi had taught, "...we
win justice quickest by rendering justice to the other party."

King stresses, therefore, that "compromise" is essential in the praxis of nonviolent resistance. His conception of compromise, however, is quite different from the way the term is often used, and it is important to look at what King actually means when he speaks of compromise. He contends:

While compromise is an absolute necessity in any movement of social transition, it must be the creative, honest compromise of a policy, not the negative cowardly compromise of a principle.

King's distinction between "principle" and "policy" in this assertion is an important differentiation and underlies the special way in which he understood compromise in the context of nonviolent resistance. In King's view, compromise is not bartering nor simply finding the lowest common denominator in a dispute, although such techniques are not ruled out in searching for a reasonable solution. Though compromise may entail the reciprocal making of concessions, for the nonviolent resister it goes beyond such haggling in a fundamental way. There is an essential, dialectical tension in King's conception of compromise, as in many areas of his thought, between absolute moral principles on the one hand and an openness to the rightful claims of the opponent on the other. This is why King emphasizes the necessity of compromise while at the same time asserting that it must be the "creative, honest compromise of a policy," not the "cowardly compromise of a principle."
Joan Bondurant has argued that "compromise" is an inadequate term to express the resolution process in the nonviolent philosophy of conflict. As she states, "there is no 'lowering' of demands, but an aiming at a 'higher' level of adjustment which creates a new, mutually satisfactory, resolution." In reality, the leaders of a campaign, Bondurant argues, do not so much look for compromise as they seek to work out a synthesis which embraces the just claims of both parties in a dispute.

A disciple of nonviolence is always prepared, therefore, to depart from his original position and to embrace his opponent's point of view if convinced that his opponent is putting forward a valid consideration. In other words, as he seeks to persuade his opponent, even through the use of rigorous direct action, he remains open to being persuaded by his opponent, endeavoring constantly to understand the conflict in a more complete manner.

For King, this essential openness to the opponent's point of view integrally relates to the overall aim and orientation of nonviolence reiterated time and time again in his writings and speeches. The leaders of a campaign must make it clear to the community and to the opponent that the goal of their protest is not an unilateral victory, but a reconstruction of the conflict situation in such a way that it allows for the creation of a more just social order and, if possible, the reconciling of the opposing points of view. A disciple of nonviolence, Bondurant writes,
recognizes, and attempts to demonstrate to his opponent that he recognizes, the desirability of a resulting synthesis, and that he is not seeking a one-sided triumph. His effort is to allow for the emergence of the best restructuring of the situation. He seeks a victory, not over the opponent, but over the situation in the best (in the sense of the total human needs of the situation) synthesis possible.92

This of course differs from compromise as it is usually understood in an important way, though Bondurant perhaps draws too absolute a distinction between "compromise" and "synthesis." Those who lead a nonviolent campaign, nonetheless, are not willing to compromise on matters of basic moral principle or on the truth of their position. Nor is a disciple of nonviolence willing to compromise his effort to eliminate social injustice—the very purpose of his engaging in direct action. But a nonviolent resister must be willing to compromise, King insists, on matters of policy and procedure in order to establish the basis upon which a satisfactory synthesis can be built.

King's stress on the importance of compromise is reminiscent, in some ways, of Reinhold Niebuhr's emphasis on the necessity of compromise in the political order, although King never attributes his ideas to any particular source nor even lays out his views in a systematic way.93 Though he says relatively little about his philosophy of compromise, King's views on this aspect of nonviolent resistance are significant. They show King's profound realism when dealing with political problems. If those who lead a nonviolent campaign for social justice are to be successful in their call for change, they must be
willing to compromise, wherever possible, and exhibit an astute understanding of political reality.

Beyond this, the nonviolent emphasis on compromise and synthesis underscores, for King, the basic principles upon which nonviolent resistance is based and therefore must be an intrinsic part of the way in which nonviolence is practiced in actual situations of protest. Though a disciple of nonviolence is determined in his moral convictions, he is always willing to negotiate. He does not approach the redress of grievances or the resolution of conflict with ironclad dogmatic solutions, but remains flexible and open to the just and fair proposals put forward by his opponent. Nonviolence, therefore, is always open-ended and the negotiation process approached in terms of the specific situation under consideration and in relation to the attitudes and actions of the adversary. By waging social conflict in this manner, King contends, the fair and equitable settlement of a dispute is a more achievable possibility.

Reconciliation

There emerges in King's writings and speeches one further distinguishable dimension of the nonviolent process which requires comment at this point. Time and time again he stresses that the goal of nonviolent resistance is the reconciliation of the opposing parties
in a dispute and the creation of what he calls the "beloved community." And the importance of seeking reconciliation in the praxis of nonviolence can hardly be overstated for King. Although nonviolence is oriented towards protest and often causes intense inconvenience to the community at large, its ultimate aim is not conflict, but the conciliative elimination of racial oppression and the establishing of a more just and humane social order. Indeed, this is the primary reason why a protester handles himself in a completely nonviolent fashion. He hopes such social action will result in a community "at peace with itself." In his classic work, Moral Man and Immoral Society, Reinhold Niebuhr argued that this was one of the primary benefits of nonviolent resistance. Through its emphasis on self-suffering and nonretaliation, nonviolence nurtures the possibility of conciliative relationships within the body politic. Nonviolent resistance, Niebuhr wrote, offers the largest opportunities for a harmonious relationship with the moral and rational factors in social life. It does not destroy the process of a moral and rational adjustment of interest to interest completely during the course of resistance. Resistance to self-assertion easily makes self-assertion more stubborn, and conflict arouses dormant passions which completely obscure the real issues of a conflict. Non-violence reduces these dangers to a minimum. It preserves moral, rational and co-operative attitudes within an area of conflict and thus augments the moral forces without destroying them.

The advantage of non-violence as a method of expressing moral goodwill lies in the fact, that it protects the agent against the resentments which violent conflict always creates in both parties to a conflict, and that it proves this freedom of resentment and ill-will to the
contending party in the dispute by enduring more suffering than it causes. If non-violent resistance causes pain and suffering to the opposition, it mitigates the resentment, which suffering usually creates, by enduring more pain than it inflicts.97

King, of course, did not believe that nonviolence assured reconciliation. He did believe firmly, however, that waging conflict through this method of social change afforded the greatest possibility for harmonious relations between contending parties in a dispute when a resolution finally had been reached. King's stress on reconciliation, moreover, is a natural consequence of his deeply held conviction that human community and agapeic love are essential moral values woven into the very structure of reality. But King's emphasis on reconciliation, it should be noted, is more than a lofty goal or ethereal value. The leaders of a nonviolent campaign, he stresses, must earnestly endeavor to bring about a wholesome restoration of social relations and work to heal the tensions which have emerged during the conflictual stages of a campaign.

King's emphasis on reconciliation as the final component of a nonviolent campaign can be seen perhaps most clearly in his handling of the final stages of the Montgomery bus boycott. Immediately upon sensing the success of the boycott, King endeavored to make the transition from segregation to integration as smooth and orderly as possible.98 Though black citizens in Montgomery had triumphed over segregated seating in public
transportation, the nonviolent process did not end with this victory. Those who had participated in direct action, King insisted, must "move from protest to reconciliation." Indeed, throughout the campaign he had stressed:

...A boycott is not an end within itself; it is merely the means to awaken a sense of shame within the oppressor and challenge his false sense of superiority. But the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community.100

As the boycott drew to a close, King affirmed that the dedicated and courageous protest of those involved in the campaign had won the right for black citizens to ride the buses free from the humiliation of racial discrimination. But he insisted at the same time that the black community of Montgomery "must go back on the buses not as a right but as a duty," not as "victors" but as those open to the restoration of good will in the community.101 Nonviolence, King declared, is not only a call for justice; it is a call for forgiveness and the mending of social relations.102

Under the auspices of the Montgomery Improvement Association, King implemented a scheme to help bring about greater racial harmony in the aftermath of the boycott. An instruction sheet was mimeographed and distributed throughout the community which informed the citizens of the Supreme Court's decision rendering the Alabama segregation law on public transportation unconstitutional. This handout listed a number of specific suggestions for fostering conciliation while
returning to integrated buses, and each item reiterated in concrete terms the emphasis on love and nonretaliation which had been stressed throughout the campaign. 103

To reinforce further the importance of a smooth transition from segregation to integration, the MIA sponsored a number of community education programs to help transform the mind set of the community from protest to peaceful social relations with the white community. The weekly meetings held during the boycott were continued and hypothetical situations of conflict worked out in role play situations to give people concrete examples of how to handle difficult circumstances without reprisal. 104 In these sessions, members of the community were continually admonished, "if pushed, don't push back; if cursed, don't curse back." 105

In addition to this, during the first week of integration ministers from the community were asked by the MIA to ride the buses during peak periods to help give moral support to those who may face the belligerence of bellicose and resentful members of the white community. It was felt that the presence of these pastors, familiar figures in the Montgomery community, would help to encourage the bus patrons and underscore the emphasis on nonviolence which had been stressed throughout the crusade. 106

All these efforts on the part of the MIA helped to alleviate the tensions created by the year-long boycott. King worked rigorously to heal the wounds of conflict and encouraged the black community to evince a conciliative
attitude toward those who had opposed integration.

King's stress on reconciliation in the praxis of nonviolent direct action did not end in Montgomery but was characteristic of his leadership of this form of social change. At the conclusion of the Birmingham campaign, for example, King also emphasized the importance of reconciliation and a spirit of understanding among those who had participated in the protest. Speaking to a mass assembly in the black community, following the signing of a formal agreement, King focused specifically on this vital concern:

We must not see the present developments as victory for the Negro. It is rather a victory for democracy and the whole citizenry of Birmingham—Negro and white....We must respond to every new development in civil rights with an understanding of those who have opposed us and with an appreciation of the new adjustments that the new achievements pose for them. We must be able to face up honestly to our own shortcomings. We must act in such a way as to make possible a coming together of white people and colored people on the basis of real harmony...and understanding. This is the time that we must evince calm dignity and wise restraint. Emotion must not run wild. Violence must not come from any of us....If we become victimized with violent acts or intentions, the pending daybreak of progress will be transformed into a gloomy midnight of retrogress. We stand on the verge of using public facilities heretofore closed to us. We must not be overbearing and haughty in spirit. We must be loving enough to turn an enemy into a friend. We must now move from the protest to reconciliation. This too is our hope for Birmingham. It is a hope that will cause us to look at the signs which say 'It's Nice to Have You in Birmingham' in a new way. Now we will know that these words are meant for all God's children, and we will know that they are sincere. Then, and only then, will all the
citizens of this community be able to say in joyful response: 'Thank you; it's great to be in Birmingham, a city of honor, respect and brotherly love.'107

It is quite clear in his writings and speeches that for King reconciliation is an underlying value which inundates each and every phase of his conception of nonviolent resistance. In his view, a nonviolent resister rigorously adheres to the principles of nonviolence in order to make the goal of an integrated, harmonious community a more real possibility. For King, authentic love and wholesome community demand reconciliation, but his emphasis on reconciliation goes beyond an intangible value or underlying attitude. Those responsible for the leadership of a nonviolent campaign, he insists, must make sure that the healing restoration of social relations is built into the actual praxis of their crusade.
CHAPTER SEVEN
THE PRIMACY OF LOVE

Now that Martin Luther King's ideas on Christian love and nonviolence have been discussed in the preceding chapters, it is appropriate to focus more precisely on the integral relationship between agape and social action in his thought. Clearly, King's thinking on love profoundly influenced his understanding of direct action, and his involvement in nonviolent campaigns and formulation of a thoroughgoing philosophy of nonviolence significantly affected his conception of Christian agape. It is this dynamic interaction between love and nonviolence in King's thinking, with special reference to his ideas on justice and power, which is the subject matter of this concluding chapter.

Love, Justice and Power

Martin Luther King's synthesis between political action and agapeic good will led him to think through, as one might expect, the important relationship between love,
justice and power in his moral philosophy. He recognized the potential problems of combining a religious love ethic with power political principles, and King sought earnestly to deal with this important issue in his writings and speeches.

First, it should be noted that King did not discuss principles of justice and political power in an abstract, speculative manner. His analysis always proceeds from a very practical point of view, his ideas always set in the context of concrete issues. Yet King constantly underscored the importance of power political principles and believed social justice must be an essential concern of anyone who seeks to bring social change.

King's basic thrust is clear: Those who protest against racial discrimination must confront the injustice of such exploitation, must challenge the power of the white community in its domination of black citizens. Consistently throughout his public career, King emphasized that civil rights would not roll in on the "wheels of inevitability,"¹ and those who wished to create changes in the structures of society must realize that privileged groups do not voluntarily give up their privileged status. King always insisted, however, that questions of power and justice must be seen within an ethical framework and analyzed in terms of the moral foundations which undergird all human relationships.

Essentially, in King's view, "power is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. Power is the ability to affect change."² In the complex social context in which
King worked, this conception of political power may seem simplistic—even naive. But the consistent and analytical way in which he applied this definition proved to be very effective in his successful leadership of nonviolent direct action.

Racial discrimination in America, King contended, was directly related to the inequitable distribution of power within the social order, and the creation of a more just society ultimately would mean "a radical redistribution of economic and political power."3 "There is nothing essentially wrong with power," King argues. "The problem is that in America power is unequally distributed."4 King asserts:

No one can deny that the Negro is in dire need of this kind of legitimate power. Indeed, one of the great problems that the Negro confronts is his lack of power. From the old plantations of the South to the newer ghettos of the North, the Negro has been confined to a life of voicelessness and powerlessness. Stripped of the right to make decisions concerning his life and destiny, he has been subject to the authoritarian and sometimes whimsical decisions of the white power structure. The plantation and the ghetto were created by those who had power both to confine those who had no power and to perpetuate their powerlessness. The problem of transforming the ghetto is, therefore, a problem of power—a confrontation between the forces of power demanding change and the forces of power dedicated to preserving the status quo.5

This is why King asserted that "integration is meaningless without the sharing of power."6 Integration is not "a romantic mixing of colors," he argued, but in the final analysis a "real sharing of power and responsibility."7
Such a real sharing of power and responsibility, of course, would cost a great deal in monetary terms, and King recognized the heavy burdens involved. "Justice so long deferred," he wrote, "has accumulated interest and its cost for this society will be substantial in financial as well as human terms."8

The black community, therefore, King insisted, must come together and force the community at large--through the assertion of its collective power--to invest in the financial and human costs of justice. Again he asserts:

We must recognize that the problems of neither racial nor economic injustice can be solved without a radical redistribution of political and economic power. We must further recognize that the ghetto is a domestic colony, black people must develop programs that will aid in the transfer of power and wealth into the hands of residents of the ghetto so that they may in reality control their own destinies. People of good will in the larger community must support them in this effort.9

Reflected in this statement is King's understanding of the close connection between political power and human freedom. For King, freedom related directly to the distribution of power within society, and he often quoted Cicero's well-known maxim: "Freedom is participation in power."10

It is difficult to overstate the importance of such democratic ideals in King's conception of justice. For him, justice demanded, at the very least, the opportunity to be involved in the decision-making processes of the community at large. Racial segregation was unjust, in his view, primarily because it denied the right of black
citizens to share in the decisions which shaped their lives, and in a democratic framework such freedom of choice, such participation in power, was an essential requirement of justice.\textsuperscript{11}

In his famous "I Have A Dream" speech, King claimed that the dream to which he clung so tightly was "a dream deeply rooted in the American dream."\textsuperscript{12} "I have a dream," he continued, "that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'\textsuperscript{13} Clearly the dream of freedom and justice which King envisioned was a society in which citizens of all races were free to participate in the decisions which determined their destiny, a community where liberty and mutual good will were common goals.

American racial discrimination was hypocritical, and King believed it undermined the fundamental concept of American freedom. This is precisely why he found segregation so offensive. It was like a cancer eating away at the American body politic.

Martin Luther King searched for ways to bring about social change within the constructs of the American democratic system. But his allegiance to the "American dream" brought him into sharp conflict with some segments of the black community. Not all black citizens, to be sure, shared King's vision of an integrated America. Indeed, some were diametrically opposed to such a social order.
Black leaders often criticized King's strict reliance upon nonviolent protest as the only means of achieving civil rights. Even some of his admirers questioned his dogged loyalty to this form of resistance. But the criticism of some black radicals towards King's program went far beyond criticizing the technique he espoused. Many Black Power advocates disagreed with the very goal and intent of King's program and envisaged a different kind of "liberation" for black people in the United States.  

Both Albert Cleage and Malcolm X, for example, were very critical of the integrationist emphasis of the SCLC. Cleage viewed the very idea of integration as "insanity" and believed that King had underestimated the evil of what Malcolm X called the "white devil."  

Rather than integration, Cleage proclaimed a doctrine of Black Christian Nationalism based on a separate political and economic program for black people, completely controlled by the black community. His writings advocate an utter division within American society between the black and white communities, "the establishment of a Black Nation within a nation."  

It is this fundamental difference between King's work for integration and the idea of a separate black nation which stands behind much of the controversy between King and many black radicals. Nonviolence, for King, was directly tied to the vision of a racially integrated society, what he metaphorically called the "beloved community." And his argument for the use of disciplined,
nonviolent action is often set in terms of this specific political goal. Black separatists, such as Albert Cleage, Malcolm X and H. Rap Brown, not only disagreed with King's reliance upon nonviolence, they declaimed against his desire for a racially integrated society.

Beyond his allegiance to democratic ideals, Martin Luther King's understanding of social justice was significantly affected, as one might expect, by the salient schools of thought which shaped his pilgrimage to nonviolence, especially his deeply held personalist convictions. His belief in the dignity and worth of human personality fashioned much of the formal philosophical basis of his ethical thinking, and King, not surprisingly, related his personalism directly to the democratic conception of justice and power he propounded.17

There emerges, therefore, in King's ideas on love, justice and power a striking synthesis between the Judeo-Christian tradition, democratic ideals and theistic personalism. King's Christian upbringing, study of evangelical liberalism and academic work under the tutelage of George W. Davis and L. Harold DeWolf, complemented by his reading of Walter Rauschenbusch and Edgar Sheffield Brightman, would have made such a synthesis of thought readily available to him. King, of course, did not equate democracy, personalism and liberal evangelical theology. He was too sophisticated a thinker for such a simplistic identification. Nonetheless, throughout his writings and speeches, King constantly
underscores the dignity and worth of human personality and argues that these ethical values are best fulfilled in a democratic social order undergirded by unconditional good will.¹⁸

In King's view, all human activity--especially the structuring of government and the writing and enforcing of laws--should be founded upon the basic value of and respect for the human being. Not to recognize these fundamental values in the affairs of the state was, for King, to open the door for exploitation and injustice.¹⁹

King often employed the language of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber to analyze the injustice and depersonalization of racial segregation. He believed that segregation substituted an "I-it" relationship for an "I-thou" relationship. It depersonalized black people and in the process defamed those who perpetrated, or allowed the perpetuation, tacitly or actively, of such a discriminatory social system.

King's moral critique of racial segregation, moreover, brings to light the importance of the communal nature of human existence in his ethical philosophy, an idea which occupies a pivotal place in his conception of justice. Through his exposure to the writings of Walter Rauschenbusch, King became convinced that social concern was a vital part of the Christian faith. Indeed, in his view, one could be fully human only in relation to other human beings; a person could be what he or she was intended to be only in community. Again in the language of Buber, for King, the "I" could be fulfilled only in
relation to the "thou."20 King wrote:

From time immemorial men have lived by the principle that 'self-preservation is the first law of life.' But this is a false assumption. I would say that other-preservation is the first law of life. It is the first law of life precisely because we cannot preserve self without being concerned about preserving other selves. The universe is so structured that things go awry if men are not diligent in their cultivation of the other-regarding dimension. 'I' cannot reach fulfillment without 'thou'. The self cannot be self without other selves. Self-concern without other-concern is like a tributary that has no outward flow to the ocean. Stagnant, still and stale, it lacks both life and freshness.21

It was this concept of the communal character of human existence, along with his personal encounter with its existential denial in the form of segregation, which led King to affirm, sometimes doggedly, the interrelatedness of all human life. At least in part, the injustice of racial discrimination hinged, in King's mind, upon the denial of this communal nature of human life--a denial of the fullness of human life itself.

King's argument is clear and persuasive. Oppressor and oppressed are tied together. The black community cannot be discriminated against politically or economically without this action adversely affecting the white community as well. In such a social situation, vital human resources are wasted, and the loss of the creative energy used to maintain and to justify segregation is detrimental to all segments of the community at large. King concludes:

In a real sense, all life is interrelated. The agony of the poor impoverishes the rich; the betterment of the poor enriches the rich. We
are inevitably our brother's keeper because we are our brother's brother. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.22

Segregation is evil because it starves the soul of both the segregated and the segregator. I have said all along that as we struggle we must come to see that we are not merely trying to help the Negro. Segregation is as injurious to the white man as it is to the Negro. The festering sore of segregation debilitating the segregated as well as the segregator. It gives the segregated a false sense of inferiority and it gives the segregator a false sense of superiority. It is equally damaging.23

It was on the basis of this conception of the communal nature of human existence that King could speak of desegregation as a moral obligation for the good of the community as a whole--for the dignity and self-respect of white citizens as well as for the benefit of the black community.

King's vision of a just social order, furthermore, went far beyond the idea of political structures alone. He also believed that justice related to essential economic concerns, and his early experiences with racial segregation had taught him that the "inseparable twin of racial injustice was economic injustice."24 King argued:

The Negro today is not struggling for some abstract, vague rights, but for concrete and prompt improvement in his way of life. What will it profit him to be able to send his children to an integrated school if the family income is insufficient to buy them school clothes? What will he gain by being permitted to move to an integrated neighborhood if he cannot afford to do so because he is unemployed or has a low-paying job with no future?....Of what advantage is it to the Negro to establish that he can be served in integrated restaurants, or accommodated in integrated hotels, if he is bound to the kind of financial servitude which will not allow him to take a vacation or even to take his wife out to dine? Negroes must not only have the right to go into any establishment...
open to the public, but they must also be absorbed into our economic system in such a manner that they can afford to exercise that right. 25

King was not interested in abstract ideals or vague rights, nor was he interested in integration for integration's sake. He was concerned with the justice of the whole social order in American society, and his understanding of justice included economic concerns as well as constitutional principles. King, therefore, insisted that there was an essential economic dimension to human dignity, and this aspect of human freedom must be taken seriously if justice is to be real in the social order.

So, for King, justice meant freedom and the participation in power in the broadest and truest sense. The affirmation of personal liberty must be written with pen and ink in the statutes of law, but this per se did not create justice. Freedom meant not only the right to avail oneself of the franchise; it meant the ability to exercise one's liberty, free from social and economic exploitation. King argued:

The struggle for rights is, at bottom, a struggle for opportunities. In asking for something special, the Negro is not seeking charity. He does not want to languish on welfare rolls any more than the next man. He does not want to be given a job he cannot handle. Neither, however, does he want to be told that there is no place where he can be trained to handle it. So with equal opportunity must come the practical, realistic aid which will equip him to seize it. 26
King's views on justice and Christian social concern forced him to return again and again to the question of power political principles. In one of his last major works, Where Do We Go From Here?, King delineated in specific terms the ways in which the black community could work for a more equitable redistribution of power in society and thereby establish a more just social order.

