

Chapter 10: Where Do We Go from Here? A Revolution of Values

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Abstract

The topic of the paper draws on Dr. Martin Luther King's well-known statement that the USA and the world need a 'revolution of values'. He made this insightful proposal at the Riverside Church in New York City on April 4, 1967, as a critique of militarism, particularly the Vietnam War, which was in full swing at the time. In terms of Dr. King's explanations, also drawing from his point of view, the revolution of values needs to change the social edifice that we inherit from the past and pass on uncritically to the next generation. It argues that the values we hold inform the social edifice, which in turn informs our values. So, we need to change the governance systems that support and enact forms of militarism; and poverty, as caused by the uncritical intergenerational greed that characterizes the market and business; and the culture that legitimizes these while inculcating forms of racism and exploitation. The paper argues that if these three pillars of social structure – the government, the market, and the civic sphere, are going to realize King's call for a revolution, then we need to inculcate, especially in the youth, the virtues of community, dignity, and liberty. The youth is seminal, since it is the youth that needs to break and replace the intergenerational values of oppressive direct violence, greed, and racism.

Keywords: nonviolence¹ as non-violent direct action, structural action, cultural action; government, market, civil society; after confrontation; virtues of community, dignity, liberty; intergenerational youth action

¹ I distinguish between the terms nonviolence/nonviolent and non-violence/non-violent. The former denotes the broadest concept of non-hurt and non-harm in human action and social order. The latter relates specifically to direct personal

I want to begin with this statement, *Nothing splendid has ever been achieved except by those who would dare believe that something inside themselves is superior to circumstances.*

It seems to me that that statement sums up the lives of Mohandas K. Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela. But it also speaks to every one of us. We must find *that something* inside of ourselves, that internal turbo that drives and directs us to a better world, to a better today and a better tomorrow.

I've been asked to speak and write a paper on Dr. King's idea of 'a revolution of values'. I begin with a series of questions: What or whose values? And, how does a revolution of values take place? I also raise the question, if Martin Luther King Jr. himself, arguably the twentieth century's pre-eminent 'nonviolentist',² could not effect such a revolution of values, how then do we?

Answering these questions is why we are here today. They follow the question King poses as the title of his book *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community* (1967). Their answers require answering others: How do we organize ourselves as a society, where we truly humanize the structural systems, institutions, programs, and processes of what we call the 'social edifice'. These are the questions relevant to Dr. King's call for a revolution of values. So, we, a gathering of strangers, are here today with the audacity to think that we will change the world through a revolution of values.

Answering them requires giving context to King's call for a revolution of values. We find the context in his statement that 'true compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar' It recognizes that the edifice that produces the beggar needs restructuring'³ In that statement, King argues that the social edifice itself violates the dignity and liberty of the person that it reduces to begging. In other words, King's question, where do we go from here, implies that *the social edifice is fundamentally violent!* Thus, it requires restructuring. That is a notion that many nonviolentists (nonviolent activists) do not fully understand and thus have not fully adopted in their nonviolence repertoire.

action that avoids hurt and harm. Thus, nonviolence, i.e., the former, subsumes the latter in all its forms.

² I use the term to refer to those who actively subscribe to the praxis of nonviolence, i.e., to nonviolence theory and practice and actively reject violence (hurt and harm) in all its forms.

³ King, 1967.

Furthermore, it acknowledges that there are different perspectives on what constitutes violence and nonviolence. Therefore, we must first define them if we are to understand how they inform and instruct the social structure.

However, let us first define the social edifice. An edifice is a structure that can be either a tangible physical structure, such as a building, or an intangible structure, like a social system. In the former case, consider a house with its intricate architectural and engineering designs and multiple systems, such as water and sewer, heating and air conditioning, and other systems that facilitate *the living conditions* it offers its occupants. In the latter case, and in our discussion, it is the social structural institutions, organizations, laws, policies, and processes that mediate human action and social order, i.e., the living conditions in the edifice. In either definition, the makeup of an edifice is as complex as it is multifaceted, requiring significant time to construct or change while always necessitating maintenance and due care.

What makes a social structure violent depends upon how one defines violence. Simply stated, in the human context,⁴ violence is any *action or condition* that causes hurt or harm to individuals and groups.⁵ Similar to the principles of architectural and engineering designs that determine the living conditions of a house, the principles and values that make up the designs of a social structural are paramount to its living condition. That suggests social structures – the edifice – are informed and instructed by value systems. These values serve as mores and norms that legitimize the social order and our behavior in it and between each other. King argued that the three values of violence that frame the social edifice are poverty, racism, and militarism. For him, these ‘triple evils’ are violent because they limit the life chances of individuals and groups, denying their dignity, limiting their liberty, and causing social chaos instead of community. Thus, they make conditions burdens from some people and benefits for others.

Alternatively, King’s vision for our world is a large house where we must learn to live together in harmony ‘or perish as fools’. This metaphor gives meaning to restructuring the edifice from a violence-values framework with an alternative set of nonviolent values. These values reflect the three forms of nonviolence. What are these three forms? Some of you may be

⁴ Violence can be done not only to humans, but to animals, things, and the environment – both animate and inanimate, sentient and non-sentient life.

⁵ Pemberton, 2016.

familiar with Judith Stiehm's 1958 article entitled, '*Non-violence is Two*'.⁶ She argues that non-violence is both a practical, pragmatic form and an ethical, principled form of *direct