First and foremost, in King's view, black people must organize to compel the community at large to listen to their claim for greater political clout. "In his struggle for racial justice," he asserts, "the Negro must seek to transform his condition of powerlessness into creative and positive power. One of the most obvious sources of this power is political."27

The black community's incognizance of its own political prowess was, in King's view, one of the most significant stifling factors to achieving full civil rights. He, therefore, called for more creative use of political strategies which would direct attention to the strength of the black community, such as the use of bloc voting and the art of making political alliances.28 But whatever the specific tactics developed, King was clear about the intent of such strategies: "One of the most basic weapons in the fight for social justice," he argued, "will be the cumulative political power of the Negro."29

Not surprisingly, King also called for the black community to make further use of its economic resources as a means of acquiring greater political leverage and
security. Though he called upon the federal government to create massive programs of assistance for the disadvantaged, King believed the primary source of financial strength and stability for black citizens was their own collective economic resources. Developing the strength of the black community meant, in King's view, undergirding the financial integrity of black businesses and greater economic development in areas traditionally populated by black citizens. 30

King argued, moreover, that the boycott was a powerful tool which the black community could use in extreme circumstances to rally public support. 31 Such noncooperation must not be employed, of course, as a means of retaliation, as a means of destroying businesses which practice discriminatory policies. But the boycott could be used as an effective lever, King says, to assist putting "justice in business." 32 He felt strongly that such direct action could prove to be an effective means of asserting the collective political and economic strength of black citizens.

King's discussion of power sources within the social order, it should be noted, went beyond the delineation of political and economic strategies, as important as such principles were for him. He believed, in the final analysis, that power could be traced not only to political and economic relationships but to what he described as "ideological" principles as well. 33

King recognized that power sources within society are often complex and integrally related to the cultural and
moral values of a community. He, therefore, challenged black citizens to analyze carefully the levers of political and economic power and to study their ideological sources within the social order.34

This is why King often directly related "power" to social and psychological dynamics which seemed distinct from political reality. For example, consistent with his personalist philosophy, King asserted that black "power," in a positive and creative sense, proclaimed the personhood of black people. "Black Power," he argued, as a vitriolic, separatist slogan could be damaging to the civil rights movement, but the concept of black power per se, as a "call to black people to amass the political and economic strength to achieve their legitimate goals," was for King at the heart of the freedom movement and the raison d'être of nonviolent resistance.35

Black power, therefore, was a psychological call to human dignity, and King believed the political strength of the black community would be greatly enhanced by the declaration of self-respect in the form of direct action. King knew that civil rights would not come through legislation and litigation alone. Working for economic security and greater political leverage is incomplete, in his view, without the primary source of power discovered in the dignity of one's own person. King asserts:

...The Negro must boldly throw off the manacles of self-abnegation and say to himself and the world: 'I am somebody. I am a person. I am a man with dignity and honor. I have a rich and noble history, however painful and exploited that history has been. I am black and comely.' This self-affirmation is the black man's need
made compelling by the white man's crimes against him. This is positive and necessary power for black people.36

Another important ideological principle often emphasized by King is the necessary ethical character of power political strategies. King insisted that the use of power must be moral, and this is precisely why he insisted on nonviolent social change. Though a civil resister calls for significant shifts in the power structure of society, pressure upon the body politic must be brought to bear in a way which is ethically consistent with the values of the community at large. King wrote:

Some Black Power advocates consider an appeal to conscience irrelevant. A Black Power exponent said to me not long ago: 'To hell with conscience and morality. We want power.' But power and morality must go together, implementing, fulfilling and ennobling each other. In the quest for power I cannot by-pass the concern for morality. I refuse to be driven to a Machiavellian cynicism with respect to power. Power at its best is the right use of strength. The words of Alfred the Great are still true: 'Power is never good unless he who has it is good.'37

King recognized, therefore, and often stressed, that justice is a two-way street. Civil rights for the black community must not be pursued at the expense of a just share of political and economic power for the white community. He wrote:

Negroes should never want all power because they would deprive others of their freedom. By the same token, Negroes can never be content without participation in power. America must be a nation in which its multiracial people are partners in power. This is the essence of democracy toward which all Negro struggles have been directed since the distant past when he was transplanted here in chains.38
So King emphasized that those who work for a more just social order must understand the principles of political and economic power and the ideological values which undergird and sustain such power dynamics. For black people to achieve full civil rights, it was necessary, in King's view, to demand equal treatment under the law while demonstrating the political and economic prowess of the black community as a whole. However, those who demand a greater share of power in the social order must take seriously the ethical propriety of their action, and for King this meant evaluating any strategy of change in terms of what he believed to be the most fundamental moral principle in human life—unconditional good will.

As already pointed out in this work, Martin Luther King's views on power and justice reflect the influence of Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian realism on his intellectual development, and King readily acknowledged his profound respect for Niebuhr's writings on social ethics. There are, however, significant differences in their thinking.

In a paper entitled "Reinhold Niebuhr's Ethical Dualism," written for a course at Boston University, King spoke directly to the matter of his appreciation for, and yet disagreement with, Niebuhrian ethics. First, King underscored in this essay the strength and significance of Niebuhr's critique of liberal perfectionism. He argued that Niebuhr was right

in insisting that we must be realistic regarding the relativity of every moral and ethical choice. His analysis of the complexity of the
social situation is profound indeed, and with it I would find very little [with which] to disagree.39

King, with Niebuhr, recognized the duplicity and paradoxical nature of power in any given social context.

Niebuhr's writings, however, are punctuated with an almost cynical view of power. "Power is poison;" he says, quoting Henry Adams with favor, "and it is a poison which blinds the eyes of moral insight and lames the will of moral purpose."40 He never contended, of course, that power is evil, but Niebuhr always questioned the ability of power to be used for moral ends. "All through history," he wrote, "one may observe the tendency of power to destroy its very raison d'etre."41

King agreed with Niebuhr that history does demonstrate the tragic tendency of power to undermine its own reason for being. Often power does poison and even "lame the will of moral purpose." But for King this was only one facet of the problem; for it was not, in his view, power per se but its inequitable distribution in the social order which made for injustice. Racial discrimination in America was possible not because white people had power but because the black community had practically no share of power in the political arena, no ability to effect change and achieve purpose. It was, therefore, the imbalance of power, the lack of creative tension in American society, which made for racial exploitation.

This difference in the way King and Niebuhr spoke of power in the political order is not so much a philosophic distinction but more a difference of expression and
emphasis. King approached principles of power from the point of view of the oppressed—from the vantage point of the existential need to acquire power for a segment of the community exploited precisely because it did not possess adequate power to protect its interests. In actuality, though, Niebuhr would have found little in King's understanding of power politics with which to disagree, and this is perhaps why, though critical of King's seemingly sentimental rhetoric, he called him the most "creative" civil rights leader in America. Essentially, Niebuhr believed King's position and approach to be right.42

Though King and Niebuhr agree on many of the broad issues, King was critical of one aspect of Niebuhr's ethics which he believed to be a fundamental weakness—a flaw which ran the whole gamut of his Christian realism. In "Reinhold Niebuhr's Ethical Dualism," King argues that Niebuhr's system does not deal adequately with the idea of relative Christian perfection. For King, the dialectical and critical character of Niebuhr's thought left little room for the idea of spiritual development, the relating of Christian values to human personality and the immanence of divine agape in human life. And King believed these were essential affirmations of the Christian faith—especially the availability and proximity of God's sovereign love.43 The reality and power of God's unconditional agape, King insisted, made a difference in human life, even if only experienced within the relativity of human existence.

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In sharp contrast to Niebuhr's characterization of agape as "an impossible possibility," King emphasizes throughout his writings and speeches the immanence of divine love in human life, and this, he believed, meant that agapeic love had a vital relationship to all human activity, including the power political arena. King's stress on the proximity and availability of love for human life profoundly influenced his moral philosophy. He believed Niebuhr's conception of agape made love too removed from existential reality.

For King, love was fraught with difficulty and danger but completely possible in the human realm by means of the enabling power of God's love at work in human history. Although realism compelled the honest thinker to see human behavior as complex and often egoistic, King believed that there was a vital sense in which one could speak of agape as a meaningful ethic for social relations.

In Martin Luther King's view, there was no absolute distinction between love, justice and power. They were, within the framework of his moral philosophy, simply different aspects of the same reality, and when analyzing King's sermons and speeches one is aware of the significant way in which these three ethical fundamentals complemented one another in his thought. He argued:

...It's not enough for us to talk about love. Love is one of the pinnacle parts of the Christian faith. There is another side called justice. And justice is really love in calculation. Justice is love correcting that which would work against love....Standing beside love is always just.
Love that does not satisfy justice is no love at all. It is merely a sentimental affection, little more than what one would have for a pet. Love at its best is justice concretized. Love is unconditional. It is not conditional upon one's staying in his place or watering down his demands in order to be considered respectable. He who contends that he 'used to love the Negro, but...' did not truly love him in the beginning, because his love was conditioned upon the Negroes' limited demands for justice.45

King saw nonviolence as a form of political power, as a social lever which could initiate change and help to establish justice. If power is to fulfill its raison d'etre, however, if it is to achieve justice rather than destroy itself, King argued, it must be infused with good will; it must be regulated by the principle of agape. He asserted:

The problem has been that all too many people have seen power and love as polar opposites. Consequently, on the one hand, they have thought of loveless power. And on the other hand they have thought of powerless love.46

Such a bifurcation of love and power had serious ethical consequences in King's view. Some philosophers, such as Friedrich Nietzsche, rejected the Christian concept of love because of its apparent powerlessness in human life. Similarly, some Christian theologians rejected any notion of the will to power philosophy in the name of Christian love. But King believed both these approaches to be wrong. He wrote:

...What we must understand in the non-violent movement is that power without love is reckless. And love without power is sentimental. In other words power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. And justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.47
For King, love, justice and power must be inextricably held together in the political arena, if they are to fulfill each other in society. This is precisely why it is essential to comprehend the vital relationship between nonviolence and love in his moral philosophy. It is in the dynamic interaction between these two aspects of King's thought that the depth and coherence of his Christian ethics come to light.

Nonviolence As Love in Action

In the third chapter of this work, a detailed exegesis of King's understanding of Christian love was presented, analyzing his tripartite distinction between eros, philia and agape. It was noted that King utilized the Greek language as a rhetorical tool to explain precisely what he meant by the term "love." Specifically, he sought to avoid any definition of love which was sentimental or founded purely upon emotion.

King did not give these detailed explanations of love, however, simply to relate the meaning of the term. His expositions on agapeic love are almost always set in the context of motivating his hearers, even in the midst of strenuous social conflict, to accept this kind of loving good will as the modus operandi of their actions. And this is important constantly to bear in mind.
King's discussions of Christian love, therefore, are actually admonitions to members of the community at large to be more loving in their dealings with others, especially in relating to potential adversaries. His Christian exegesis of agape is integrally related to the popular movement and call to action which he championed.48

The underlying, motivational character of King's writings and speeches, it should be stressed, is an essential aspect of his Christian ethics, for there is reflected in the apologetic intent of his work the important connection between thought and action in his moral philosophy. For King, nonviolence was both an effective strategy for eliminating racial discrimination and "a way of life"—the welding together of ethical precepts with a powerful method of social change.

The moral foundations of nonviolence and the tactics of civil resistance, therefore, are viewed by King as an integral whole.49 Philosophy and action, in his view, are bound together and never can be divorced from one another without very pejorative ethical consequences.50

Theory enlightens action, but only when it is practiced. Action gives concrete, existential meaning to theory, but only when it is guided by coherent purpose. For King, ultimately, theory and action are simply two facets of the same reality, each fulfilling the other in the sphere of ethical choice.51

This vital connection between thought and practice is especially significant when analyzing the meaning of agapeic love in King's moral philosophy. The Christian
ethic must be lived in a social context, he believed, for its full logic and inner coherence to be understood. 52 Agape, as a fundamental moral principle, would be no more than "meaningless abstraction," King says, if divorced from practical application, if separated from faithful social concern. 53 It is, therefore, in light of this emphasis on praxis that one must endeavor to understand the dynamic relationship between love and nonviolence in King's ethical philosophy.

In the second chapter of this work, it was pointed out that early in his academic career King questioned whether an ethic emphasizing agapeic good will could confront the recalcitrance of racial discrimination. But after being exposed to the writings of Mahatma Gandhi in a sermon by Mordecai Johnson, King began to rethink his ideas on the social power of Christian love. What fascinated King with Gandhi was the way in which the Mahatma had developed a method of protest revolving around a religious love ethic. He recounts:

Like most people, I had heard of Gandhi, but I had never studied him seriously. As I read I became deeply fascinated by his campaigns of nonviolent resistance....The whole concept of 'Satyagraha' (Satya is truth which equals love, and agraha is force; 'Satyagraha,' therefore, means truth-force or love force) was profoundly significant to me. As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi my skepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time its potency in the area of social reform. 54

From childhood King had had a deep commitment to Jesus' love ethic as a vital part of his personal faith, but he
believed that Gandhi had demonstrated the social applicability of Christian love, its power even in the political arena. King wrote:

Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale. Love for Gandhi was a potent instrument for social and collective transformation. It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking....I came to feel that this was the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.55

But King, of course, did not accept Gandhi's ideas per se, and this is important to appreciate. He translated the Mahatma's concept of satyagraha into Western categories and interpreted the "truth-force" or "love force" of which Gandhi spoke through the eyes of the Christian faith.

How did King arrive at such an interpretation? First, it must be said that Gandhian teaching lends itself to being understood from a Christian point of view. When reading his writings, one is struck by the broad, universal quality of his ideas, and the catholic character of the Mahatma's thinking opened his teaching to a wider, Western audience. This, of course, is not to diminish the importance of the Hindu and Jainist traditions to which Gandhi was heir. His writings, nonetheless, almost invite reinterpretation from various perspectives, and indeed one senses that the Mahatma probably would have responded favorably to King's restatement of his ideas on nonviolence.56
At times, King even could rely upon the language and power of expression employed by Gandhi, despite the vastly different cultural milieu out of which he spoke. A case in point is Gandhi's well-known recount of how the term "satyagraha" came to be coined. The Mahatma wrote:

Maganlal Gandhi...suggested the word 'sadagraha,' meaning 'firmness in a good cause.' I liked the word, but it did not fully represent the whole idea which I wished to connote. Therefore I corrected the term to 'satyagraha.' Satya (Truth) implies love; and Agraha (Firmness) serves as a synonym for Force. So I began to call the Indian movement 'satyagraha.' By this I meant the force which is born of Truth and Love. After this we gave up the use of the phrase, 'passive resistance,' altogether.57

King's ethical and theological interests in nonviolence were stimulated by the religio-ethical character of the Mahatma's thought and language. When King explained the meaning of Gandhian satyagraha in Stride Toward Freedom, he directly paraphrased this particular discussion of the term's etymology.58

Gandhi's positive interpretation of ahimsa also appealed to King's interest in morality and social change. For Gandhi, ahimsa was "not merely a negative state of harmlessness but...a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer."59 "Ahimsa," according to the Mahatma, "means Universal Love."60

It is not difficult to see why King found Gandhi's discussions of nonviolence very exciting intellectually. The universal character of the Mahatma's teaching appealed to King's own catholicity of thought, and the translation of his ideas into Christian and Western categories,
therefore, was quite natural for King. In much the same way that Gandhi utilized Western ideas to formulate his thinking on satyagraha, King incorporated into his Christian ethics salient aspects of Gandhian philosophy.

In *Stride Toward Freedom*, his first major work on nonviolence, King acknowledged his debt to the writings and example of Mahatma Gandhi, but he also wanted to make clear in this volume the Christian origins and motivations for the direct action campaign in Montgomery. A quote given in the "Introduction" of this work is worth repeating here, for it speaks directly to the relation between love and nonviolence in his mind:

"From the beginning a basic philosophy guided the movement. This guiding principle has since been referred to variously as nonviolent resistance, noncooperation, and passive resistance. But in the first days of the protest none of these expressions was mentioned; the phrase most often heard was 'Christian love.' It was the Sermon on the Mount, rather than a doctrine of passive resistance, that initially inspired the Negroes of Montgomery to dignified social action. It was Jesus of Nazareth that stirred the Negroes to protest with the creative weapon of love."

As the days of the Montgomery bus boycott unfolded, King asserts, the influence of India's great Mahatma became more and more apparent. But it is important to note the precise way Gandhian philosophy influenced King's thinking. Nonviolence, for King, was a means of implementing the doctrine of agapeic love through Gandhi's *technique* of direct action. This is why he argued that "Christ furnished the spirit and motivation, while Gandhi furnished the method." "Nonviolent resistance...emerged
as the technique of the movement," King said, and "love stood as the regulating ideal."63

It is also important to stress the special quality of love which, for King, was at the heart of the Montgomery movement. In his speeches and writings, King spent a great deal of time, during and after the bus boycott, explicating his careful distinction between eros, philia and agape, explaining precisely the character of love so fundamental to his conception of nonviolence. It is obvious in these discussions that evangelical theology, especially as articulated in theistic personalism, formed the foundation of King's moral philosophy and shaped his Christian concept of love.

Gandhi was not Martin Luther King's intellectual mentor, though the Mahatma's influence on his life certainly was considerable. Gandhi's life stood as a powerful symbol of love in action--love confronting the evil of oppression. His satyagraha crusades historically verified, in King's view, the power of good will in the social arena. Indeed, it was King's abiding belief in the ethic of agape which attracted him to Gandhian philosophy in the first place. He came to believe that through the strong resistance of nonviolence, regulated by the principle of unconditional love, racial discrimination could be defeated, and defeated by a moral means of social reform.64
The primary focus of this work has been the dynamic relationship between love and nonviolent resistance in Martin Luther King's thought, and one conclusion emerges with distinct clarity: It is impossible to comprehend King's moral philosophy as a whole or his conception of civil resistance without a clear understanding of his thinking on agape and nonviolence.

To be sure, the vital interaction between good will and political action stands at the heart of King's social philosophy. The religious character of his thought, moreover, and the pivotal place he occupies in American civil rights history makes King's synthesis between love and nonviolence of particular interest to the Christian ethicist.

It must be pointed out, however, despite his remarkable accomplishments, that certain weaknesses emerge in King's ethical thought, and it is important to be aware of these issues when analyzing his ideas on love and social action. Three general, yet significant, criticisms are presented here.

First, it must be said that King tended to talk about complex ethical issues in absolute, almost simplistic, terms. He tended, for example, to deny categorically the ethical legitimacy of violence. He was unequivocal in his moral condemnation of war and vociferous in his criticism of the Black Power movement. No doubt, such "moralizations" were effective rhetorical strategies in
his leadership of the civil rights movement. But sometimes King's tendency to cast social issues in absolute terms caused a lack of precision in his social ethics.

King, of course, was not interested in the creation of an ethical system. He was more concerned with motivating people to social action, and his expositions on nonviolence and love must be seen in the context of this vital concern.

Nonetheless, King never seems to appreciate the possibility that violence may be something other than retaliation. On the basis of the same moral values enunciated in his writings and speeches, it certainly would be possible to condone, though reluctantly, the use of certain forms of violence—such as sabotage, symbolic acts of property destruction, perhaps even the selective use of assassination. King, in other words, really never answered the substantive ethical claims of the just war theory, and this is why his absolute denial of violence as a legitimate agent of social change is confusing.

Perhaps in a different time and place King's denunciation of violence would not have been so categorical. One wonders, for example, if he actually would have advised Dietrich Bonhoeffer—who himself was very attracted to Christian pacifism and the writings of Gandhi—not to plot the assassination of Adolph Hitler. It is difficult to imagine King condemning Bonhoeffer's efforts to eliminate the tyranny of the Fuhrer.

Second, beyond his tendency to cast ethical ideas in
categorical terms, King left certain fundamental aspects of his moral philosophy essentially undeveloped. For example, he did not define adequately his understanding of moral law, though he often appealed to the metaphysical reality of immutable moral principles. King also believed deeply in the communal character of human existence and expressed great confidence in God's purposeful involvement in human history. But, again, these ideas do not receive substantive philosophical discussion in his writings and speeches.

On a number of important topics, King seems content simply to appeal to metaphysical principles in very broad and general terms. The idea of moral law, the communal character of existence and the reality of divine involvement in human life are all pivotal ideas in his social ethics, to be sure. Their treatment, however, remains primarily on the level of presupposition, without the formal philosophical structure to support King's claims.

Third, it should be noted that there is a kind of syncretic, uncritical character to King's writings and speeches. He often incorporates into his moral thought ideas from very diverse and sometimes even philosophically inconsistent sources.

King's published and unpublished works are punctuated with references to sources as varied as the writings of Gandhi, Thoreau, Niebuhr and Brightman—thinkers with whom he agreed only partially. And one wonders if he even was aware of the significant differences between his thought
and the thinking of those writers to whom he often alludes. No doubt, King's liberal catholicity of thought was part of his broad appeal. But his almost eclectic assimilation of diverse ideas into his Christian ethics leaves the impression, at times, that his social philosophy is uncritical and unhoned.65

These criticisms, though important to note, do not take away from King's unique and significant accomplishments. Indeed, if Jurgen Moltmann is right in saying that "the new criterion of theology and of faith is to be found in praxis,\(^66\) then King's synthesis of thought and action is even more remarkable. It is not in a systematic treatise that one encounters King's social ethics, but rather in the eloquence of praxis that he develops his moral philosophy. King passes the critical test of Moltmann's new criterion with distinction, and perhaps this is why Moltmann dedicated to Martin Luther King's memory the volume in which he argues for his new criterion of theology and faith.\(^67\)

King's philosophy of nonviolence is a valuable contribution to Christian ethics, a creative combination of religious thought and the nonviolent method of social change. King's moral philosophy represents an intentional synthesis between his ideas on Christian love, realistic approach to political power and emphasis on the need for justice in the social order. For him, nonviolent resistance meant strong remonstration against the ravages of racial discrimination, but he always contended that at
the heart of his understanding of nonviolence stood the ethic of love.68

King, of course, was not the first Western interpreter of Gandhian nonviolence to demonstrate its commensurability with the Christian idea of love.69 But King was the first American social reformer to restate the Mahatma's ethics with such popular appeal, to synthesize love and political action into a powerful mass movement. King's ostensibly Christian emphasis, moreover, was an integral part of his effective leadership in the civil rights movement—especially in black communities throughout the South. For King, nonviolence was a means of carrying the principle of Christian agape to its logical political conclusion.70

It is almost impossible to overstate the importance of this idea in King's moral philosophy. Agapeic love was the single most significant moral principle in his conception of nonviolence, and King's understanding and use of this technique of social change helped to give a concrete quality and practical depth to his thinking on the Christian ethic. Unconditional good will, as developed in his written works and carried out in Christian social action, was the sine qua non of King's moral philosophy. And it is in the vital interaction between love and nonviolence that the profundity of his thought comes to light.

For King, agapeic love was the ethical basis of Christian social concern, and he diligently sought to make nonviolence a form of love in action, love seeking to
correct that which stood against love. In his appeals for radical social change, therefore, King called for a method of reform which rejected vengeance and retaliation and pointed to the power of unconditional good will even in the political sphere.

Love as an ethical imperative derived its source and meaning, King believed, from the ontological presence of a loving, forgiving God. Such love was woven metaphysically into the very structures of reality itself and could be relied upon as a vital power in human life. But agape, though ultimate and metaphysical, was not, for King, abstract and detached. Love was as profound as moral reality and as concrete as the needs of one's neighbor.

King tested his theological ontology of love in the rigor of social action. He wrestled with the policies and procedures which would best implement nonviolent protest in a manner consistent with the Christian ethic. Agapeic love, he believed, must be lived out in human life if its full meaning and power is to be experienced. And this is why he often delineated the precise meaning of such love and why he constantly returned to the business of praxis.

Love for King, therefore, was real; love related to the whole of human life, including power and justice. He realized, moreover, that an emotional understanding of love could not cope with the calculations, tensions and conflicts of a pluralistic social order. But King took great care to ensure that the conception of love he propounded would not be misinterpreted as weak and sentimental emotion.
For King, that love which is unconditional and seeks the ideal of justice in the social sphere is not rendered impotent in the power political arena. Such love can calculate--indeed, is called to weigh ethical decisions in the critical balance of social analysis. Such love must stand against that which is unloving and seek to eradicate that which is unjust.

From his early days at Crozer Theological Seminary, King was interested in the vital interaction between morality and social change, the dynamic connection between power and love. His philosophy of nonviolence and active involvement in the civil rights movement developed out of his fascination with this very matter: How can Christian love work in the social arena? How can power be moral in its application?

King's insistence upon loving power and powerful love is one of the salient aspects of his thought and perhaps his most significant contribution to Christian ethics as a whole. He believed firmly that power political issues must be part of Christian social concern. But it was equally important, in his view, to assert the priority of redemptive good will in any campaign for social change. From Montgomery to Memphis, therefore, he sought to combine in his direct action crusades the Christian ethic of agape with an effective strategy of social reform.

King's early and untimely death prevented him from working out completely his ideas on love, justice and power. His was a life of controversy and action, without the luxury of being able to develop in detail the
intricacies of his ethics. But King's ideas on agapeic love and nonviolent resistance, nonetheless, capture the human imagination; his emphasis on good will and realistic social action inspires the human spirit. Martin Luther King stands as a powerful example of one who created a working synthesis of love in action. He took the Christian ethic utterly seriously and refused to close his eyes to the political and economic exploitation of his fellow human beings—black or white.

At the very beginning of this work, Karl Marx's well-known critique of philosophy, indelibly written on his grave in London, was quoted: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it." It is appropriate to end a study of Martin Luther King's ethics with this thought in mind. King's moral philosophy was not interpretation alone; his conception of nonviolence was a philosophy of praxis, a dynamic mode of thought oriented toward action and change.

But King was unwilling to emphasize social reform, as desperately as it was needed in the existential circumstances in which he worked, at the expense of moral integrity, and he was extremely critical of social thinkers such as Marx and Nietzsche who did not give ethical propriety its proper place. Perhaps more than any other person, King was responsible for the demise of racial segregation in America. Yet his clarion call for radical social change never failed to underscore the
importance of good will; his words and deeds always challenged the society of his day to take seriously the primacy of love. 73

FINIS
I. INTRODUCTION


4. Ibid., p. 62.

5. Ibid., p. 63.

6. Ibid., p. 62.

7. King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 84. It is interesting to note King's reference to the idea of love in a telegram to Governor Coleman of Mississippi. Initially, Coleman sent the following telegram to King asking him not to come to Mississippi: "The press reports that you are scheduled to address a public meeting in Jackson, Mississippi on Friday of this week. Mississippi has no intention now or hereafter of interfering with the constitutional rights of freedom of assembly and freedom of speech; yet I feel it my duty as Governor of Mississippi to inform you that conditions in our state are now more tranquil than at any time in recent months and in view of your record your appearance here will be a great
disservice to our Negro people. I trust you will reconsider and indefinitely postpone your visit." See: Telegram from J. P. Coleman, Governor of Mississippi, April 23, 1956 (Boston University: King Collection, II, 28). King responded the next day to Governor Coleman's correspondence: "Your telegram was received and contents have been noticed very scrutinizingly. First, I must say that I am not scheduled to speak in Jackson, Mississippi. When the invitation was extended, some months ago, I made it clear that I could not accept the invitation because of a previous commitment. However, if I had accepted the invitation I would feel it my moral responsibility to come to Mississippi in spite of your most cautious warning. You stated that in view of my record my coming to Mississippi would be a great injustice to the Negro people. I think if you would observe my record very carefully you would discover that it is more the record of a peacemaker than a peacebreaker. The most glaring thing appearing in my record is that I am concerned about achieving justice, fair play and equality for all people through legal and nonviolent methods. The philosophy undergirding my stand is deeply rooted in the Christian faith. I have stated more than once that in our struggle for justice that our weapon must be the weapon of love. Certainly I think the state of Mississippi could well profit from a gospel of love. That is the pivotal point around which my whole philosophy revolves and if I were coming to Mississippi I would be preaching such a gospel. I am quite gratified to learn, according to your telegram, that racial conditions are more peaceful in Mississippi than ever before. I would ask you to consider, however, that peace is not merely the absence of some negative force—tension, confusion, the murdering of Emmett Till, and the Reverend George Lee—but the presence of some positive force—love, justice, and good will." See: Martin Luther King, Jr., Telegram in reply to Governor J. P. Coleman of Mississippi, April 24, 1956 (Boston University: King Collection, II, 28).

8. Lerone Bennett, Jr., What Manner of Man: A Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, Inc., 1968), p. 82. Bennett wrote: "SCLC in its original call to battle reflected King's ideas, calling upon all Negroes, 'to assert their human dignity' by refusing 'further cooperation with evil.' 'But far beyond this,' the organization said, 'we call upon them to accept Christian love in full knowledge of its power to defy evil. We call upon them to understand that nonviolence is not a symbol of weakness or cowardice, but as Jesus demonstrated, non-violent resistance transforms weakness into strength and breeds courage in the face of danger.'" See: Ibid., emphasis Bennett's.

9. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Address to the War
Resister's League" (Boston University: King Collection, XVI, 15), p. 11.

10. See: Martin Luther King, Jr., "Charting our Course for the Future," Frogmore, South Carolina, May 29-31, 1967 (King Center, Atlanta: King Papers). The "Poor People's Campaign," planned as a massive march on Washington in 1968 (an event which King's untimely death prevented him from leading), is typical of this shift in emphasis in the program of the SCLC under his leadership late in life. King's move from an emphasis on civil rights to an emphasis on human rights caused him to begin to focus on the exploitation and injustice of poverty in American society.


12. During the last year of his life, King often spoke of the meaning of Christian love. For examples of where he emphasized again the meaning and importance of love see: Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Levels of Love," Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia, August 21, 1967 (King Center, Atlanta: King Papers); "Charting our Course for the Future:" The Trumpet of Conscience, pp. 87-90. For an explanation of why King called for civil disobedience in response to the deprivation of northern ghettos and the plight of southern poor, see: Martin Luther King, Jr., "A New Sense of Direction," Worldview XV (April 1972). In this article King once again affirmed his absolute allegiance to nonviolence and couched his commitment in the language of a marriage service.


II. PILGRIMAGE TO NONVIOLENCE

1. King gives two accounts of his "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence." The first and most extensive appears in Stride Toward Freedom. Another version appears in Strength to Love and is a slightly abbreviated and updated rendition of the same essay. See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 90-107; Strength to Love (Cleveland, Ohio: William Collins and World Publishing Co., 1963), pp. 147-155.

2. See: Stephen B. Oates, Let The Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr. (New York: Harper & Row,
Publishers, 1982), pp. 3-5, 14-15 and 17-20. Andrew Young has stated that it was Ebenezer Baptist Church which gave King his vision of economic and social justice. It was at Ebenezer that he heard the message of the Old Testament prophets preached. It was there that he heard even as a small child: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." See: Interview with Andrew Young, "CBS Morning News," June 14, 1983.


7. Ibid.


10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., pp. 18-21.


13. King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 91. Although the specific resistance Thoreau discusses in his essay on "Civil Disobedience" is nonviolent in character, his idea of noncooperation and philosophy of civil disobedience are not strictly speaking a theory of nonviolence. For example, Thoreau praised John Brown's famous violent attempt to capture the Federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry in 1859. See: Henry David Thoreau, "Plea for Captain John Brown," printed in Chronicles of Black Protest, ed. by


19. Ibid., p. 491.

20. Ibid., pp. 491-492.


22. Smith and Zepp, Search for the Beloved Community, p. 72.


26. Ibid., p. 93.

27. Ibid.


29. Ibid.

30. Ibid. Many scholars would disagree with the inference that Christianity is essentially a kind of philosophical idealism. King does not say that Christianity is a form of idealism, but this conclusion easily could be reached on the basis of his critique of Communism. One can observe in King's statements on Communism the strong influence of personalist philosophy, which has been identified as a brand of philosophical idealism. Compare: Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *Moral Laws* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1933; Kraus Reprint Co., 1969), pp. 284-286f.


32. King, *Strength to Love*, p. 98. Aspects of this issue will be taken up in a later chapter.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., pp. 98-99.

35. Often King employs the language of Kant's categorical imperative, arguing that "all men must be treated as ends and never as mere means." See: Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 97; emphasis King's.


38. King was reluctant to criticize all forms of capitalism, but he was critical of a "traditional," laissez-faire capitalism which did not deal with the problem of inequitable distribution. King believed that some forms of "modern" capitalism had overcome many (though certainly not all) of the problems of distribution. See: King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, pp. 93-95; also, *Strength to Love*, p. 102.

40. Ibid., pp. 102-103.
41. King, Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 92-95.
42. Ibid., p. 95.
43. Ibid., p. 92.
44. Ibid., p. 95.
45. Ibid., p. 96.
46. Ibid., p. 95.

49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., p. 96.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid., p. 97.
53. Ibid.


57. See: Smith and Zepp, Search for the Beloved Community, p. 31; also, Martin Luther King, Jr., "Reinhold Niebuhr's Ethical Dualism," May 9, 1952 (Boston University: King Collection, XV, 20); "Karl Barth's Conception of God," January 2, 1952 (Boston University: King Collection, XV, 20).

59. Niebuhr's doctrine of human nature also helped clarify King's criticism of pacifism. See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 97-99; also, Strength to Love, pp. 147-149.

60. King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 100.

61. Ibid. It is interesting to note that Brightman's personalism was one of the most important intellectual influences on Davis' theology. See: Smith and Zepp, Search for the Beloved Community, pp. 99-100.

62. John J. Ansbro in his Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Making of a Mind demonstrates the profound commensurability between the thinking of DeWolf and King and contends that DeWolf shaped King's thought in a major way. See: John J. Ansbro, Martin Luther King, Jr. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1982), pp. 9-10, 19-26 and 38f. DeWolf was in many ways a more orthodox theologian than Brightman and other personalists, and it is not surprising that he and King agreed on most major
theological issues. It is difficult, however, to name any ideas which King received directly and ostensibly from DeWolf. Because King was exposed to the teaching of George W. Davis during the early days of his theological education it is fair to say that Davis was the most seminal evangelical liberal in King's intellectual development. But DeWolf's importance must not be underestimated. His influence helped provide philosophical depth and clarity to many of King's traditional Christian beliefs.

63. Coretta Scott King, My Life With Martin Luther King, Jr., p. 101. This is not to imply that King always agreed with Brightman. Ervin Smith has demonstrated that King's thinking is more commensurate with L. Harold DeWolf (and others) on several key issues, despite his interest in Brightman. See: Ervin Smith, "The Role of Personalism in the Development of the Social Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr." (Ph.D. thesis, Northwestern University, 1976), pp. 51-133. No doubt King's interest in Brightman was stimulated, at least in part, by the celebrated status of Brightman as an American philosopher in King's day.


65. King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 100. King's Ph.D. thesis provides an interesting example of his adherence to personalistic thought. His thesis focused on a comparison and analysis of the conceptions of God held by Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman. King is critical of both of these theologians, and his criticisms revolve around his allegiance to theistic personalism. See: Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman" (Ph.D. thesis, Boston University, 1955).

66. Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Conception and Impression of Religion Drawn From Dr. Brightman's Book Entitled, A Philosophy of Religion" (Boston University: King Collection, XV, 14).
III. CONCEPTION OF LOVE


7. Personal interview with L. Harold DeWolf, Lakeland, Florida, May 27, 1981. DeWolf not only was King's major advisor at Boston University but a close confidant throughout his public ministry. Moreover, DeWolf participated as strategist and negotiator in some of King's civil rights campaigns and was one of the memorial speakers at his funeral.


9. Ibid. John Ansbro points out that King's idea of agape reflects the influence of George W. Davis and Harold DeWolf rather than simply adopting Nygren's conception per se. See: Ansbro, Martin Luther King, Jr., pp. 9-10. During his academic career, King wrote a formal essay which deals with Nygren's theological perspective; see: Martin Luther King, Jr., "Contemporary Continental Theology" (Boston University: King Collection, XV, 14). He also referred to Nygren's understanding of agape in an essay entitled: "A View of the Cross Possessing Biblical and Spiritual Justification" (Boston University: King Collection, XV, 14), pp. 4-5.


12. Ibid., p. 182.

13. Ibid., p. 31. Nygren seems to view agape through the optics of Nietzsche's radical assertion that the gospel is "a transvaluation of all ancient values," and he often quotes Nietzsche's statement approvingly. This theological perspective is the basis of his view that eros and agape are separate worlds. There are distinct differences between eros and agape, to be sure, but there are no grounds for Nygren setting up an almost inimical relationship between them; see: pp. 50 and 202.

14. Many exegetes believe this is a misreading of Jesus' command to love one's neighbor. Rudolf Bultmann writes: "It is...stupid to say...that a justifiable self-love, a necessary standard of self-respect, must precede love of neighbor, since the command runs 'love your neighbor as yourself.' Self-love is thus presupposed. Yes, it is indeed presupposed, but not as something which man needs to learn, which must be

15. Martin Luther King, Jr., Strength to Love (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1964), p. 69; hereafter, this printing will be referred to as: "Strength to Love (London)."


17. Ibid., p. 135; emphasis Fromm's.

18. Ibid., p. 134.

19. Ibid., p. 131.


21. Paul Tillich, for example, points to the ambiguity of the word "self-love," asserting that it has both pejorative and positive connotations. He prefers, for the sake of precision, to use the terms "self-affirmation," "selfishness" and "self-acceptance." See: Tillich, Love, Power and Justice, p. 34. For different reasons, Barth also questions the legitimacy of the term "self-love." A person cannot be both the subject and object of love at the same time. "Love must always have an opposite, an object....What we love--if we love at all--is always something else or someone else." See: Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, vol. 1/2, trans. by G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), p. 388. Like Bultmann, Barth sees no injunction for self-love in Jesus' command to love one's neighbor. Speaking of self-love he states: "God will never think of blowing on this fire, which is bright enough already." See: Ibid. Here Barth is reiterating Calvin's pejorative view of self-love. See: Ibid., pp. 387-388.
22. A number of Christian ethicists argue that some understanding of legitimate self-regard must be part of Christian ethics, even if only as a peripheral concern. Paul Ramsey writes: "...Some definition of legitimate concern for the self must be given, even if only as a secondary and derivative part of Christian ethics. For certainly as a part of vocational service grounded in Christian love for neighbor, an individual has great responsibility for the development and use of all his natural capacities, or else he takes responsibility for rashly throwing them away." See: Paul Ramsey, Basic Christian Ethics (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1953), pp. 159f. For a thorough discussion of the theological legitimacy of self-love, see: M. C. D'Arcy, The Mind and Heart of Love: A Study in Eros and Agape, second rev. ed. (London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1954); see also: Outka, Agape: An Ethical Analysis, pp. 55-74.

23. King, Strength to Love (London), p. 69. It is interesting to note that King speaks of "potential powers" within the self, rather than a "divine spark" or "essence." For King, a person's creative powers must be understood in the context of Christian stewardship, not the personal salvation of the soul in any Platonic sense. Unlike Plato, salvation, for King, is not achieved through the soul's ascent.


25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., p. 71.


31. King's understanding of philia is consistent with the New Testament sense of the word, though by the Koine period some of the original strength of the term had been lost. See: Kittel and Friedrich, editors, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, s.v. "phileo."


36. Ibid., p. 8.


38. Matthew 5:44.

39. King, "The Power of Non-Violence," p. 8. This question is not just an intellectual query, for King, but an existential problem, and his struggle with this dilemma can be traced back to his early childhood. In "An Autobiography of Religious Development," King relates the story of his first conscious encounter with segregation—an incident which made him aware of the cruel fact of racial prejudice. In this context he relates how his parents' emphasis on love as a Christian duty left an indelible impression upon him. When King asks in later life "How can one love one's enemy?" it reflects the dilemma of an earlier struggle. See: Martin Luther King, Jr., "An Autobiography of Religious Development" (Boston University: King Collection, XIV, 22). It is interesting to note Howard Thurman's discussion of the love of enemy in Jesus and the Disinherited. King read (or re-read) this book while engaged in the Montgomery bus boycott. Compare: Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), pp. 91-97. See also: Bennett, *What Manner of Man*, p. 74.


41. Ibid.


44. Ibid.


46. King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 104. It should be pointed out that King insists the human being must be seen as a whole entity. He is critical of any attempt to divide human personality into distinct "parts." The "will" for him is simply the volitional, decision-making properties of the human being. See: King, *Where Do We Go From Here?*, pp. 97-98. This stress on love being firmly
rooted in the will does not mean that love is unemotional nor is it to say that love is hostile to sentiment. King simply did not believe that love is contingent upon an emotion. There is, therefore, a kind of dialectical tension between love and feeling. "For Jesus...love is a matter of will and action." Yet, this calls for a commitment of one's whole self. Indeed, love entails "a glowing passion for God...." See: Kittel and Friedrich, editors, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, s.v. "agape."

47. Professor L. Harold DeWolf has written: "Love is less a matter of feeling than of intention, less of glandular activity than of purpose." See: L. Harold DeWolf, Responsible Freedom: Guidelines to Christian Action (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), p. 109. The New Testament scholar C. H. Dodd insists that agape "is not primarily an emotion or an affection; it is primarily an active determination of the will. That is why it can be commanded, as feelings cannot." See: C. H. Dodd, Gospel and Law: The Relation of Faith and Ethics in Early Christianity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. 42. Reinhold Niebuhr writes: "The ideal of love is...first of all a commandment which appeals to the will." See: Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, p. 216. Barth relates this idea to the character of divine love. God's love is not primarily an emotion or disposition but "an act which God has willed and executed with all the energy of the crucifixion. It is this act which is the basis, the creative model, of true human love. If the latter is its imitation, it too is an act, ...the act of the whole man." See: Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, vol. IV/2, p. 786. Tillich states: "Either love is something other than emotion or the Great Commandment is meaningless." See: Tillich, Love, Power and Justice, p. 4.


49. King, Strength to Love, p. 27.

50. Ibid., p. 29.

51. Ibid., pp. 31-32.

52. Ibid., p. 35.

53. King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 104. This aspect of King's thought is strongly parallel to Paul Ramsey's thinking on the same subject. Although he does not refer
to Ramsey, a few of King's key phrases are direct quotations from Ramsey's Basic Christian Ethics. Compare: Ramsey, Basic Christian Ethics, pp. 92-96.

54. King, "Love, Law and Civil Disobedience," p. 5. Barth says: "In agape-love a man gives himself to the other with no expectation of a return, in a pure venture, even at the risk of ingratitude, of his refusal to make a response of love...." See: Barth, Church Dogmatics, vol. IV/2, p. 745.


56. Ibid.

57. Ibid. It should be noted that King believed agape had a firm "ground" and was profoundly "motivated." His point here is to stress that Christian love is not founded upon the "loveliness" of the person loved. Much of King's thought on the "unmotivated" quality of agape is commensurate with Nygren's discussion of "The Content of the Idea of Agape." King uses many of the same terms and concepts as Nygren to convey the meaning of Christian love. Compare: Nygren, Agape and Eros, pp. 75-81.


59. King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 104; emphasis King's.


61. King, "An Experiment in Love," p. 16; emphasis King's.

62. King, Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 104-105. Compare: Ramsey, Basic Christian Ethics, pp. 158-159; see also: Kierkegaard, Works of Love, pp. 129f. To emphasize this point, King draws attention again to the example of the good Samaritan. The agapeic character of the Samaritan's act lay in his willingness to respond to the human need with which he was presented. See: King, "An Experiment in Love," p. 16.

64. Romans 5:8; see also, King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 105.


66. Ibid., p. 52.

67. Ibid., p. 45.

68. King, The Trumpet of Conscience, p. 89.

69. See: King, "The Levels of Love." This sermon discussed the different types of love in an unique manner compared with King's other writings. He, nonetheless, reaches the same basic conclusions. One should note also that there are significant differences in King's and Tillich's conceptions of love. Tillich does not wholly embrace the idea of a personal God, yet he wishes to speak of God as love. King is highly critical of this dimension of Tillich's thought—what he sees as a philosophically inconsistent theism. King writes: "...Tillich speaks of God as love. But on closer scrutiny we discover that love, for Tillich, is just the dialectical principle of the union of opposites. Tillich's use of the word love...reminds one of the love (and strife) of Empodocles, who meant by 'love' no more than the attraction of the elements for one another." See: King, "A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman," p. 158. King's criticism notwithstanding, there are definite parallels between how he and Tillich portray the relation between eros, philia and agape.

70. Ibid., pp. 148-149; see also, Paul Tillich, Love, Power and Justice, p. 5.


72. King describes eros as "a beautiful type of love" and philia as "a vital, valuable love." See: King, "Love, Law and Civil Disobedience," p. 5; and, "The Power of Non-Violence," p. 9, respectively.

73. Kierkegaard insists that God must be the center of any understanding of love. He writes: "Worldly wisdom believes that love is a relationship between man and man; Christianity teaches that love is a relationship between man-God-man, that is, that God is the middle term." See: Kierkegaard, Works of Love, p. 87; emphasis Kierkegaard's. King's radical theism is also evident when dealing with other subjects, such as the theological basis.
of any legitimate understanding of ethics. He states: "Any religion that is completely earthbound sells its birthright for a mess of naturalistic pottage. Religion, at its best, deals not only with man's preliminary concerns but with his inescapable ultimate concern. When religion overlooks this basic fact, it is reduced to a mere ethical system in which eternity is absorbed into time and God is relegated to a sort of meaningless figment of the human imagination." See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 36.

74. King, "Address at the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom."

75. King, Strength to Love, p. 83. Clearly, the source of King's understanding of the character of God is the Christian tradition, and he identified the source of his thinking as firmly rooted in his family and upbringing. In an essay he wrote for a course in "The Religious Development of Personality," King relates the quality of the homelife in which he was reared to his theological perspective: "It is quite easy for me to think of a God of love mainly because I grew up with a family where love was central and loving relationships were ever present. It is quite easy for me to think of the universe as basically friendly mainly because of my uplifting heredity and environmental circumstances. It was quite easy for me to lean more toward optimism than pessimism about human nature mainly because of my childhood experiences. It is impossible to get at the roots of one's religious attitudes without taking in account the psychological and historical factors that play upon the individual. So that the above biographical factors are absolutely necessary in understanding my religious development." See: King, "An Autobiography of Religious Development," pp. 6-7. This illustrates the profound influence King's family had on his later development. He believed in a God of love because of the emphasis placed on this reality in his homelife and the quality of life he found in his family.

76. King, Strength to Love, p. 90.

77. Ibid., p. 15.

78. Ibid., p. 16.

79. Ibid.

80. For examples of ways in which King employs this dialectical method, see: King, Strength to Love, pp. 9, 103 and 148-149; see also: L. Harold DeWolf, "Martin Luther King, Jr., As Theologian," unpublished essay, p. 11; Chapter Two of this work, "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence."

82. Ibid., p. 16. In his article, "Love, Justice and the Non-Violent Movement," James Sellers is critical of King's depreciation of God's demand for justice and the "sloganizing" of love as a "technique." But Sellers oversimplifies much of King's theology, and on several key issues completely misreads King. Although much of Seller's criticism is an accurate critique of liberal theology, his analysis fails to penetrate to the heart of King's evangelical brand of liberal thought. King never subordinates the importance of God's demand for justice, nor does he render love as merely a technique. He expressly emphasizes the importance of the Bible's stress on both the radical righteousness and eternal mercy inherent in God's character. See: James E. Sellers, "Love, Justice, and the Non-Violent Movement," Theology Today XVIII, 4 (January 1962), pp. 422-434.

83. King, Strength to Love, p. 146.


85. King, Strength to Love, p. 39. King intentionally links the cross to the character of agapeic love when he relates the cross to Jesus' excessive altruism. "His altruism was excessive," he writes, "for he chose to die on Calvary, history's most magnificent expression of obedience." See: Ibid., p. 35.

86. Ibid., p. 39; compare: Romans 12:21.


88. King, Strength to Love, p. 120.

89. Ibid., pp. 45-46.


91. This issue will be discussed again later in this work. See the section on "Creative Suffering" in Chapter Five.
92. Reinhold Niebuhr points to forgiving love as the "crown of Christian ethics," for it is the most difficult of moral achievements. "In it the whole genius of prophetic religion is expressed." Love as forgiveness manifests the transcendent quality of Christian love. See: Niebuhr, "Love as Forgiveness," An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, pp. 223f.

93. King, Strength to Love, p. 36.


95. King, Strength to Love, p. 38.

96. Ibid., p. 43; emphasis mine.

97. Ibid., p. 48.


99. King, Strength to Love, p. 48; emphasis mine.

100. Ibid., pp. 48-49.

101. Ibid., p. 49.

102. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Beyond Vietnam," United States, House, 90th Cong., 2nd sess., April 9, 1968, Congressional Record, CXIV, p. 9394; emphasis mine. See also, I John 4:7f. The text from I John reads slightly differently from its rendering in "Beyond Vietnam."

103. King, "Beyond Vietnam," Congressional Record, p. 9394. James P. Hanigan is critical of King's conception of love because "in his understanding of love there is simply no metaphysical basis." Hanigan asserts that love is only an instrument for King, i.e., a means rather than an end. Although King does speak of the instrumentality of love, as we shall see later, it is inaccurate to claim his understanding of love has no metaphysical basis. Indeed, the foundation of his understanding of love's instrumentality is the metaphysical assertion that God is love. For King, "love is the most durable power" because it is firmly rooted in the power and nature of the One who creates, sustains and redeems the world. See: Hanigan, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Ethics of Militant Nonviolence," pp. 70f.


105. King, Strength to Love, p. 145. Elsewhere King
expressly betrays his personalism by speaking of personality as the "clue to the meaning of ultimate reality." These are only two ways of saying the same thing. King was attracted to the theistic personalism of Edgar S. Brightman and L. Harold DeWolf because it established in concrete philosophic terms the existence of a personal God. King's identification of the biblical idea of God as love and the metaphysical conception of God as personality, articulated by Brightman and DeWolf, is a natural step and accurately expresses the implications of I John 4:8. Commenting on the personal character of God as portrayed by the writer of I John, C. H. Dodd writes: "...If the characteristic divine activity is that of loving, then God must be personal, for we cannot be loved by an abstraction, or by anything less than a person." See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 100; also, C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1946), pp. 109-110.


107. King writes: "We are potential sons of God. Through love that potentiality becomes actuality. We must love our enemies, because only by loving them can we know God and experience the beauty of his holiness." See: King, Strength to Love, p. 53.

108. Ibid., p. 146.

109. It is difficult to understand why Joseph Washington claims that "King has come to understand love through the syncretistical religion of Gandhi. His philosophy has led him to see Jesus of Nazareth as a man who taught love in his Sermon on the Mount. King did not come to love or to Jesus through the eyes of the Christian faith." Although Gandhi profoundly influenced King's conception of love by demonstrating its power and social practice in a concrete historical context, the New Testament remained the touchstone of King's thought throughout his life. It is truer to say that King came to Gandhi through the eyes of the Christian faith. See: Joseph R. Washington, Jr., Black Religion: The Negro and Christianity in the United States (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 11.


111. Ibid., p. 11.

112. In his classic Works of Love, Kierkegaard develops a poignant image which expresses the integral way love is tied to the character of God for its existence. He writes: "Love's secret life is in the heart, unfathomable,
and it also has an unfathomable connection with the whole of existence. As the peaceful lake is grounded deep in the hidden spring which no eye can see, so a man's love is grounded even deeper in the love of God. If there were at bottom no wellspring, if God were not love, then there would be no quiet lake or human love. As the quiet lake is grounded darkly in the deep spring, so is human love mysteriously grounded in God's love." See: Kierkegaard, Works of Love, p. 8.

113. King, The Trumpet of Conscience, p. 88. Ira Zepp is critical of King's associating agape with the liberal notion of the infinite value of the human soul and thereby diluting the radical biblical idea that human worth is only theologically tenable in terms of human relatedness to God. But this is a misreading of King's intent. Though King embraces a brand of the liberal doctrine of the inherent value of human personality, he expressly states: "Human worth lies in relatedness to God." Moreover, King never speaks of human worth as the motivation for loving one's neighbor, nor does he speak of human worth as the reason for God's love. Indeed, he asserts that love is not motivated by some idea of a "divine spark" possessed by the individual. King names two motivations for love. At times he says, "when we rise to love on the agape level we love men...because God loves us." Elsewhere King says, "when you rise to love on this level, you love all men...because God loves them." Agapeic love is, therefore, a bifocal recognition of God's love for the neighbor and oneself. As a response of profound gratitude, one loves one's neighbor because God loves the neighbor. See: Ira G. Zepp, Jr., "The Intellectual Sources of the Ethical Thought of Martin Luther King, Jr., As Traced in His Writings with Special Reference to the Beloved Community" (Ph.D. thesis, St. Mary's Seminary and University, 1973), p. 147; Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Ethical Demands of Integration," Religion and Race, May 1963, p. 4; "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," pp. 30-31, respectively; emphases mine.


115. King, Strength to Love, p. 122; emphasis mine.

116. Ibid., p. 39.

117. Ibid., p. 122.

118. Ibid., p. 146.


120. King, Strength to Love, p. 122.
121. King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 107. Ervin Smith discusses this idea as one of the personalist strains in King's thought. See: Smith, "The Role of Personalism in the Development of the Social Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.," p. 60.

122. King, "Beyond Vietnam," Congressional Record, p. 9394. Much of the language which King uses to discuss this aspect of love is similar to Tillich's depiction of love, but as discussed earlier, King's critical analysis of Tillich's conception of God made him uncomfortable with Tillich's understanding of love. King cites Erich Fromm's The Art of Loving as one of the sources of his understanding of love as an unifying principle. See: Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Knock at Midnight," cited in Keele, "A Burkeian Analysis of the Rhetorical Strategies of Martin Luther King," esp. p. 309; compare, Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving (New York: Perennial Library, 1974), pp. 6-69.

123. Smith and Zepp, Search for the Beloved Community, p. 64.


125. Outka, Agape: An Ethical Analysis, p. 42.


127. Ibid.


129. King, Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 105-106. Walter Rauschenbusch, one of the theologians who heavily influenced King's thought, writes: "The fundamental virtue in the ethics of Jesus was love, because love is the society-making quality. Human life originates in love. It is love that holds together the basal human organization, the family. The physical expression of all love and friendship is the desire to get together and be together. Love creates fellowship... Love with Jesus was
not a flickering and wayward emotion, but the highest and most steadfast energy of a will bent on creating fellowship." See: Rauschenbusch, Christianity and the Social Crisis, pp. 67-68.

130. Smith and Zepp claim that the concept of the beloved community is the "capstone" of King's thinking, and the "organizing principle of all" his thought and activity. Though they accurately point to an important aspect of King's thought, Smith and Zepp perhaps overemphasize this metaphor in King's writings. It is difficult to defend the assertion that the "beloved community" is the "organizing principle of all of King's thought and activity" when this motif receives little development in King's writings as to its precise meaning. He never even cites Josiah Royce who coined the phrase. The beloved community is, rather, a metaphor for King which points to the communal dimensions of love. See: Smith and Zepp, Search for the Beloved Community, pp. 119-140; also, Josiah Royce, The Problem of Christianity (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968; originally published in 1918).

132. Ibid.
133. Ibid.
134. King, Strength to Love, p. 52.
137. Ibid., p. 53.
138. Ibid.
140. King, Strength to Love, p. 52.
141. Ibid., p. 34.
142. Ibid., p. 143. King's statement: "Let no man pull you so low that you hate him" is attributed to Booker T. Washington and is a phrase King is fond of quoting. See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 106.
143. Martin Luther King, Jr., Why We Can't Wait (New York: The New American Libraries, Inc., 1964), p. 62; see also, Carl T. Rowan, "Martin Luther King's Tragic
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144. "Interview with Martin Luther King," Playboy XII (January 1965), p. 68; emphasis mine.


IV. NONVIOLENCE IN PERSPECTIVE

1. Late in his civil rights career, King began to think creatively about how to apply nonviolent social change to other areas of social concern. Poverty and the problem of war were especially pressing issues in his mind and often he spoke against what he believed to be the three great evils of his day—racism, poverty and war. See: Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Quest for Peace and Justice," Lecture to the Nobel Academy, Oslo, Norway, December 11, 1964 (King Center, Atlanta: King Papers); "The Three Evils of Society," August 31, 1967 (King Center, Atlanta: King Papers). Less than a year before his death, King stated at a staff retreat for the SCLC: "I think it is necessary for us to realize that we have moved from the era of civil rights to the era of human rights. You see when we think of civil rights we are referring to those rights that are clearly defined by the Constitution. The denial of those rights can be dealt with by going into court, by demonstrating to dramatize the denial, or by an Executive Order from the President of the United States who has the authority and the responsibility to enforce and implement all of the edicts of the Constitution of our nation. But when you deal with human rights, you are not dealing with something clearly defined in the Constitution. They are rights that are clearly defined by the mandates of a humanitarian concern. ...Although the Constitution guarantees the right to vote, it does not guarantee the right to an adequate livable income. Although the Constitution guarantees the right to have access to public accommodations, it is not clearly stated in the Constitution that a man must have a decent sanitary house in which to live. Although the Constitution guarantees the right to attend an integrated school, it does not guarantee that that school will be filled with quality. So we are dealing now with issues that are in the realm of human rights. We are talking about a good, solid, well-paying job. We are talking about a good, sound, sanitary house. We are talking not merely about desegregated education, but we are talking about quality..."
education." See: King, "Charting our Course for the Future," pp. 2-3. This statement reflects the breadth and universality of King's social concern. The brevity of his career, however, did not allow the working out of comprehensive programs in areas other than civil rights. Though King often denounced the inequitable distribution of wealth in America, spoke against the nuclear arms race, criticized the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War and spoke out on other controversial social issues, racial discrimination and the winning of civil rights for black people were overwhelmingly his most vital concerns and the only social issue for which King systematically worked out a strategy of nonviolent resistance.


6. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Out of Segregation's Long Night: An Interpretation of a Racial Crisis," Churchman CLXXII (February 1958), p. 7. One must be careful, however, not to overstate black acquiescence. There is much historical evidence to support that black Americans did not develop a "pure" acquiescence as a result of slavery. Furthermore, there were numerous slave revolts from the very beginning of American slavery until 1864. C. Eric Lincoln has described the subtle yet significant forms of protest adopted by American slaves: "Some writers of the early nineteenth century refer to the impossibility of forcing the Negro slaves to work to capacity, except when working for themselves. In the fields, they had to be watched constantly and supervised by the plantation overseer. Yet, when Negroes cultivated their own land or were working toward buying their own or a relative's freedom, their efficiency often surprised slaveholders. Malingering, or feigning sickness, was a favorite device..."
used by the slave to avoid working the white man's fields. Petty sabotage in the form of breaking and misusing tools or laming animals, and more serious acts such as arson and poisoning, were further evidence of the Negro's protest against servitude." See: C. Eric Lincoln, The Negro Pilgrimage in America, revised ed. (New York: Bantam Pathfinder Books, 1969), pp. 26-31; see also, Bradford Chambers, ed., Chronicles of Black Protest (New York: Mentor Books, 1968).

7. King, "Non-violence the Only Way," p. 54. Elsewhere King writes: "There is such a thing as the freedom of exhaustion. Some people are so worn down by the yoke of oppression that they give up. A few years ago in the slum areas of Atlanta, a Negro guitarist used to sing almost daily: 'Ben down so long that down don't bother me.' This is the type of negative freedom and resignation that often engulfs the life of the oppressed." See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 212.


11. King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 202. In an address to a predominantly black audience King states: "If you fail to act now, history will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people." See: Martin Luther King, Jr., Annual Address at the Fourth Anniversary of the Montgomery Improvement Association, December 3, 1959.
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(Boston University: King Collection, I, 11), p. 13; emphasis mine.

12. King, "Non-violence the Only Way," p. 55; compare: Stride Toward Freedom, p. 212. Elsewhere King writes: "To co-operate passively with an unjust system makes the oppressed as evil as the oppressor." See: King, Strength to Love, p. 92. King's views on noncooperation as a moral imperative will be discussed in the next chapter.


17. Martin Luther King, Jr., Address in Accepting the Social Justice Award of the Religion and Labor Foundation, Inc., April 24, 1957 (Boston University: King Collection, I, 11), p. 3.


19. Ibid.; see also, "The Case Against 'Tokenism,'" New York Times Magazine, August 5, 1962, p. 53. King writes: "The crisis [in race relations] has been precipitated...by the radical change in the Negro's evaluation of himself. There would probably be no crisis in race relations if the Negro continued to think of himself in inferior terms and patiently accepted injustice and exploitation. But it is at this very point that the change has come. For many years the Negro tacitly accepted segregation. He was the victim of stagnant passivity and deadening complacency. The system of slavery and segregation caused many Negros to feel that perhaps they were inferior. This is the ultimate tragedy of segregation. It not only harms one
physically, but it injures one spiritually. But through the forces of history something happened to the Negro. He came to feel that he was somebody. He came to feel that the important thing about a man is not the color of his skin or the texture of his hair, but the texture and quality of his soul. So there has been a revolutionary change in the Negro's evaluation of his nature and destiny, and a determination to achieve freedom and human dignity. See: King, "Out of Segregation's Long Night," p. 7. Elsewhere King states: "Then something happened to the Negro. The Negro masses began to re-evaluate themselves. They came to feel that they were somebody. Their religion revealed to them that God loves all of his children, and that the important thing about a man 'is not his specificity but his fundamentum,' not the texture of his hair or the color of his skin, but the texture and quality of his soul." See: Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Realistic Look at the Question of Progress in the Area of Race Relations," Address at the Second Anniversary of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, New York, May 17, 1951 (Boston University: King Collection, I, 32), p. 3.

20. King, "The Case Against 'Tokenism,'" p. 11; emphasis King's.


23. "Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi," Negro History Bulletin XXXI (May 1968), p. 5. Elsewhere King states: "In the final analysis integration will become a reality in America only when enough people come to believe that it is morally right and are willing to work passionately for its fulfillment." See: Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at the Public Meeting of Mississippi Christian Leadership Conference, September 23, 1959 (Boston University: King Collection, XVI, 11).

24. It is important to note that King viewed racial riots and other forms of violence precipitated by frustrated members of the black community as retaliatory or reactive in nature. Such acts were retaliations against the "violence" of racial discrimination and economic deprivation. See: Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Violence of Poverty," New York Amsterdam News, January 1,
1966 (King Center, Atlanta: King Papers). He asserts: "It is incontestable and deplorable that Negroes have committed crimes; but they are derivative crimes. They are born of the greater crimes of white society." See: Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Crisis in America's Cities," Atlanta, Georgia, August 15, 1967 (King Center, Atlanta: King Papers), p. 1; emphasis mine. Compare: King, "A New Sense of Direction," pp. 6-8; "A Testament of Hope," Playboy XVI (January 1969), pp. 233 and 236.


26. When King speaks of violence as "impractical" he means that retaliatory violence as a program for social change does not produce desired results in the long view. Violence is not totally ineffectual. But it is not effective in facilitating the goal of a reconciled, integrated community. Hence, King denounces violence as "impractical." See also the section on "Moral Coherence" in the fifth chapter of this work.


28. King often describes the racial problem as "America's greatest moral dilemma," a phrase which he borrowed from Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal. See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 205; Where Do We Go From Here?, pp. 83-96. In this regard King also often quotes with favor President John F. Kennedy: "We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the Scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution...Those who do nothing are inviting shame as well as violence. Those who act boldly are recognizing right as well as reality." See: King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 32.

29. Building the ethical foundation for what has come to be known as the "just war" theory, Augustine wrote: "If it is supposed that God could not enjoin warfare, because...it was said by the Lord Jesus Christ, 'I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but if any one strike thee on the right cheek, turn to him the left also,' the answer is, that what is here required is not a bodily action, but an inward disposition." See: "Reply to Faustus The Manichean," Book XXII, 76, printed in The Works of Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, vol. V, ed. by Marcus Dods, trans. by Richard Stothert (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1872) p. 465.


42. Ibid.; see also, "Interview With Martin Luther King," Playboy, p. 74. King's thinking on the relationship between ends and means in the philosophy of nonviolence will be discussed in the next chapter.

43. "Interview With Martin Luther King," Playboy,
p. 74; emphasis King's.


46. Ibid.


48. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Advice For Living," Ebony XIII (December 1957), p. 120. Often in this regard King quotes President John F. Kennedy's celebrated statement: "Mankind must put an end to war, or war will put an end to mankind." See: King, "Role of the Behavioral Scientist in the Civil Rights Movement," p. 11.

49. It should be noted that even King's views on the Vietnam War were deeply influenced by his concern for civil rights. He points out that black soldiers make up a disproportionate number of the front-line troops. The war, in his view, drained the United States' economy of vital resources which could be used for domestic programs. King even cites the war in Vietnam as one of the causes of black discontent and rioting (1965-1967). See: King, The Trumpet of Conscience, pp. 17-19; see also: "Beyond Vietnam," Congressional Record, pp. 9391-9395.

50. King, "The Social Organization of Nonviolence," pp. 5-6; "Nonviolence: The Only Road To Freedom," pp. 29-30. King allowed for self-defense in a broad sense, but he remained skeptical as to the effectiveness or practicality of violence--even defensive violence--bringing greater protection under the law for black people. He argued, therefore, that "self-defense" in a civil rights context must be viewed from a broader perspective.

51. King, "The Social Organization of Nonviolence," p. 6. King also argues that the right of self-defense is already enshrined in the United States Constitution and upheld even in some of the most racially segregated areas of the South. See: King, "Nonviolence: The Only Road To Freedom," p. 29.

52. "Meet the Press," Sunday, August 21, 1966, United States, Senate, 89th Cong., 2nd sess., August 29, 1966, Congressional Record, CXII, p. 21097. Elsewhere King writes: "...It is extremely dangerous to organize a movement around self-defense. The line between defensive violence and aggressive or retaliatory violence is a fine
line indeed. When violence is tolerated even as a means of self-defense there is grave danger that in the fervor of emotion the main fight will be lost over the question of self-defense." See: King, "Nonviolence: The Only Road To Freedom," p. 29. By "main fight" King is referring to the struggle for full civil rights. He was afraid that talk of defensive violence would be counter-productive in achieving this greater goal.

53. Gandhi also spoke of self-defense in a wider sense. He wrote: "For self-defence, I would restore the spiritual culture. The best and most lasting self-defence is self-purification. I refuse to be lifted off my feet because of the scares that haunt us today. If Hindus would but believe in themselves and work in accordance with their traditions, they will have no reason to fear bullying." See: Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance, p. 50; compare, King, "A Testament of Hope," p. 233; "Nonviolence: The Only Road To Freedom," pp. 29-30.

54. See: King, Where Do We Go From Here?, pp. 55 and 26-27.

55. King, "Nonviolence: The Only Road To Freedom," p. 29.

56. King writes: "Two things are clear to me, and I hope they are clear to white liberals. One is that the Negro cannot achieve emancipation through violent rebellion. The other is that the Negro cannot achieve emancipation by passively waiting for the white race voluntarily to grant it to him. The Negro has not gained a single right in America without persistent pressure and agitation." See: King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 90.

57. Ibid., p. 129; see also: Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 213-215. Reinhold Niebuhr asserted that nonviolent resistance was probably the only realistic option open to black people in the United States to achieve full citizenship under the law. In 1932 he wrote: "The emancipation of the Negro race in America probably waits upon the adequate development of this kind of social and political strategy. It is hopeless for the Negro to expect complete emancipation from the menial social and economic position into which the white man has forced him, merely by trusting in the moral sense of the white race. It is equally hopeless to attempt emancipation through violent rebellion." See: Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), p. 252. No doubt King reflected upon Niebuhr's prophetic words when he first read them as a student at Crozer Theological Seminary.
58. King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 86-87. It is interesting to note that King wrestled with this same tension between militancy and moderation in preparation for the speech he made initiating the Montgomery bus boycott. See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 59-60.

59. King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 64; see also, p. 17.

60. King, "The Case Against 'Tokenism,'" p. 52.


63. King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 89.

64. Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance, p. 59.


66. King uses the phrase "passive resistance" infrequently as a synonym for nonviolent resistance. He says the phrase is confusing for it connotes that nonviolence is a "do-nothing" method of protest, and nothing, in his view, could be further from the truth. See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 102 and 221-222; also, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 184. Gandhi also expressed ambivalence about the phrase "passive resistance," especially late in life, calling it a "misnomer." He wrote: "Non-violence is an intensely active force when properly understood and used." "Passive resistance is a misnomer for non-violent resistance. It is much more active than violent resistance. It is direct, ceaseless...." See: M. K. Gandhi, Non-Violence in Peace and War, vol. I, third ed. (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1948), pp. 129 and 128-129, respectively; see also, p. 113. Elsewhere Gandhi stated: "Non-co-operation is not a passive state, it is an intensely active state--more active than physical resistance or violence. Passive resistance is a misnomer." See: Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance, pp. 161-162. However, Gandhi often was inexact in his use of the phrase "passive resistance," using it synonymously with satyagraha. Compare: Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance, pp. 3, 17, 35, 51-55, 358. It is important to note that neither King nor Gandhi understood nonviolence to be passive or nonassertive in character.
67. King, "Facing The Challenge of a New Age," p. 31; Why We Can't Wait, p. 86; "The Case Against 'Tokenism,'" p. 56.

68. King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 28.

69. Martin Luther King, Jr., "This is a Great Time To Be Alive" (Boston University: King Collection, XVI, 17), p. 1.

70. King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 59; emphasis mine.


V. TOWARD A CHRISTIAN MORAL PHILOSOPHY


2. It should be noted that the praxis of nonviolent resistance will be discussed in Chapter Six, and the integral relationship between nonviolence and Christian love will be developed in more detail in Chapter Seven.


4. See: King, "The Rising Tide of Racial Consciousness," p. 11; "Out of Segregation's Long Night," p. 15; "The Current Crisis in Race Relations," p. 9. Compare Gandhi's assertion: "Ahimsa is not the way of the timid or cowardly. It is the way of the brave...." See: Gandhi, Non-Violence in Peace and War, vol. I, p. 76. King's strong criticism of nonresistance or passive acquiescence was founded upon his stress on the importance of moral courage. See: Chapter Four of this work.

Toward Freedom, p. 102.


13. Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at the Freedom Fund Report Dinner, NAACP, 53rd Annual Convention, July 5, 1962 (Boston University: King Collection, I, 11), p. 11; Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 212 and 221-222. It is significant to note that King viewed civil protest as a fundamental American right secured by the Constitution. He is also fond of citing historical examples of civil disobedience, seeking to show that there is a long tradition for this form of protest against injustice. Compare: King, "Love, Law and Civil Disobedience," p. 8; "A Legacy of Creative Protest," Massachusetts Review IV (Autumn 1962), p. 43; "Interview With Martin Luther King," Playboy, p. 68; Why We Can't Wait, p. 84. For a detailed discussion of civil disobedience in ancient times, see: David Daube, Civil Disobedience in Antiquity (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1972).

15. Ibid.


18. There is some doubt as to whether King recognized some of the subtle differences between his conception of nonviolence and Thoreau's ideas on civil disobedience. He remarks that Thoreau's essay was his "first intellectual contact with the theory of nonviolent resistance." See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 91. However, Gandhi, who also was familiar with Thoreau's famous essay, seems to have been aware of the differences between his conception of non-cooperation and that of Thoreau. Gandhi observed that the term "civil disobedience" was coined by Thoreau to express his opposition to a slave state, "but Thoreau was not perhaps an out and out champion of non-violence." See: Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance, p. 3.


20. King, "A Legacy of Creative Protest," p. 43; emphasis mine; see also, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 212. Elsewhere King states: "It is not enough to cooperate with good; we must refuse to cooperate with evil." See: King, "Advice For Living," Ebony XIV (December 1958), p. 159.


23. The way in which noncooperation operates in the strategy of nonviolence will be discussed further in Chapter Six, "Nonviolence in Action." For now, it is important to note that King felt noncooperation was both a moral obligation and an effective means of implementing social change.

25. Ibid., p. 119.


29. King, "The Case Against 'Tokenism,'" p. 52; Address, Freedom Fund Report Dinner, p. 10. The importance of direct action will be discussed in the next chapter.


32. King, "Nonviolence: The Only Road To Freedom," p. 30. King closely identifies nonviolence with conscience. Speaking of the freedom movement he states: "We feel that we are the conscience of America--we are its troubled soul--we will continue to insist that right be done because both God's will and the heritage of our nation speak through our echoing demands." See: Martin Luther King, Jr., Remarks at the Convocation on Equal Justice Under the Law, NAACP Legal Defense Fund, May 28, 1964 (Boston University: King Collection, XI, 6), p. 13.

33. "Speeches by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.," Negro History Bulletin XXXI (May 1968), p. 22; see also, Ernest Dunbar, "A Visit with Martin Luther King," Look XXVII (February 12, 1963), p. 95. Note the moral resolve in Gandhi's statement: "For me there is no turning back whether I am alone or joined by thousands. I would rather die a dog's death and have my bones licked by dogs than that I should return to the Ashram a broken man." See: Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance, p. 246.

34. Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," p. 208. In many ways Thoreau's famous essay is a call to conscience over and above the call for submission to legal authority: "A few--as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men--serve the state with their consciences...and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies of it." See: Ibid., p. 197.

35. Fischer, ed., The Essential Gandhi, p. 152. See
also: C. F. Andrews, ed., Mahatma Gandhi At Work: His Own Story Continued (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1931), pp. 310-311. Gandhi asserted: "To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience." Quoted in Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, p. 152. Compare Davis' statement: "Conscience is still the voice of God when it whispers that we are our brother's keeper...." See: Davis, "Liberalism and a Theology of Depth," p. 200.

36. Brightman, Moral Laws, pp. 13-14, 64-68. Elements of personalism are distinctly Kantian in character. Speaking of the importance of Kant's thinking for personalist philosophy, Knudson wrote: "Kant was not himself a metaphysical personalist, but indirectly he probably did more to promote the spread of personalism than any other thinker.... Almost a full personalistic creed might... be deduced from certain phases of the Kantian philosophy." See: Knudson, The Philosophy of Personalism, pp. 431-432.

37. Brightman, Moral Laws, p. 79. Brightman also wrote: "Moral experience occurs only in persons. In fact, a person may be defined as a being capable of moral experience." See: Ibid., p. 58.


40. King writes: "...Cowardice asks the question, 'Is it safe'?! Expediency asks the question, 'Is it political'? Vanity asks the question, 'Is it popular'? But conscience must ask the question, 'Is it right'?" See: King, "The Role of the Behavioral Scientist," p. 5.

Kant's Moral Philosophy (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1970), pp. 45-52. Brightman believed Borden Parker Bowne, a student of Rudolf Hermann Lotze and the first philosopher to work out a comprehensive system of personalist thought, had demonstrated that rationality and reason were absurd notions apart from the idea of human freedom. See: Borden Parker Bowne, "The Speculative Significance of Freedom," printed in Representative Essays of Borden Parker Bowne, Warren E. Steinkraus, ed. (Utica, New York: Meridian Publishing Company, 1979), pp. 24-36. Bowne began teaching philosophy at Boston University in 1876 and remained at Boston until his sudden death in 1910. A seminal thinker, it is difficult to overestimate his influence in the development of personalism, though he has not received the recognition enjoyed by some of his successors. See: Ibid., pp. iii-ix. King studied the philosophy of Bowne, and his teacher Lotze, while at Boston University. See: Martin Luther King, Jr., Notes on Personalism (Boston University: King Collection, XV, 23).

More importantly, King was aware of Bowne's (and Brightman's) insistence that reason necessitates freedom. Therefore, freedom takes on a metaphysical and profoundly significant quality in personalism. See: King, "The Personalism of J.M.E. McTaggart Under Criticism." As Bowne had stated: "I believe...that freedom is involved in reason itself, and that the denial of freedom must lead to the collapse of reason." See: Bowne, "The Speculative Significance of Freedom," p. 25.

42. King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 97.

43. Ibid., p. 98.

44. Ibid., p. 97. King states that he is reluctant to locate freedom as a moral resource of the individual in an abstract function or aspect of personality called the "will." King believes this tends to divide the personality into functions, making will an "object," and an "object" by definition is not free. Rather, King prefers to speak of the whole person in relation to freedom. Nevertheless, he makes it clear that human moral resources are inseparably joined to decision-making and integrally involve choice; i.e., the exercise of will. King also asserts that human freedom must be understood within certain limits. A person is not free to choose two conflicting choices at the same time. Freedom is always within the limits of human choice and possibility. Beyond this, King emphasizes that a person must be responsible for the exercise of his freedom; i.e., an individual is answerable for the decisions he makes. See: Ibid., pp. 97-98. Compare Davis' discussion of freedom as held in tension with "destiny:" "God and History," pp. 22-24. Compare further: Brightman, Moral Laws, p. 76.
45. King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 98. See also: King, Strength to Love, p. 99. Brightman wrote: "There is no moral situation where there is no choice. The essence of a moral situation is will, and the essence of will is choice." See: Brightman, Moral Laws, p. 74.

46. King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 98. H. J. Paton argued a similar point from a more Kantian perspective. "Whatever be the difficulties involved, it seems clear enough that willing is always self-denial and self-realisation, a giving up of the old self and a going on to the new. This is what is meant by saying that the self or spirit is a process or, better, an activity. It is not something which is, but something which becomes. It is not something given, but something which makes itself and is its own making. If it does not will in this double movement of self-denial and self-realisation, it is just nothing. To cease from willing--including that willing which is also thinking--is to cease to be. It is in activity alone that the self is and enjoys its being. And this activity is a continual being and not being, a continual becoming other than it is, a continual manifestation of sameness in and through differences. We maintain our life by effort, and there is no cessation of that effort. We cannot will not to will. We can be more or less active; we can will to wait upon life rather than to direct it; we can make our lives relatively full or relatively empty; but we cannot cease to will without also ceasing to be." See: H. J. Paton, The Good Will: A Study in the Coherence Theory of Goodness (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1927), p. 108.

47. In regard to the "revolutionary" relationship between ethical decision-making and identity, Thoreau wrote: "Action from principle, the perception and the performance of right, changes things and relations; it is essentially revolutionary, and does not consist wholly with anything which was. It not only divides States and Churches, it divides families; ay, it divides the individual, separating the diabolical in him from the divine." See: Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," p. 201.


49. King, "Love, Law and Civil Disobedience," p. 6. Davis stated in "In Praise of Liberalism:" "Man is neither good nor bad by nature, but possesses dangerous capacities which may become servants of goodness or evil." See: Davis, "In Praise of Liberalism," p. 491. There is a strong doctrine of sin operative in the thinking of L. Harold DeWolf, though he insists that humankind is not "totally depraved" (i.e., incapable of moral choice) but still free to choose the good. He writes: "If human
depravity were really total, men would simply call evil good and be content. In actuality they cannot quite do this, though they often try." See: L. Harold DeWolf, A Theology of the Living Church (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1953), pp. 179-202; quotation is from p. 201. During his student days, King expressed great appreciation for Reinhold Niebuhr's penetrating analysis of human sinfulness, though he believed that much of Niebuhr's writing eclipsed the importance of human moral potential. See: King, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Ethical Dualism," also, Martin Luther King, Jr., "How Modern Christians Should Think of Man" (Boston University: King Collection, XV, 14). Compare: King, Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 97-99; Strength to Love, pp. 147-149.

50. See: King, "The Ethical Demands of Integration," pp. 3-4, 7-8. King interprets the imago Dei as a fundamental tenet of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and he asserts that this doctrine points to the inherent sacredness and dignity of the human personality, an idea which was solidified in his study of theistic personalism. King stresses this teaching throughout his discussions of nonviolence, and often he cites one formulation of Kant's categorical imperative to give philosophical support to his views on innate human worth: "All men must be treated as ends and never as mere means." See: Ibid., p. 3. See further: Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Challenge to the Churches and Synagogues" (Boston University: King Collection, XVI, 16); "What a Christian Should Believe About Himself" (Boston University: King Collection, XV, 19). Compare: Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals, printed in Paton's The Moral Law, pp. 95-98. There are differences in King's and Kant's use of this formula, and it should be noted that King's understanding is much closer to Brightman's restatement of this ethical imperative in his "Law of Altruism." Compare: Brightman, Moral Laws, pp. 223-240. See also: Davis, "God and History," p. 25. L. Harold DeWolf placed great stress on the imago Dei in his A Theology of the Living Church, and King's thinking bears the marks of his influence. See: DeWolf, A Theology of the Living Church, pp. 201-207.

51. For an excellent, though abstract, discussion of the integral relation between will and the good see: Paton, The Good Will.


employs Plato's poignant image of the charioteer trying to steer two head-strong horses each pulling in a different direction. See: Ibid.

55. King states: "No matter how low one sinks into racial bigotry he can be redeemed...." See: "Attack on Conscience," Time LXIX (February 18, 1957), p. 17. Elsewhere King asserts: "We must always see these potentialities within human nature; the non-violent discipline goes on with this belief that even the most difficult person...can be transformed." See: King, "Non-violence the Only Way," p. 59. Characterizing Gandhian satyagraha Erik Erikson has written: "The mood of the Event was, above all, pervaded by a spirit of giving the opponent the courage to change even as the challenger remained ready to change with the events." See: Erik H. Erikson, Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1970), p. 435. Although Gandhi no doubt would have agreed with much of King's thinking on human nature, there are some significant differences in their respective points of view. M. M. Thomas has written an interesting article which deals with these differences as they relate to Gandhi's and King's ideas on nonviolence. See: M. M. Thomas, "Basic Approaches to Power--Gandhiji, Andrews and King," Religion and Society XVI, 3 (Bangalore: 1969), pp. 15-25.

56. See: Martin Luther King, Jr., Address to the National Press Club, Washington, D.C., July 19, 1962 (Boston University: King Collection, I, 11), p. 7. King asserts: "The method of nonviolent resistance is effective in that it has a way of disarming the opponent, it exposes his moral defenses, it weakens his morale and at the same time it works on his conscience." See: Ibid. Compare: King, "The Case Against 'Tokenism,'" p. 52.


59. King, "Showdown For Non-Violence," p. 25. Elsewhere King states: "We want to rely upon the goodwill of those who oppose us. Indeed, we have brought forward the method of non-violence to give an example of unilateral goodwill...." See: Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at the Fourth Constitutional Convention, AFL-CIO, Miami, Florida, December 11, 1961 (Boston University: King Collection, I, 11), p. 3. King, of course, did not believe that a nonviolent resister's reliance upon good will obviates the necessity for rigorous direct action. He did not argue that nonviolence relies upon good will
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alone. See: Ibid.

60. King, "The Case Against 'Tokenism,'" p. 52.


63. Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, p. 189. Bondurant continues: "Where political theory has evidenced an awareness of the unity of ends and means, the problem has tended to be stated in terms of machinery or of form and device. The challenge of Gandhian satyagraha centers upon the necessity of reconciling ends and means through a philosophy of action." See: Ibid.; emphasis mine.

64. King, The Trumpet of Conscience, pp. 85-86.

65. Ibid., p. 86.

66. Ibid., p. 85. King's words are a direct quotation of a statement made by Krishnalal Shridharani who described means as "the end in process and the ideal in the making." See: Krishnalal Shridharani, War Without Violence: A Study of Gandhi's Method and Its Accomplishments (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1939), p. 267. This statement is quoted in Bondurant's Conquest of Violence and King originally may have received this idea through her writings. See: Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, p. 34.


68. Fischer, ed., The Essential Gandhi, p. 199. Gandhi also writes: "Violent means will give violent Swaraj....There is no wall of separation between means and end...." See: Ibid.

69. Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance, p. 42. To those who said means are after all just means, Gandhi responded "means after all are everything." See: Fischer, ed., The Essential Gandhi, p. 199.


71. Quoted in Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, p. xviii.
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72. Ibid.


76. King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 93-94. King also uses the terms "means" and "ends" in another sense. Criticizing modern culture he writes: "Our problem today is that...we have allowed the means by which we live to outdistance the ends for which we live. So much of modern life can be summarized in that suggestive phrase of Thoreau: 'Improved means to an unimproved end.'" See: King, Where Do We Go From Here?, pp. 171-172. Compare: King, "Modern Man's Dilemma," p. 1. Ends are not only political objectives, for King, but may refer to ultimate ethical values--such as justice, peace, freedom and community.


78. King, "Love, Law and Civil Disobedience," p. 5; emphasis mine.

79. King, "The Case Against 'Tokenism,'" p. 52.


81. Martin Luther King, Jr., Howard University Lecture (Boston University: King Collection, I, 11), p. 6. King goes on to assert that politics and economics must not ignore social values. Any activity which does not conform to moral law defeats its own purpose. See: Ibid.

82. King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 102.

83. King, "Our Struggle," p. 6. King contends nonviolent protest is not meant to create animosity for the white community among black people. He even admonishes that this form of protest should not lead to a distrust of all white people. Compare: "Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi," pp. 4-5; Martin Luther King, Jr., Speech at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C., August 28, 1963 (Boston University: King Collection, I, 11), p. 3. This address has come to be known as King's famous "I Have a Dream..." speech. Hereafter referred to as "I Have a Dream..."

84. King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 102.


88. Ibid., pp. 102-103.

89. Brightman asserted: "To respect a sinner's personality does not mean to respect his sin. It means to love him, not for what he is, but for what he may be, or even to love him as he is in order that he may become better. The greater the love for the person, the greater the hatred for his sin." See: Brightman, Nature and Values, p. 149.

90. Gandhi, An Autobiography, p. 276. Gandhi wrote: "A Satyagrahi must never forget the distinction between evil and the evil-doer. He must not harbour ill-will or bitterness against the latter. He may not even employ needlessly offensive language against the evil person, however unrelieved his evil might be." Gandhi also insisted that it is never the intention of the nonviolent resister "to embarrass the wrong-doer. The appeal is never to his fear; it is, must be, always to his heart." See: Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance, pp. 77 and 87, respectively.


93. Ahimsa is the sine qua non of Jainism, an ancient Hindu reform movement dating to the sixth or seventh century B.C. As a religious doctrine, it has exerted a significant influence on Indian tradition since its appearance and has been interpreted in a variety of ways and to varying degrees. Etymologically, the term is formed from the negative particle prefix "a" plus the Sanskrit word himsa, meaning "harm" or "injury." Hence, the word literally means "no harm" or "non-injury." In Jainism, ahimsa has been interpreted in very strict terms and involves the utmost care to see that one does not cause harm, knowingly or unknowingly, to any living creature. Jainism was prominent in Gujarat, Gandhi's home state, and deeply influenced his mother's religious faith. Gandhi's understanding of ahimsa is at the heart

94. King, "The Ethical Demands of Integration," p. 8. There were fundamental differences between Gandhi's doctrine of ahimsa and King's interpretation of the imago Dei, to be sure. But King seemed content simply to point to this one salient parallel. See: Ibid., pp. 3, 4 and 7-8.

95. It is interesting to note King's discussion of the imago Dei as a pivotal theological concept while he was a student of Professor DeWolf at Boston University. See: King, "What A Christian Should Believe About Himself," p. 1. DeWolf's understanding of the "image of God" can be found in his A Theology of the Living Church. See: pp. 201-207.

96. King, Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 103-104.


98. Gandhi, Non-Violence in Peace and War, vol. II, p. 69. Gandhi also asserts: "What is good under certain conditions can become an evil or a sin under a different set of conditions." "In life it is impossible to eschew violence completely." See: Ibid. "Religion is a thing to be lived. It is not mere sophistry." See: Ibid., p. 70.


100. King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 103. See also: King, "Out of Segregation's Long Night," p. 15.


102. King, "Non-violence the Only Way," pp. 56-58; Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 103-107. It is significant to note that King's detailed discussions of the Greek word agape are often in the context of explaining the principle of non-injury.

104. See: "Meet the Press," Congressional Record, p. 21096; Martin Luther King, Jr., "Behind the Selma March," Saturday Review XLVIII (April 3, 1965), pp. 16-17+; Why We Can't Wait, p. 79. Compare: Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance, pp. 145-146; Fischer, ed., The Essential Gandhi, p. 156. As early as 1955 and as late as 1967, King used the term "coercion" to describe nonviolent direct action. His use of such terminology, however, was infrequent. King seems to have avoided the word "coercion" because of its violent connotations. For him, nonviolent protest meant strong pressure on the body politic but not the threat of violent or retaliatory measures. Even the few times when King used the term coercion, he meant for it to be understood fundamentally in a completely nonviolent context. Compare: King, Address, December 5, 1955, printed in Keele, A Burkeian Analysis of the Rhetorical Strategies of Martin Luther King, p. 303; Address at the Conference of Religious Leaders under the sponsorship of the President's Committee on Government Contracts, Washington, D.C., May 11, 1959 (Boston University: King Collection, I, 11), pp. 6f; Where Do We Go From Here?, pp. 90-91.


106. Ibid., p. 51. King sanctioned the use of the boycott in Birmingham on similar grounds. Later in his civil rights career, King did not exhibit the same reticence in using the word "boycott" or even the phrase "nonviolent coercion." See: King, Where Do We Go From Here?, pp. 90-91. But this was not so much a change of mind as an adjustment of his view in the face of the entrenchment and profundity of racial oppression in the United States. As already noted, even as early as 1955, King used the term "coercion" in connection with nonviolence, though he never sanctioned the use of violent force. See: King, Address, December 5, 1955, "Contemporary Social Action Collection," tape 1, side 1. The distinction between violent and nonviolent "coercion" is a subtle yet important distinction. Joan Bondurant takes up this issue in Conquest of Violence. She concludes: "The difference between violent coercion in which deliberate injury is inflicted upon the opponent and non-violent coercion in which injury indirectly results is a difference of such great degree that it is almost a difference of kind. Certainly this tends to be true in cases of extended and intensive use of violence in the one case and of non-violent coercion in the other. Withholding of services or profits may cause a very real discomfiture to the opponent, and he may interpret this as serious injury--but compared with physical destruction and deliberate undermining of morale, possibly coupled with extreme distortion of truth (as in the use of certain types of psychological warfare), the contrast is
significant. Beyond this difference of degree, there are yet other distinguishing elements. In the case of non-violent coercion there is a willingness on the part of the one who would coerce to submit himself to suffering; in contrast, one who uses violence to coerce intentionally causes suffering to his opponent." See: Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, pp. 9-10.


108. Ibid., pp. 51-52.

109. Ibid., p. 103.

110. Ibid. The quote in this passage is attributed to Gandhi. Compare: Martin Luther King, Jr., Statement at the Prayer Pilgrimage Protesting the Electrocution of Jeremiah Reeves, April 6, 1958 (Boston University: King Collection, I, 11), p. 4. Elsewhere King states: "If he [the Negro] has to go to jail for the cause of freedom, let him enter it in the fashion Gandhi urged his countrymen, 'as a bridegroom enters the bride's chamber'--that is, with a little trepidation but with a great expectation." See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 220.

111. See: Fischer, ed., The Essential Gandhi, p. 199; and Andrews, ed., Mahatma Gandhi At Work, p. 386, respectively. Often Gandhi refers to the "law of suffering" and is convinced: "Reason has to be strengthened by suffering and suffering opens the eyes of understanding." See: Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance, pp. 134 and 194, respectively. Compare: Ibid., p. 112.

112. Andrews, ed., Mahatma Gandhi At Work, p. 386. The relation between suffering, renunciation and immortality is complex. Joan Bondurant points out the rich cultural tradition of tapas, i.e., the law of restraint and discipline, in Indian society. Tapasya, or self-suffering, was an integral part of satyagraha for Gandhi, and his understanding carried with it deep connotations of the traditional Yogic law of self-denial. See: Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, pp. 26-33, 113-115 and 228-230.

113. King, "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," p. 32.


115. King, "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," p. 32. Compare: King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 220. Frederick Douglass, a black leader greatly admired by King, once wrote: "Let me give you a word of the philosophy of reforms. The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions, yet made to her august
claims, have been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, agitating, all-absorbing, and for the time being putting all other tumults to silence. It must do this or it does nothing. If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand." See: Chambers, ed., Chronicles of Black Protest, p. 5.

116. King, Address, Fourth Anniversary of the M.I.A., p. 9. Elsewhere King states: "Long ago the Greek philosopher Heraclitus argued that justice emerges from the strife of opposites, and Hegel, in modern philosophy, preached a doctrine of growth through struggle. It is both historically and biologically true that there can be no birth and growth without birth and growing pains. Where there is the emergence of the new we confront the recalcitrance of the old. So the tensions which we witness in the world today are indicative of the fact that a new world order is being born and an old order is passing away." See: King, "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," p. 25.

117. King, "Love, Law and Civil Disobedience," p. 6. Elsewhere King quotes Gandhi as saying: "Things of fundamental importance to people are not secured by reason alone, but have to be purchased with their suffering." "Suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears which are otherwise shut to the voice of reason." See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 103.

118. King, "I Have a Dream...," p. 3.

119. King, "Non-Violence: Its Basic Precepts," p. 2. See also the section on "The Cross" in Chapter Three of this work.


121. Edgar Sheffield Brightman, "The Essence of Christianity," Crozer Quarterly XVIII (April 1941), p. 119. Smith and Zepp point out that this article was required reading in many of Davis' courses. See: Smith and Zepp, Search for the Beloved Community, pp. 103 and 197. Ervin Smith in his thesis, "The Role of Personalism in the Development of the Social Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.," disputes the idea that Brightman is the main source of King's thinking on creative suffering. He
asserts that King's understanding of suffering is grounded primarily in his own existential experience, and King relates that much of his thinking on suffering has been shaped by his own personal trials. See: Smith, "The Role of Personalism in the Development of the Social Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.," p. 197; King, *Strength to Love*, pp. 153-154. The above quote from Brightman's article points to the importance of redemptive suffering in Christian thought, and it may be that King originally encountered the theological treatment of this idea in reading Brightman's "The Essence of Christianity."


125. See: Davis, "Liberalism and a Theology of Depth," pp. 198, 199 and 203.

126. Ibid., p. 201.

127. Davis, "In Praise of Liberalism," p. 491. Elsewhere Davis quotes the eminent British historian, James A. Froude: "One lesson, and only one, history may be said to repeat with distinctiveness: that the world is built somehow on moral foundations; that, in the long run, it is well with the good; in the long run, it is ill with the wicked." See: Davis, "Liberalism and a Theology of Depth," p. 202. The quote by James A. Froude is from: Short Studies on Great Subjects, vol. I (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1867), p. 19. Compare Davis' statement: "It is ultimately well with the righteous; ultimately it is ill with the wicked. The moral foundations of reality are there, terribly there." Davis, "Liberalism and a Theology of Depth," p. 203.

128. Brightman, *Moral Laws*, p. 45; see also, pp. 9-15, 22-31 and 53-59. For Brightman human experience is the source of ethical knowledge, as it is the source of all "science." See: Ibid., pp. 55-57 and 81-88.

129. Brightman, *Moral Laws*, p. 22. The moral laws which Brightman formulated are like working hypotheses or theorems for the philosophical ethicist rather than absolute formulations given once and for all. The task of an ethical system, according to Brightman, is to connect the different moral laws, formulated from experience, into

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a coherent whole. See: Ibid., pp. 81-86.

130. Brightman, Moral Laws, p. 82.

131. Ibid., p. 286.

132. Smith and Zepp make this same observation in Search for the Beloved Community, p. 111.


134. King asserts: "...The invincible will of justice and democracy undergird our struggle. And all the armies of the earth...are not stronger than one single moral idea which tenaciously demands fulfillment." See: Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at the Formation of the Gandhi Society For Human Rights, May 17, 1962 (Boston University: King Collection, I, 11), p. 5. King is fond of quoting Victor Hugo: "There is no greater power on earth than an idea whose time has come." See: King, "The Time For Freedom Has Come," p. 25.

135. King, "This is a Great Time to be Alive," p. 5. Gandhi also had claimed nonviolence rested upon the foundation of moral reality, for he asserted, "morality is the basis of things...." See: Gandhi, An Autobiography, p. 34. Gandhi's complete statement reads: "But one thing took deep root in me--the conviction that morality is the basis of things, and that truth is the substance of all morality." See: Ibid. Gandhi wrote: "I have found that life persists in the midst of destruction and, therefore, there must be a higher law than that of destruction. Only under that law would a well-ordered society be intelligible and life worth living." See: Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance, p. 383. Gandhi closely identified religion and morality, as did Brightman. Indeed, Gandhi asserted that "the essence of religion is morality." See: Gandhi, An Autobiography, p. xiii.


Notes for Chapter V

Love, p. 77.

138. King, Strength to Love, p. 70.


140. Davis, "God and History," p. 31. Davis asserted: "One of the most obvious facts about man is that he is a social animal. As such he is ever bent on achieving a true sociality or solidarity." See: Ibid., p. 28.


145. See: King, Where Do We Go From Here?, pp. 167-171 and 190. King asserts that the "world house" calls for "an all-embracing and unconditional love for all men." See: Ibid., p. 190.

146. Ibid., p. 171. Compare Davis' statement: "We know now that we must live together or perish. If we will not have one world, we may have no world." See: Davis, "Liberalism and a Theology of Depth," p. 205.


touched on this issue in his funeral tribute to Martin Luther King. He wrote of King: "He sought to relieve the slavery of the oppressors as well as that of the oppressed." DeWolf was the only white man to speak at King's Memorial service in Ebenezer Baptist Church. See: L. Harold DeWolf, "Funeral Tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr." (Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta: n.p., April 9, 1968). Compare: King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 212.

150. King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 52.

151. King, "I Have a Dream...," p. 5.


154. King, Strength to Love, p. 154. The idea that religious truth is validated in experience is one of the major features of Brightman's philosophy of religion.

155. King, Strength to Love, p. 155; emphasis King's.

156. King, "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," p. 31. Elsewhere King writes: "This faith is another reason why the nonviolent resister can accept suffering without retaliation. For he knows that in his struggle for justice he has cosmic companionship." See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 106.


158. King of course readily admits that not all those who adhere to nonviolence believe in a personal God: "It is true that there are devout believers in nonviolence who find it difficult to believe in a personal God. But even these persons believe in the existence of some creative force that works for universal wholeness. Whether we call it an unconscious process, an impersonal Brahman, or a Personal Being of matchless power and infinite love, there is a creative force in this universe that works to bring the disconnected aspects of reality into a harmonious whole." See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 106-107. King was firmly convinced that the existence of such a "creative force" led to a metaphysical affirmation of the existence of a personal God. This he believed was the major philosophical contribution of theistic personalism.


166. See: King, *Strength to Love*, pp. 76-79.

167. Ibid., p. 82. James H. Smylie has written an excellent article discussing King's use of the Exodus event as a motif expressing God's involvement in history and the place of that motif in black literature. See: James H. Smylie, "On Jesus, Pharaohs and the Chosen People: Martin Luther King As Biblical Interpreter and Humanist," *Interpretation* XXIV (January 1970), pp. 74-91.

168. Compare King's homiletic use of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo: "In a real sense, Waterloo symbolizes the doom of every Napoleon and is an eternal reminder to a generation drunk with military power that in the long run of history might does not make right and the power of the sword cannot conquer the power of the spirit." King, *Strength to Love*, p. 109. Compare also: Davis, "Liberalism and a Theology of Depth," p. 203.

169. This is a view which was poignantly expressed by King's teacher George W. Davis: "So history discloses," Davis wrote, "that wisdom lies...in man cooperating with God who is now acting." See: Davis, "God and History," p. 24. Compare: Davis, "Liberalism and a Theology of Depth," p. 204.


VI. NONVIOLENCE IN ACTION

1. See: King, *Strength To Love*, pp. 151-152.


6. See: "Unwise and Untimely?" A Public Statement Directed to Martin Luther King, Jr. by Eight Alabama Clergymen, April 12, 1963 (King Center, Atlanta: King Papers); "Letter From Birmingham Jail," *Why We Can't Wait*, pp. 76-95. King states: "In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; self-purification; and direct action." It is clear from the rest of his discussion, however, that he did not mean nonviolence ended with direct action. When making this statement King included only the stages which had been undertaken in the Birmingham crusade at the time of his writing. He clearly believed the process of a nonviolent campaign went beyond direct action. See: King, *Why We Can't Wait*, pp. 78-80. For a thorough analysis of Gandhi's praxis of satyagraha see: Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, pp. 36-104. In a document contained in the SCLC administrative files, the "tactics" of the nonviolent process are delineated as follows: Investigation; Negotiation; Education of the Public; Spiritual Preparation; Direct Action. Essentially, the document reflects the same elements of a nonviolent campaign stated in King's "Letter From Birmingham Jail." Compare: King, *Why We Can't Wait*, page 70; Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Philosophy of Nonviolence and the Tactics of Nonviolent Resistance" (King Center, Atlanta: SCLC Records 123:22), p. 4.

7. The "stages" of a nonviolent campaign delineated in this chapter are not absolute, rigid categories of a mechanical process. Indeed, at times it is difficult to identify some of these stages in the campaigns led by King. In a sense, the "stages" of a nonviolent crusade discussed in this chapter are like the components of an "ideal type," not an historical description of any particular campaign. Max Weber coined the phrase "ideal type" in his methodological discussions to describe socially "typical" schemes, structures or phenomenon that emerge in experience. (The word "ideal" is not meant to carry any value connotations.) For example, certain typical generalizations could be made about ballet dancers, and these characterizations would provide insight into the nature of the profession. Each and every ballet dancer may not conform to this ideal type; indeed, none may fit the generalization in every way. Yet these sociological "types" help to bring understanding and clarity to reality. The process of a nonviolent campaign as delineated in this chapter represents the general way

8. A great deal of the discussion in this chapter will focus on King's understanding of "direct action"—unquestionably the most radical phase of a nonviolent campaign and the stage which receives the greatest attention in his writings and speeches. Much misunderstanding and controversy surrounded this aspect of nonviolent resistance, and King felt obliged to clarify the meaning and basis of this form of rigorous protest. But direct action, in King's view, must be seen in the context of the overall process of a nonviolent campaign and must not be separated from the principles and precepts which form the philosophical basis of nonviolence. In no way does direct action eclipse the importance of the other components and emphases discussed in this chapter.

9. The intrinsic adaptability of nonviolence often confused Gandhi's critics. The Mahatma stated: "People say that I have changed my view, that I say today something different from what I said years ago. The fact of the matter is that conditions have changed. I am the same....There has been a gradual evolution in my environment and I react to it as a Satyagrahi." Quoted in Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, pp. 34-35.

10. Commenting on this aspect of Gandhian satyagraha,
Joan Bondurant asserts: "The action undertaken in a satyagraha campaign varies distinctly from one circumstance to another. Tactics are evolved to meet the specific situation, both offensively and defensively. Strategy, however, remains broadly the same, based upon the considerations indicated...as steps or stages in a satyagraha campaign." See: Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, p. 104; emphases mine. The distinction between tactics and strategy is not discussed by King, and Smith and Zepp assert that "there seems to have been some conceptual confusion in King's mind at this point...." However, the general principle Bondurant seeks to elucidate undoubtedly would have been affirmed by King. As Smith and Zepp conclude: "Although there was some confusion in King's theory regarding the difference between strategy and tactics, it is obvious from his activity that he made a distinction in practice." See: Smith and Zepp, Search for the Beloved Community, pp. 133-134.

11. King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 78. In some ways, investigation and analysis are two different yet complementary intellectual processes included by King in a single step. Investigation is an information gathering procedure, while analysis involves weighing the data gathered in the balance of critical judgment.

12. It is interesting to note Howard Thurman's discussion of the social dynamics of oppression in Jesus and the Disinherited, a book which King read (or reread) during the Montgomery bus boycott. See: Thurman, Jesus and the Disinherited, pp. 36-80; see also: Bennett, What Manner of Man, pp. 74-75.

13. See: King, Where Do We Go From Here?, pp. 48, 67-83. To add credence to his understanding of racism King quotes Dr. George Kelsey's Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man and Ruth Benedict's Race: Science and Politics. Kelsey asserts: "Racism is a faith. It is a form of idolatry....In its early modern beginnings, racism was a justificatory device. It did not emerge as a faith. It arose as an ideological justification for the constellations of political and economic power which were expressed in colonialism and slavery. But gradually the idea of the superior race was heightened and deepened in meaning and value so that it pointed beyond the historical structures of relation, in which it emerged, to human existence itself." Ruth Benedict defines racism as "the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to hereditary inferiority and another group is destined to hereditary superiority. It is the dogma that the hope of civilization depends upon eliminating some races and keeping others pure. It is the dogma that one race has carried progress throughout human history and can alone
ensure future progress." See: King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 69.

14. Paulo Freire has discussed the inevitable role of violence in the domination of the oppressed in his Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Freire insists that oppression always is based on violence or the threat of violence. Exploitation, he argues, cannot exist without violence and what he calls "cultural invasion." See: Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, pp. 41-42 and 150-151.

15. For an excellent discussion of his ideas on the unfair and illogical justification of segregation on the basis of the cultural and educational discrepancies between blacks and whites, see Martin Luther King's: Address to the Second Annual Institute on Nonviolence, "Contemporary Social Action Collection" (State of Wisconsin Historical Society: University of Wisconsin Library), tape 1, side 2, part 1.

16. See: Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Wind is Rising" (Boston University: King Collection, XI, 6), pp. 1-3.

17. See: King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 50.

18. Ibid., p. 28. See also: King, The Trumpet of Conscience, pp. 11-12; Lerone Bennett, Jr. and Allan Morrison, "The South and the Negro," Ebony XII (April 1957). Paulo Freire has written: The peasant begins to get courage to overcome his dependence when he realizes that he is dependent. Until then, he goes along with the boss and says 'what can I do? I am only a peasant.' When superficially analyzed, this fatalism is sometimes interpreted as a docility that is a trait of national character. Fatalism in the guise of docility is the fruit of an historical and sociological situation, not an essential characteristic of a people's behavior. It almost always is related to the power of destiny or fate or fortune--inevitable forces--or to a distorted view of God. Under the sway of magic and myth, the oppressed (especially the peasants, who are almost submerged in nature) see their suffering, the fruit of exploitation, as the will of God--as if God were the creator of this 'organized disorder.' " See: Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, pp. 47-48.

19. Wyatt Walker has commented on the way communities were chosen by SCLC for a nonviolent campaign. The key ingredient, according to Walker, was the degree of impatience in the community and the willingness of its citizens to engage in the rigors of protest. See: Transcript of Wyatt T. Walker Interview, 1967 (The Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University: The Ralph J. Bunche Oral History Collection), p. 32.
20. King's views on social protest are founded upon his understanding of noncooperation. (See the discussions of "Moral Courage" and "The Call to Conscience" in the previous chapter of this work.) He writes: "To accept passively an unjust system is to cooperate with that system; thereby the oppressed become as evil as the oppressor. Noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. The oppressed must never allow the conscience of the oppressor to slumber. Religion reminds every man that he is his brother's keeper. To accept injustice or segregation passively is to say to the oppressor that his actions are morally right. It is a way of allowing his conscience to fall asleep. At this moment the oppressed fails to be his brother's keeper. So acquiescence—while often the easier way—is not the moral way. It is the way of the coward. The Negro cannot win the respect of his oppressor by acquiescing; he merely increases the oppressor's arrogance and contempt. Acquiescence is interpreted as proof of the Negro's inferiority. The Negro cannot win the respect of the white people of the South or the peoples of the world if he is willing to sell the future of his children for his personal and immediate comfort and safety." See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 212. King's views on the communal nature of human life are reflected in this statement. (See the discussion of "The Communal Character of Human Existence" in the previous chapter of this work.) He believed firmly that there existed an integral relationship between the oppressed and their oppressors. Nonviolent resistance, therefore, seeks to work social change by analyzing and seeking to alter this relationship. It is interesting to view King's ideas in the light of Paulo Freire's brilliant analysis in Pedagogy of the Oppressed. See: Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, pp. 27-56, 78, 120-121, 142-143, 150-151 and 176-177.

21. It should be noted that King relied a great deal on his keen sense of intuition and political savvy in analyzing the social dynamics of a protest situation. There is no evidence that King used formal, "scientific" instruments in the investigation and analysis process. Rather, this stage of a campaign, for him, entailed a thorough and intentional thinking through the social scene of a crusade. King's intuition and political insightfulness played an important role in his leadership of nonviolent resistance.

22. See: King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 78.

23. Bondurant also points to the importance of negotiation in the early stages of nonviolence. See: Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, pp. 40, 220-221.

25. See: King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 51-54 and 78; also, Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 108-124.


27. King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 78.

28. Bondurant comments on this aspect of nonviolent resistance: "Immediately upon recognizing the existence of a conflict situation which might lead to direct action, motives are to be carefully examined, exercises in self-discipline initiated, and the fullest discussion launched within the group regarding issues at stake, appropriate procedures to be undertaken, the circumstance of the opponents, the climate of public opinion, etc." See: Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, p. 40. King learned to treat such preparation utterly seriously, especially by the time he led his Birmingham and Selma campaigns. For him, such preparation was multipurpose: It meant preparing those engaged in the protest for what was ahead, educating the community at large in the ways of and reasons for nonviolent resistance, building and helping to sustain the resolve and moral courage of individual nonviolent resisters, laying out a basic strategy and organizing the various details and procedures. King also believed that this emphasis on preparation and self-purification helped to uplift and ennoble those involved in the process, instilling a sense of discipline and dignity. This is why he refers to nonviolence as a form of social education. See: King, "The Time For Freedom Has Come," p. 118.

29. See: "Interview With Martin Luther King," Playboy, p. 78.

30. See: King, Howard University Lecture, p. 11. Here King seeks to interpret the positive aspects of Gandhi's program of satyagraha. Elsewhere King discusses the problem of self-righteousness in nonviolence; see: King, Address to the War Resister's League, p. 6.


32. Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at the Meeting to Launch the Crusade for Citizenship, Miami, Florida, February 12, 1958 (Boston University: King Collection, I, 11), p. 5.

33. King attributes this idea to Gandhi. See: King, Howard University Lecture, p. 11.

34. See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 221-224; Address to the Second Annual Institute on Nonviolence.

36. Ibid. See the discussion of "Moral Courage" and "The Call to Conscience" in the previous chapter of this work. King insisted that nonviolence was not simply a negative program only oriented toward protest. He believed this form of social change brought discipline, courage and dignity to those involved in the process. At the end of *Stride Toward Freedom*, King touches on various aspects of this, though he never developed his ideas extensively. Self-purification for King did not take on the deep sense of renunciation that it did for Gandhi. In King's view, self-purification meant primarily testing one's motives for protest to insure that they are not purely selfish and increasing one's sense of self-respect, moral resolve and bravery--positive moral values at the heart of his ethical philosophy. There is also a profoundly social character to King's understanding of self-purification; i.e., he believed that nonviolence, through its exhibition of self-discipline and moral courage, helped to uplift the entire black community. Violence and acquiescence degraded, nonviolence edified. See: King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, pp. 219f; also, *Where Do We Go From Here?*, pp. 193-202.

37. King, *Why We Can't Wait*, p. 38. Wyatt Walker has commented that the organizational success of SCLC can be attributed, at least in part, to the way in which this organization relied upon and strengthened to a greater degree the local civil rights leadership in communities in which it was involved. See: Transcript of Wyatt T. Walker Interview (Howard University), p. 47.


39. Ibid., p. 79.

40. Ibid., pp. 63-64; emphasis King's.

41. Ibid.

42. See: Ibid., pp. 60-75. It is interesting to note that the mass meetings in Birmingham (as well as those of the Montgomery campaign) were structured like a Baptist worship service. See: Administrative Records and Correspondence (King Center, Atlanta: King Papers 1:7). Wyatt Walker has attributed much of the organizational success of the SCLC to its relationship with the black Southern church and much of the popular appeal of the SCLC to the religious character of its leadership. See: Transcript of Wyatt T. Walker Interview (Howard University), pp. 4-5, 38 and 101-102. It is almost impossible to overstate the importance of this religious
dimension in King's leadership of SCLC. His personal and administrative records, as well as the administrative records of the SCLC, are punctuated with this kind of religious emphasis. For example, see: Southern Christian Leadership Conference Memo (King Center, Atlanta: King Papers 32:6). Walker has discussed, moreover, the importance of religious retreats in the institutional life of SCLC. See: Transcript of Wyatt T. Walker Interview (Howard University), pp. 78f. The administrative records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference show that at times the organization focused attention on the meaning of agapeic love for its own policies and inner workings, examining the way in which the ethical and spiritual dimensions of nonviolence were being observed within the leadership and staff. A report recording the deliberations of a staff retreat, during which some of these matters were discussed, lists the following concerns: lack of inner love in SCLC; factions which divide; presence of persons who have not accepted nonviolence as a way of life; big business organization has taken away much of the esprit-de-corps and cooperation; interdepartmental competition and rivalry have resulted. It is interesting to note some of the ethical questions raised during the retreat and the conclusion recorded in the report. The conclusion states: "The group was cognizant of the value of the retreat and expressed the desire to have...them more often. It was suggested that what we invest in shows results. If we invest in self-searching, love, and suffering, the result will be a more dedicated and cooperative staff." See: Staff Report (King Center, Atlanta: King Papers 32:9.)

43. For a detailed discussion of the planning which went into King's Birmingham campaign, one of his best executed and most successful crusades, see: King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 54f. Documents contained in King's personal and administrative files reflect the meticulous planning that went into the Birmingham campaign. See: Administrative Records and Correspondence. Wyatt Walker was responsible for executing the preparatory plans. Walker says he depended upon the advice of Fred Shuttlesworth for the places where sit-ins, marches, etc. would be most effective. Stores were surveyed and floor plans sketched. Walker also drew up three levels of "targets" for the protest. That way, if the city officials blocked demonstrations at one site, the protesters could move to a secondary or tertiary target. The detailed planning of the Birmingham campaign contributed greatly to its success. See: Transcript of Wyatt T. Walker Interview (Howard University), pp. 52-58. The planning process for Birmingham also included a careful analysis of the mistakes made in King's Albany campaign, one of his least successful crusades. See: King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 54-55; also, Interview With
Wyatt T. Walker, David J. Garrow, Atlanta, Georgia, April 18, 1980 (King Center, Atlanta: David J. Garrow Oral History Collection GAR-2). David Garrow has argued that King's use of nonviolent direct action was more effective when the leaders of the campaign focused on one clear goal which could be communicated to and by the news media. Garrow asserts that this is one of the reasons that the Selma protest was so instrumental in bringing about the Voting Rights Act of 1965. See: David J. Garrow, Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King, Jr. & the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 2-5 and 133f. No doubt, Garrow's analysis is correct, at least in part. Indeed, King specifically names a lack of clear focus as one of the major problems in Albany. However, King argued, even after the Selma campaign, that nonviolent resistance works best when tactics are formulated to cover a variety of grievances and demands. King wrote: "In Selma, our points encompass voting rights, employment opportunities, improved interracial communication and paved streets in the Negro neighborhoods. The last demand may appear to Northerners to lack some of the historic importance of voting rights. To the Southern Negro the fact that anyone can identify where the ghetto begins by noting where the pavement ends is one of the many offensive experiences in his life. The neighborhood is degraded to degrade the person in it." See: Martin Luther King, Jr., "Let Justice Roll Down," Nation CC (March 15, 1965), p. 270. King asserts further: "We have found that when we make a package of our demands our goals are clarified and victory becomes easier. This has not meant that we would refuse to recognize partial gains or to call a pause when we had made significant progress. Taking a leaf from trade unions, we have accepted less than full victory, knowing that a degree of success is a foundation from which later struggles can be launched for additional gains." See: King, "Let Justice Roll Down," p. 270. Wyatt Walker has commented extensively on the way nonviolent campaigns work to help provide future successes in the area of civil rights. Indeed, Walker contends that the history of the civil rights movement in the second half of the twentieth century can be seen in light of a progressive process. See: Transcript of Wyatt T. Walker Interview (Howard University), pp. 26-28.

44. King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 157.

45. Martin Luther King, Jr., Essay on Nonviolence, 1964 (King Center, Atlanta: SCLC Records 27:47), p. 19.

46. King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 78.
47. Ibid., p. 78.


49. King saw civil disobedience as a form, albeit a severe form, of noncooperation, and his views are based on his belief, framed in the words of St. Augustine, that "an unjust law is no law at all." In the face of unjust legal structures, King occasionally contended that he had no choice but to transgress certain unjust laws on the basis of conscience. He always insisted that such acts of protest were serious matters and must be done openly and nonviolently. King understood such civil breaches of the law as a means of reforming the law and bringing the law of the United States in line with moral law and the true intent of the Constitution. Those who follow this extreme course of action, King insisted, must willingly and cheerfully accept the legal penalties for such violations as a sign of their sincerity not to evade or subvert the law. He wrote: "In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law, as would the rabid segregationist. That would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law." See: King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 82-85. For a detailed discussion of how King distinguished between "just" and "unjust" laws, see: King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 82-85; "Love, Law and Civil Disobedience," pp. 7-9. Toward the end of his life, King began to believe that mass civil disobedience may be an effective way of dealing with the entrenched racism and poverty of American society and initiated plans for using this method of direct action. Even King's call for mass civil disobedience, however, must be seen in the context of direct action and in terms of his overall philosophy of nonviolence. See: King, "A New Sense of Direction," pp. 5-12; also, "An Interview with Andrew J. Young," by James R. McGraw, Christianity and Crisis XXVII, 2 (January 22, 1968), p. 2. Thoreau related noncooperation to the meaning of what he called "peaceable revolution." He wrote: "This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible. If the tax-gatherer, or any other public officer, asks me, as one has done, 'but what shall I do?' My answer is, 'If you really wish to do anything, resign your office.' When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished. But even suppose blood should flow. Is there not a sort of bloodshed when the
conscience is wounded? Through this wound a man's real manhood and immortality flow out, and he bleeds to an everlasting death. I see this blood flowing now." See: Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," p. 204.

50. See: King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 54f; see also, "Nonviolence: The Only Road To Freedom," pp. 30-34. Again, it is interesting to note that King demonstrated a great deal of intuitive insight and political savvy in knowing which "techniques" to employ in dealing with the pressure points of a protest situation.

51. King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 78-80.

52. King, "Nonviolence: The Only Road To Freedom," p. 32; see also: "The Social Organization of Nonviolence," p. 6; The Trumpet of Conscience, p. 23. Fred Shuttlesworth, President of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights during the Birmingham campaign, has commented on the "Gandhian principle" of filling the jails and its impact in the Birmingham crusade. Shuttlesworth contends that the practice of getting people arrested and having them stay in jail for as long as possible (an intentional strategy of SCLC) placed the city officials in a rather severe financial dilemma. The City of Birmingham, Shuttlesworth says, was in debt for a year after the campaign because of the money that was spent on arrests and jailings during the crusade. This economic pressure added to the social and political impact of the demonstrations and helped to bring a civil rights victory in Birmingham. See: Interview With Fred Shuttlesworth, Cincinnati, Ohio, November 19, 1969 (King Center, Atlanta: Oral History Collection), sides 9 and 10.

53. See the section on "Violent Retaliation," Chapter Four of this work.

54. King, "A New Sense of Direction," p. 5. David Garrow has written an excellent analysis of the role the news media played in King's nonviolent campaigns. It was the media which communicated the goals of the protest and exhibited the vitriol of violent segregationists. This is significant, for it was through the media, therefore, that public sympathy was solicited. See: Garrow, Protest at Selma, pp. 3-5, 60-61, 111, 223f. In Birmingham, and elsewhere, King showed a keen understanding of how images carried by the news media stirred the conscience of members of the community at large and stimulated federal and congressional action. See: Martin Luther King, Jr., Address in Birmingham, "Contemporary Social Action Collection" (State of Wisconsin Historical Society: University of Wisconsin Library), tape 4, side 1, part 1. It is interesting to note that Wyatt Walker recounts how incorrect reporting of the Birmingham campaign benefitted
the SCLC cause. On one occasion only a small group of people had gathered to participate in a march led by Dr. King's brother, the Rev. A. D. King. A great number of citizens in the black community, however, had gathered on the streets to watch the event as spectators. In the UPI report the people lining the street were counted as demonstrators. The report stated that 1100 people demonstrated when a number much smaller than this had actually participated in the march. See: Transcript of Wyatt T. Walker Interview (Howard University), pp. 59-61.

55. This was King's main criticism of the Black Power movement. He never objected to the idea of black power, but he did believe that those who chanted such slogans dangerously flirted with animosity and violence. King saw a sharp contrast between the public sympathy generated by nonviolence and the way in which calls for black power and violent retaliation evaporated popular support. See: King, Where Do We Go From Here?, pp. 3, 23-66.

56. King conceived of such suffering as a means of alleviating the more dehumanizing and enduring suffering which had continued for centuries in the form of racial oppression. See: King, Where Do We Go From Here?, pp. 20 and 55-56; Stride Toward Freedom, p. 103. Compare the discussion on "Creative Suffering" in the previous chapter of this work.

57. King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 120-121.

58. King, "Behind the Selma March," p. 16. It is interesting to note the fundamental American, democratic context of King's thinking, clearly exhibited in this statement. He believed, moreover, that there existed an integral relationship between nonviolent direct action and legal measures of social change, such as litigation and legislation. King always encouraged civil rights advocacy through traditional and formal legal channels, but at the same time he believed nonviolent direct protest helped to initiate and to sustain equal rights through the judicial and legislative processes. King insisted that legal measure had a definite place in the black community's struggle for civil right, but he felt direct action was a more visible and socially efficacious means of moral appeal. King believed, furthermore, that the federal government had an essential role to play in bringing into fruition full civil rights for black citizens. He wrote: "...A recognition of the potentials of federal power is a primary necessity if the fight for full racial equality is to be won. With it, however, must go another indispensable factor--the recognition by the government of its moral obligation to solve the problem." See: King, "Equality Now," p. 95. King asserts further: "...Proposals for federal action do not obviate the
necessity for the people themselves to act, of course. An administration of good faith can be strengthened immeasurably by determined popular action. This is the great value of the non-violent direct-action movement that has engulfed the South. On the one hand, it gives large numbers of people a method of securing moral ends through moral means. On the other hand, it gives support and stimulation to all those agencies which have the power to bring about meaningful change. Thousands of courageous students, sitting peacefully at lunch counters, can do more to arouse the Administration to positive action than all of the verbal and written commentaries on governmental laxity put together." King, "Equality Now," p. 95. In an article entitled, "Let Justice Roll Down," King wrote on this subject: "Are demonstrations of any use, some ask, when resistance is so unyielding? Would the slower processes of legislation and law enforcement ultimately accomplish greater results more painlessly? Demonstrations, experience has shown, are part of the process of stimulating legislation and law enforcement. The federal government reacts to events more quickly when a situation of conflict cries out for its intervention. Beyond this, demonstrations have a creative effect on the social and psychological climate that is not matched by the legislative process. Those who have lived under the corrosive humiliation of daily intimidation are imbued by demonstrations with a sense of courage and dignity that strengthens their personalities. Through demonstrations, Negroes learn that unity and militance have more force than bullets. They find that the bruises of clubs, electric cattle prods and fists hurt less than the scars of submission. And segregationists learn from demonstrations that Negroes who have been taught to fear can also be taught to be fearless. Finally, the millions of Americans on the side lines learn that inhumanity wears an official badge and wields the power of law in large areas of the democratic nation of their pride."
"Demonstrations may be limited in the future, but contrary to some belief, they will not be abandoned. Demonstrations educate the onlooker as well as the participant, and education requires repetition. That is one reason why they have not outlived their usefulness." "Perceptive Negro leadership," King continues, "understands that each of the major accomplishments in 1964 was the product of Negro militancy on a level that could mobilize and maintain white support. Negroes acting alone and in a hostile posture toward all whites will do nothing more than demonstrate that their conditions of life are unendurable, and that they are unbearably angry. But this has already been widely dramatized. On the other hand, whites who insist upon exclusively determining the time schedule of change will also fail, however wise and generous they feel themselves to be. A genuine Negro-white unity is the tactical foundation upon which
past and future progress depends." See: King, "Let Justice Roll Down," pp. 270 and 272, respectively.

59. King discussed how federal intervention was a significant factor in the success of his Birmingham campaign. To aid in the negotiation process the Attorney General dispatched Burke Marshall, his chief civil rights assistant, and Assistant Deputy Attorney General, Joseph F. Dolan. Beyond this, President Kennedy federalized the Alabama National Guard to quell the violence of pro-segregationist forces. King points to the way in which these actions helped to bring a just and peaceful settlement in Birmingham. See: King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 102-109.

60. David Garrow has written an insightful analysis of the way in which King's Selma campaign helped to bring the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into fruition. See: Garrow, Protest at Selma, pp. 133-135f. Burke Marshall, former Assistant Attorney General (Civil Rights Division, U.S. Justice Department) in the Johnson administration, has stated that President Johnson saw the Selma march as an excellent opportunity to push ahead his desire for voting rights legislation. Public and congressional reaction to the campaign made this possible, and Johnson capitalized upon it. See: Transcript of Burke Marshall Interview, 1970 (The Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University: The Ralph J. Bunche Oral History Collection), pp. 35-36. Selma was a natural place to plan a campaign which focused upon voting rights as one of its primary goals. Voter registration efforts had been a grass-roots concern in Dallas County for many years. See: Transcript of Frederick Reese Interview, 1968 (The Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University: The Ralph J. Bunche Oral History Collection). For an interesting discussion of the social and political dynamics of the Selma protest, see: Garrow, Protest at Selma, pp. 212f.

61. King, Where Do We Go From Here?, pp. 15-17.


63. King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 39.


65. Gregg, The Power of Nonviolence (Greenwood), p. 44.

66. Ibid., p. 45. For an interesting example of where the social dynamics of moral jiu-jitsu came into play
during King's Birmingham campaign, see: King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 101-102.

67. King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 83.


69. King, "A New Sense of Direction," p. 5; emphasis King's. King was keenly aware of the fact that violence unleashed by segregationists against nonviolent demonstrators often worked to help solicit the vital public sympathy needed for SCLC to secure victory. After the Birmingham campaign, President Kennedy commented to King that Bull Conner, the vitriolic Birmingham Public Safety Director, had done a great deal that year for the civil rights movement. See: King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 132; compare: Transcript of Fred Shuttlesworth Interview, 1968 (The Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University: The Ralph J. Bunche Oral History Collection), pp. 56f. Using Conner's bellicose actions to benefit the movement was no accident. During the Birmingham campaign Wyatt Walker was instructed by King to try to get Conner to show his true colors, revealing the violent domination under which black citizens lived in Birmingham. See: Transcript of Wyatt T. Walker Interview (Howard University), p. 59. But these ideas must be seen in proper perspective. King never tried to create an atmosphere of violence, though he believed violence on the part of segregationists and self-suffering on the part of nonviolent resisters could be beneficial to the movement. Paulo Freire has shown in his insightful analysis that violence is the foundation of oppression and is always initiated by the oppressor. See: Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, pp. 41-42 and 150-151. King understood this implicitly, and he used nonviolent demonstrations to reveal the inherent violence in racial discrimination. King always worked against the further perpetration of violence. When violence broke out in Birmingham, for example, perpetrated by white racists after the signing of a peace agreement, the SCLC did all it could to quell the angry response of black citizens--as SCLC did whenever it encountered volatile, or potentially volatile, situations. See: King, Address in Birmingham. In Birmingham several bombs exploded, including one which destroyed the home of A. D. King, Martin Luther King's brother. Following the bombings King made this statement to citizens in the black community, a statement which evinces his commitment to minimizing violence in the community: "I am convinced that the agreements that have been made will be met and we are going to see an integrated Birmingham in the next few weeks. The thing we must do is hold our heads high and keep ourselves committed to nonviolence. And let me tell you another thing, all of the white people in Birmingham are not bad
people. All of the white people in Birmingham are not against what we are fighting for. I'm sorry but I will never teach any of you to hate white people. This is not the meaning of our movement. I am teaching you to love those who hate us and love those who love us. Love everybody because God says 'love.' Now to show you that all white people are not against us and that some of them are ashamed about what's happening, one of the wealthy white men in this community called us this morning and said 'I don't know the cost, but whatever it will cost to rebuild the home of Rev. A. D. King, I want to pay every penny of it.' This is important for us to see....There are friends that we have in the white community. So let us be true to nonviolence." See: Martin Luther King, Jr., Address, Birmingham, Alabama, "Contemporary Social Action Collection" (State of Wisconsin Historical Society: University of Wisconsin Library), tape 4, side 2, part 2.

70. See: King, Where Do We Go From Here?, pp. 121-123; Why We Can't Wait, pp. 39-40. King attributed victory in the Birmingham campaign to the courage of the protesters. He wrote: "The keys to victory in Birmingham were the refusal to be intimidated; the indomitable spirit of Negroes to endure; their willingness to fill the jails; their ability to love their children--and take them by the hand into battle; to leave on that battlefield six murdered Negro children, to suffer the grief, and resist demoralization and provocation to violence." See: Martin Luther King, Jr., "Hammer of Civil Rights," Nation CXCVIII (March 9, 1964), p. 231.

71. King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 120-121.


74. King, Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 39-40. Compare: Martin Luther King, Jr., "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," Address at the First Annual Institute on Non-Violence and Social Change, December 3, 1956 (Boston University: King Collection, X, 44 and I, 11), p. 7; Address, Freedom Fund Report Dinner, pp. 6-7; "A Realistic Look at the Question of Progress in the Area of Race Relations," p. 3; "The Current Crisis in Race Relations," pp. 9-10; "When Peace Becomes Obnoxious," March 22, 1956 (King Center, Atlanta: King Papers); Address at Rally, Gadsden, Alabama, June 21, 1963 (King Center, Atlanta: King Papers), pp. 1-3.
75. Wyatt Walker, in an interview with John Britton, also discussed this issue. Walker believed that though the SCLC often brought to light the tension in race relations it never created crisis for crisis sake, nor precipitated racial tensions for the purpose of raising funds. Walker does assert, however, that keeping the issue of racial discrimination before the public in the form of nonviolent campaigns did help to stimulate further advances in civil rights and helped in the raising of additional funds. See: Transcript of Wyatt T. Walker Interview (Howard University), pp. 25, 29-30 and 54.

76. "Meet The Press," Congressional Record, p. 21095. Gandhi was also criticized on this account. In response, he wrote: "But my critic deplores direct action. For, he says, 'it does not work for unity.' I join issue with him. Never has anything been done on this earth without direct action. ...What was the larger 'symbiosis' that Buddha and Christ preached? Buddha fearlessly carried the war into the enemy's camp and brought down on its knees an arrogant priesthood. Christ drove out the money-changers from the temple of Jerusalem and drew down curses from Heaven upon the hypocrites and the pharisees. Both were for intensely direct action. But even as Buddha and Christ chastized they showed unmistakable gentleness and love behind every act of theirs. They would not raise a finger against their enemies, but would gladly surrender themselves rather than the truth for which they lived. Buddha would have died resisting the priesthood, if the majesty of his love had not proved to be equal to the task of bending the priesthood. Christ died on the cross with a crown of thorns on his head defying the might of a whole empire. And if I raise resistances of a non-violent character I simply and humbly follow in the footsteps of the great teachers named by my critic." See: Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance, pp. 110-112.

77. King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 85-86.

78. See: King, Where Do We Go From Here?, pp. 90-91. King often uses this kind of metaphor. In a sense, he saw direct action as a "surgical" technique employed to bring greater health in the body politic. See further: King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 151-152.

79. King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 85.

80. King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 40; see also: Matthew 10:34f.


82. See: King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 26f.
83. See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 39-40; Address, Freedom Fund Report Dinner, pp. 6-7; "A Realistic Look at the Question of Progress in the Area of Race Relations," p. 3.

84. It should be noted that negotiation and direct action are not isolated or distinct stages. The negotiation process normally would begin before direct action is suspended. Moreover, direct protest would not be withdrawn until guaranteed assurances were given in good faith that the presence of certain injustices would be removed.

85. King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 79-80. He also asserts: "My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent-resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word tension. I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, so must we see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood." See: King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 79-80.


87. King, Address, Fourth Anniversary of the M.I.A., p. 5. King uses the word "compromise" with positive and pejorative connotations. Compare: King, Address, Fourth Anniversary of the M.I.A., p. 5; and, Martin Luther King, Jr., Remarks at the Annual Dinner of Freedom House, November 26, 1963 (Boston University: King Collection, I, 11), p. 2; Why We Can't Wait, p. 131.

88. King, Address, Fourth Anniversary of the M.I.A., p. 5; emphasis mine.

89. Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, p. 197; see also, pp. 192-196, 220-221.

90. Ibid., p. 196.

91. See the discussion of "The Aim and Orientation of Nonviolence" in the previous chapter.

92. Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, p. 196; emphasis mine.
93. For an excellent discussion of Niebuhr's views on compromise in relation to agapeic love and social justice, see his An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, pp. 139-198.

94. See: King, "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," p. 30. King indicates the purpose of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference as follows: "The ultimate aim of SCLC is to foster and create the 'beloved community' in America where brotherhood is a reality. SCLC works for integration. Our ultimate goal is genuine intergroup and interpersonal living—integration." See: Smith and Zepp, Search for the Beloved Community, p. 120; also, pp. 119-140.

95. King, "The Case Against 'Tokenism,'" p. 52. King writes: "The nonviolent resisters can summarize their message in the following simple terms: We will take direct action against injustice without waiting for other agencies to act. We will not obey unjust laws or submit to unjust practices. We will do this peacefully, openly, cheerfully—because our aim is to persuade. We adopt the means of nonviolence because our end is a community at peace with itself. We will try to persuade with our words—but if our words fail we will try to persuade with our acts. We will always be willing to talk and seek fair compromise but we are ready to suffer when necessary and even risk our lives to become witnesses to the truth as we see it." See: King, "The Case Against 'Tokenism,'" p. 52.


97. Ibid., p. 247.

98. It was not difficult for King to anticipate the successful outcome of the boycott for in November, 1956 the Supreme Court ruled that Alabama's state and local laws requiring segregation in public transportation were unconstitutional. This is one of the reasons why the reconciliation "stage" is so apparent in the Montgomery crusade. The campaign leaders had ample time to anticipate and prepare for the eventual integration of the city buses.


101. King, "We Are Still Walking," p. 7; emphasis mine, but two paragraphs later in this article the same emphasis is given by King. See also: King, Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 170-173.
103. See: Ibid., pp. 164-169.
104. See: Ibid., p. 163.
105. See: Ibid., p. 183.
106. Ibid., p. 172.

VII. THE PRIMACY OF LOVE

1. King, Why We Can't Wait, p. 86.
3. Ibid., p. 8.
4. King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 37.
5. Ibid., pp. 36-37. M. M. Thomas has written an interesting article contrasting King's approach to power with that of Gandhi. He concluded that King's views on power politics were much more realistic and did not include some of the ambiguity and religious sentimentality present in Gandhi's thinking on this topic. See: M. M. Thomas, "Basic Approaches to Power--Gandhi, Andrews and King," esp. pp. 20-25; see also, Bishop, A Technique For Loving, pp. 135f.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 194.
9. Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at the National Conference for New Politics, August 31, 1967 (King Center, Atlanta: King Papers), p. 19.
10. King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 54.
11. In his December 5, 1955 speech King pointed out that the black community's love of democracy was one of the primary motivations for engaging in the Montgomery protest. "The great glory of American democracy," he stated, "is the right to protest for the right." Throughout this impelling oration, one is aware of the
fundamental democratic values which underlie King's view of justice. He says: "We are here because of our love for democracy, because of our deep-seated belief that democracy transformed from thin paper to thick action is the greatest form of government on earth." See: King, Address, December 5, 1955, "Contemporary Social Action Collection," tape 1, side 1. This same idea is reflected in another powerful speech given at the Lincoln Memorial during the first march on Washington in 1957. King stressed the importance of voting rights for black citizens as a primary social justice issue in the United States: "...All types of conniving methods are still being used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters. The denial of this sacred right is a tragic betrayal of the highest mandates of our democratic tradition. So long as I do not firmly and irrevocably possess the right to vote I do not possess myself. I cannot make up my mind—it is made up for me. I cannot live as a Democratic citizen, observing the laws I have helped to enact—I can only submit to the edict of others. So our most urgent request to the President of the United States and every member of Congress is to give us the right to vote. Give us the ballot and we will no longer have to worry the Federal Government about our basic rights. Give us the ballot and we will no longer plead to the Federal Government for passage of an anti-lynching law; we will by the power of our vote write the law on the statute books of the Southern States, and bring an end to the dastardly acts of the hooded perpetrators of violence." See: King, "Address at the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom," p. 1; also, Statement Before the Platform Committee, Democratic Party, October 1956 (Boston University: King Collection, I, 11), p. 1. Compare: Martin Luther King, Jr., "Who Speaks For the South," Liberation II (March 1958). King's views on justice presuppose his basic concept of human freedom, discussed in Chapter Five of this work. Freedom for King was the ability to deliberate and to decide, the capacity to make choices, and therefore to participate in the decision-making processes that set the structures, mores and legal framework of society.

12. See: King, "I Have a Dream...," p. 4.

13. Ibid.

14. Within the black community there has been a diversity of opinion regarding King's reliance upon nonviolent resistance, and this has been true among black theologians as well. J. Deotis Roberts characterizes his attitude towards King's program as "affirmative and yet not uncritical." See: J. Deotis Roberts, A Black Political Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), p. 198. One senses Roberts' deep respect for King throughout his writings. See: Roberts, A Black Political
Theology, esp. pp. 198-204; Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), esp. pp. 182-191; "Christian Liberation Ethics: The Black Experience," Religion in Life XLVIII, 2 (Summer 1979), pp. 227-235. After the dawning of the Black Power movement, James Cone questioned the adequacy of King's nonviolent program. Cone also was suspicious of why the white community affirmed King's position. He believed whites viewed King's emphasis on nonviolence "as the less of two evils." See: James H. Cone, Black Theology and Black Power (New York: The Seabury Press, 1969), p. 79; see also pp. 108-109. And yet Cone writes: "It is not possible to speak meaningfully to the black community about liberation unless it is analyzed from a Christian perspective which centers on Jesus Christ. This accounts for the influence of Martin Luther King, Jr. As a prophet, with a charisma never before witnessed in this century, King preached black liberation in the light of Jesus Christ and thus aroused the spirit of freedom among black people. To be sure, one may argue that his method of nonviolence did not meet the needs of the black community in an age of Black Power; but it is beyond question that it was King's influence and leadership in the black community which brought us to the period in which we now live, and for that we are in his debt. His life and message demonstrate that the 'soul' of the black community is inseparable from liberation but always liberation grounded in Jesus Christ. The task of Black Theology is to build on the foundation laid by King by recognizing the theological character of the black community, a community whose being is inseparable from liberation through Jesus Christ." James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970), pp. 77-78. Compare: Joseph R. Washington, Jr., Black Religion: The Negro and Christianity in the United States (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964; fifth printing, 1972), esp. pp. 1-30; Major J. Jones, Black Awareness: A Theology of Hope (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971); Christian Ethics for Black Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974). The references contained in Notes 15 and 16 of this chapter also may be of interest.

Notes for Chapter VII


17. King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 100. King related in Stride Toward Freedom that personalism was his "basic philosophical position." See: Ibid., p. 100.

18. King was very critical of those who identified the Christian gospel with a specific socio-economic system, as reflected in his appraisal of Rauschenbusch's theology of the social gospel. King subscribed to many of the democratic values inherent in Rauschenbusch's writings, but he felt Rauschenbusch naively equated those values with a particular political structure. See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 91.

19. King's deeply held personalist values, especially as they relate to social structures, are reflected in his critique of Communism. See "The Search For a Means" in Chapter Two of this work.

20. See: King, "The Ethical Demands of Integration;" and Where Do We Go From Here?, pp. 180-181.

21. King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 180. King goes on to say: "Nothing would be more disastrous and out of harmony with our self-interest than for the developed nations to travel a dead-end road of inordinate selfishness. We are in the fortunate position of having our deepest sense of morality coalesce with our self-interest." See: Ibid. It is interesting to note here King's use of the term "self-interest." This statement is founded upon King's metaphysic of morals. For him, that which runs cross-grain to the moral principles of life is ultimately self-defeating. See: Ibid., pp. 180-181.

22. Ibid., p. 181. King did not lay out the complex psycho-social relationships involved in his critique of racial discrimination, but clearly, for King, "injustice anywhere was a threat to justice everywhere." See: King, "The Rising Tide of Racial Consciousness," p. 9.
23. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Desegregation and the Future," with an Introduction by Kenneth B. Clark, December 1, 1956 (King Center, Atlanta: King Papers), pp. 8-9; also, King, Address, President's Committee on Government Contracts, pp. 3-4. King wrote: "Then there is a third reason why segregation is evil and that is because it ends up depersonalizing the segregated. That's the end result of segregation. The segregated becomes merely a thing to be used, not a person to be respected—made merely a depersonalized cog in a vast economic machine. And this is why segregation is utterly evil and utterly un-Christian. It substitutes an 'I-it' relationship for the 'I-thou' relationship. It relegates the segregated to the status of a thing rather than elevating to the status of a person. So segregation will always be evil because it ends up depersonalizing the segregated." See: King, "Desegregation and the Future," p. 9.

24. King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 90.

25. King, Why We Can't Wait, pp. 135-136. Out of this concern King called for "a Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged." He argued that just as the Marshall Plan was put into effect to help Europe after the devastation of the Second World War, so black people in the United States who had endured the ravages of slavery and racial discrimination must be the recipients of affirmative action to bring them into the mainstream of American life. King also likened such a Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged to several other compensation programs in American history. He asserted, moreover, that these programs should be available to poor whites as well. See: Ibid., pp. 136-139. Compare: Martin Luther King, Jr., Statement Before the Platform Committee, Republican National Convention, San Francisco, California, July 7, 1964 (Boston University: King Collection, I, 11), pp. 8-9.

26. King, Statement Before the Platform Committee, Republican National Convention, p. 9. Elsewhere King stated, "In an effort to achieve freedom in America, we must not try to leap from a position of disadvantage to one of advantage, thus subverting justice. We must seek democracy and not the substitution of one tyranny for another. Black supremacy is as bad as white supremacy. God is not interested merely in the freedom of black men and brown men and yellow men, God is interested in the freedom of the whole human race." See: King, Address to the National Bar Association, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August 20, 1959 (Boston University: King Collection, VI, 28 and I, 11), p. 9.

27. King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 37.
28. Ibid., pp. 37-38. King asserted: "The final major area of untapped power for the Negro is in the political arena. Negro population is burgeoning in major cities as tides of migrants flow into them in search of employment and opportunity." See: Ibid., p. 146. King believed that the black community's political power, in areas where the black population was expanding and where black people constituted a majority, could be used to elect public officials who could further the cause of racial and economic equality.

30. King, Where Do We Go From Here?, pp. 139ff.
31. Ibid., pp. 143-144.
33. King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 138.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., p. 36.
36. Ibid., pp. 43-44; emphasis mine.

37. Ibid., p. 59. King was fond of quoting Lord Acton's dictum: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." See: King, Strength to Love, p. 60. But King does not refer to this famous statement in a cynical manner. For him, this maxim did not preclude the black community demanding a greater share in the political and economic power structures of American society. Indeed, Acton's dictum reflects the primary social justice problem in the United States in King's view. It is the absolute power of white society--i.e., the inequitable balance and unjust use of power--which has created the exploitation of racial discrimination. A more equitable distribution of power within American society, in King's view, would create checks and balances, establishing healthy tensions, which would keep power from being absolute and thereby minimize racial exploitation.

38. King, Where Do We Go From Here?, p. 54.
41. Ibid., p. 11. Niebuhr wrote of power: "The limitations of the human mind and imagination, the
inability of human beings to transcend their own interests sufficiently to envisage the interests of their fellowmen as clearly as they do their own makes force an inevitable part of the process of social cohesion. But the same force which guarantees peace also makes for injustice. 'Power,' said Henry Adams, 'is poison; and it is a poison which blinds the eyes of moral insight and lames the will of moral purpose." See: Ibid., p. 6. Niebuhr also wrote: 'The very power which organizes human society and establishes justice, also generates injustice by its preponderance of power.' See: Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny of Man, vol. 2, p. 21.


43. King quotes Dean Walter Muelder in support of his criticism of Niebuhr's ethics. See: King, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Ethical Dualism," p. 14. Muelder's statement is worth noting here. He writes of Niebuhr's thought: "The strength of this position lies in its critique of the easy conscience and the complacency of some forms of perfectionism. But its weakness resides in its inability to deal adequately with the relative perfection which is the fact of the Christian life. How there can be development in the spiritual life of the self; by what powers Christian values are conserved in personality; what redemptive forces can be released into history by committed human beings; and how the immanence of Agape in human nature and history is to be concretely conceived—all these issues are left unresolved. The practical assurance of the ultimacy and availability of the divine Agape, we should recognize, is not naive, and it is not to be dismissed as an extreme perfectionism which misjudges the historical situation. There is a Christian perfectionism which may be called a prophetic melliorism, which, while it does not presume to guarantee future willing, does not bog down in pessimistic imperfectionism. Niebuhr's treatment of much historical perfectionism is well-founded criticism from an abstract ethical viewpoint, but it hardly does justice to the constructive historical contributions of the perfectionist.
sects within the Christian fellowship and even within the secular order. There is a kind of Christian assurance which releases creative energy into the world and which in actual fellowship rises above the conflicts of individual or collective egoism." See: Walter Muelder, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Conception of Man," The Personalist (1945), pp. 282-293; esp. pp. 291-292.

44. King, Address, December 5, 1955, "Contemporary Social Action Collection," tape 1, side 1; compare: Martin Luther King, Jr., "Why We Must Go To Washington," II, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia, January 15, 1968 (King Center, Atlanta: King Papers), p. 8.

45. King, Where Do We Go From Here?, pp. 89-90. Compare: King, Address, December 5, 1955, "Contemporary Social Action Collection, tape 1, side 1; Where Do We Go From Here?, esp. pp. 89-90; "Charting Our Course For the Future," pp. 7-8. King's understanding of the vital connection between love, justice and power may have been influenced by Paul Tillich's ontological analysis of these three ethical fundamentals. King, however, never cited Tillich as a source in this regard, and there are significant differences in their thinking. It is interesting to note that King, like Tillich, believed there was a fundamental relationship between love, justice and power and that they must be analyzed in relation to each other for a complete understanding of their meaning. Compare: Tillich, Love, Power and Justice.


47. Ibid., p. 8. Allan Boesak has affirmed King's insistence on holding together love and power. He states: "Power without love is essentially unauthentic; it becomes cruel and ultimately demonic." See: Allan Aubrey Boesak, Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power (New York: Orbis Books, 1977), p. 95. King asserted elsewhere: "Enlarged power means enlarged peril if there is not concomitant growth of the soul. Genuine power is the right use of strength. If our nation's strength is not used responsibly and with restraint, it will be following Lord Acton's dictum, that power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts..."
absolutely. Our arrogance can be our doom." See: Martin Luther King, Jr., Address to Peace Parade and Rally, Chicago, Illinois, March 25, 1967 (King Center, Atlanta: King Papers), p. 10.

48. As one might expect, the motivational character of King's discussions of love led some of his critics to declaim against his ideas as sentimental and lacking in political realism. Such quick judgments, however, represent a superficial reading of his thought. Precisely because King's ideas are almost always couched in the rhetoric of popular appeal, one must look beyond the somewhat simplistic statement of his moral philosophy and his public orations. Closer scrutiny reveals an underlying profundity to King's ethics as a whole. King's emphasis on motivating his hearers to accept agapeic love as the modus operandi of their actions reflects the praxis orientation of his moral philosophy.

49. King says of theory and action: "They are two sides of the same coin. Action without theory is aimless and misguided. Theory without action is empty and meaningless abstraction...." This statement is contained in a hand-written essay by King which was probably the broad outline for a public address. See: King, "Non-Violence: Its Basic Precepts," p. 1.

50. It is important, moreover, to keep both sides of the dialectical tension between theory and action in focus. King emphasizes both theory and action. "Action is not in itself a virtue," he asserted, "its goal and its forms determine its value." See: Martin Luther King, Jr., "Negroes Are Not Moving Too Fast," Saturday Evening Post CCXXXVII (November 7, 1964), p. 9. In King's view, "one must not only preach a sermon with his voice, he must preach it with his life." See: Dunbar, "A Visit With Martin Luther King, Jr.," p. 96.

51. This essential praxis orientation of King's thought is reflected in a statement by Ralph David Abernathy, one of his closest companions and a high ranking leader in SCLC during King's presidency. Abernathy wrote: "From the grand action of the Montgomery movement, our lives were filled with the action of doing God's will in village, hamlet, and city. We used to talk theology and then we learned to do theology." See: Abernathy, "Our Lives Were Filled With the Action," printed in Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Profile, ed. by C. Eric Lincoln (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), p. 224; emphasis mine. Abernathy's statement brings to light an important part of King's thinking as a whole. Even theology, for him, was not an abstract, other-worldly mode of cerebral activity but a way of thinking and doing, a mode of thought which must be lived for its full logic to be understood.
52. Some researchers have contended that properly speaking Martin Luther King, Jr. was not a "theologian," but they ignored the importance of this praxis dimension of his thought. For example, see: Hannigan, "King and the Ethics of Militant Nonviolence," p. 29. King was not a theologian in the classical, European mold, to be sure, but the assertion that he was not properly speaking "a theologian at all" is a serious misreading of his thought. True, King's writings and speeches on religion are aimed at persuasion and action rather than analysis as Hannigan contends. But this does not preclude King from being a theologian in his own right. King believed theology must be lived out for its integrity to be preserved, and hence the persuasive and action character of his speeches and sermons are an embodiment of this special approach to the theological discipline. One wonders what operative definition of theology stands behind Hannigan's statement and if the same criticism could not be made of all great religious teachers—from Amos to Jesus, St. Francis to Gandhi. For an interesting discussion of King's contributions as a theologian see: Paul R. Garber, "King Was a Black Theologian," Journal of Religious Thought XXXI (Fall-Winter 1974-1975), pp. 16-32; "Black Theology: The Latter Day Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.," The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center II (Spring 1975), pp. 100-113; also, Herbert Warren Richardson, "Martin Luther King—Unsung Theologian," printed in New Theology No. 6, ed. by Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969), pp. 178-184.


55. Ibid., p. 97.

56. The universal quality of Gandhi's teaching is reinforced further by the way he related his ideas to other religions and philosophies. Often throughout his writings, the Mahatma quotes from the New Testament and refers to Western thinkers such as Henry David Thoreau and John Ruskin, and he was very impressed with the writings of Leo Tolstoy. Gandhi frequently relied, therefore, upon sources from the West and elsewhere to add further support and credence to his ideas. In his book The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance, M. M. Thomas has discussed the similarities and differences between Gandhi's teaching and the Christian faith. See: "Mahatma Gandhi: Jesus the Supreme Satyagrahi," The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1969), esp. pp. 234-236.

58. Though Gandhi did not equate ahimsa with the Pauline idea of agape, he recognized the strong commensurability between his positive definition of ahimsa and New Testament love. He says of ahimsa: "It is a force which is more positive than electricity, and more powerful than even ether. At the center of non-violence is a force which is self-acting. Ahimsa means 'love' in the Pauline sense, and yet something more than 'love' defined by St. Paul, although I know St. Paul's beautiful definition is good enough for all practical purposes. Ahimsa includes the whole creation, and not only human. Besides 'love' in the English language has other connotations, and so I was compelled to use the negative word. But it does not, as I have told you, express a negative force...." See: Gandhi, Non-Violence in Peace and War, vol. I, p. 113. This statement reflects Gandhi's deep ambivalence about certain connotations of the word "love" in the West, especially sexual inferences sometimes ascribed to the term. It is interesting to note further that King also had some questions about certain connotations of the word "love" in the West. Indeed, this is one reason why he was careful to exegete the three loves in his sermons and speeches. King did not share, however, Gandhi's aversion to sexual aspects of love. For other examples of where Gandhi interprets ahimsa in a positive sense, relating ahimsa to the idea of love, see: Gandhi, An Autobiography, p. 28; Non-Violence in Peace and War, vol. II, pp. 67-69.

59. Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance, p. 161. Gandhi goes on to assert: "But it [ahimsa] does not mean helping the evil-doer to continue the wrong or tolerating it by passive acquiescence. On the contrary, love, the active state of ahimsa, requires you to resist the wrong-doer by dissociating yourself from him even though it may offend him or injure him physically. Thus if my son lives a life of shame, I may not help him to do so by continuing to support him; on the contrary, my love for him requires me to withdraw all support from him although it may mean even his death. And the same love imposes on me the obligation of welcoming him to my bosom when he repents. But I may not by physical force compel my son to become good. That in my opinion is the moral of the story of the Prodigal Son." See: Ibid., p. 161.

60. Ibid., p. 43. The Mahatma understood, through his catholic vision, the striking parallels between Christian agape and his interpretation of ahimsa. Clearly, for Gandhi, as for Martin Luther King, the pervasive presence and ontological power of love were of profound metaphysical importance, and the significance of what the Mahatma called "Universal Love" is emphasized time and
time again in his writings. Gandhi's religio-ethical approach to social change and deep belief in the moral fiber of reality seminarily influenced King's intellectual development, and when the Mahatma spoke of ahimsa and satyagraha King read into his statements his own Christian conception of agape. King also gave a positive interpretation to the idea of "non-injury" in his moral philosophy in much the same way that Gandhi reinterpreted ahimsa in a positive manner. See: King, "The Ethical Demands of Integration."

61. King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 84. David Lewis has asserted that much of the Gandhian influence exerted upon King during the Montgomery bus boycott came from Bayard Rustin, a committed pacifist and excellent organizer, and the Reverend Glenn E. Smiley, a field secretary for the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Both of these men arrived in Montgomery toward the end of February during the boycott. Lewis states: "Although the concept of nonviolence was implicit in the Christian emphasis of the MIA, thus far it had remained unarticulated....The arrival of Rustin and Smiley contributed to the acceleration of the MIA's construction of a philosophical framework for its tactics. The disciples of the Fellowship of Reconciliation were a remarkable lot, almost monomaniacal in their commitment to pacifism. Rustin, Smiley, Richard Gregg, James Farmer, the founder of CORE, and William R. Miller, a future biographer of Martin, and others were among its more distinguished exponents. They had a special jargon of their own--sobomost, Satyagraha, ahimsa, hartal--derived from their polymorphous philosophy of Indian, Christian, and humanistic pacifism. They were a loquacious and insistent group, and it is a safe assumption that Rustin and Smiley availed themselves of every opportunity to present Martin an exegesis on nonviolent passive resistance [sic]. 'During all my work with Martin King,' Rustin confirms, 'I never made a difficult decision without talking the problem over with A. J. [Muste] first.' There is more than coincidence, certainly, in the fact that, from this point on, Martin began to lace his discourses with Gandhian terminology." See: Lewis, King: A Biography, p. 72. One thing is clear: Martin Luther King, his deep respect for Gandhi notwithstanding, wished to make it clear in Stride Toward Freedom that the motivation and spirit of the Montgomery bus boycott came from the teachings of Jesus and the Judeo-Christian tradition. See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 84-85; 90-107.


63. Ibid.

64. See: Ibid., p. 89. Throughout his civil rights
career, King realistically recognized that there were those who would accept nonviolence only as a method of protest and not as a way of life, those who would see the power of this form of resistance for social reform but would not accept the ethic of agape. Nonetheless, King's own firm commitment to nonviolent resistance as a weapon "fabricated of love" always remained undaunted. For him, nonviolence in the truest sense was not "a strategy that one uses simply because it is expedient at the moment," but rather it was "ultimately a way of life that men live by because of the sheer morality of its claim." See: Ibid., p. 89. King also makes this same point in an interview with Donald Hugh Smith. See: Donald Hugh Smith Recordings, Interview With Martin Luther King, Jr., November 29, 1963, "Contemporary Social Action Collection" (State of Wisconsin Historical Society: University of Wisconsin Library), tape 9, side 1 and tape 10, side 1. King certainly allowed, indeed encouraged, people to try nonviolence even if only as a technique for social reform, but it was always his hope that those who went so far as to commit themselves to nonviolent direct action as a method of change would go further and adopt nonviolence with its ethic of loving good will as a way of life. See: King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 89.

65. One of King's biographers, David L. Lewis, has stated that King was "highly competent,...highly sensitive and intelligent, highly competitive scholastically, capable of occasional insights bordering on genius," nevertheless he insists that "his intelligence was essentially derivative" and that he "lacked the comprehensive critical apparatus and the inspired vision that blessed good philosophers." In response to this assertion Professor L. Harold DeWolf has stated: "To this somewhat patronizing comment I would respond that (1) all modern theology which is competent is 'essentially derivative'; (2) first-rate theologians and philosophers devote many years to mastering historical and contemporary thought before creating systems partially new and King was assassinated when he was only 39; and (3) immediately after achieving his doctorate he was thrust into such pressure of responsibility, peril, and incessant work putting his theology into practice, that he had little time for refining and systematizing his thought or for speculating further on unresolved problems like the problem of evil or the dialectic of divine destiny and human freedom. It was only by his special genius that he was able to state with precision and systematic coherence so much of theological thought as can be found in his writings." DeWolf goes on to say: "The main original theological contribution of his tragically shortened career was his remarkably consistent translating of this theology into action. In this process he related his theological beliefs in an authentic and original way to
various social theories and movements." And DeWolf comments further: "If he had chosen the halls of academia I have no doubt he would have become one of the most eminent Christian theologians of his generation. Instead he gave the world an unequalled example of Christian theology--catholic, critical, evangelical, related to all of life--in passionately committed, wholehearted, and effective action." See: DeWolf, "Martin Luther King As Theologian," pp. 14-16; Lewis' statement is recorded by DeWolf. A published version of this essay can be found in the following journal: L. Harold DeWolf, "Martin Luther King, Jr., As Theologian," The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center IV, 2 (Spring 1977), pp. 1-11.


69. "The proximity of this concept," Bondurant wrote of ahimsa, "to the Christian charity and to the Greek agape is, throughout, apparent." See: Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, p. 24. It is interesting to compare this statement with that of Iyer in The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 182.

70. King wrote: "Love is our great instrument and our great weapon, and that alone." See: King, "Walk For Freedom," p. 6. Elsewhere King wrote: "Always be sure that you struggle with Christian methods and Christian weapons. Never succumb to the temptation of becoming bitter. As you press on for justice, be sure to move with dignity and discipline using only the weapon of love. Let no man pull you so low as to hate him. Always avoid violence." See: King, "The Most Durable Power," p. 708. Sentimental love cannot be portrayed in these terms. For King, both the ontological character and instrumental quality of agapeic love are important, and this is precisely why he could speak of nonviolent direct action as "the Christian doctrine of love operating through the Gandhian method of nonviolence." See King, Stride Toward Freedom, p. 85.

71. Compare: Thomas, "Basic Approaches to Power;" Bishop, A Technique For Loving, pp. 92-142; Smith and Zepp, Search For the Beloved Community, pp. 119-140.

73. For an example of where King uses the phrase "primacy of love," see: King, "Walk For Freedom," p. 7.
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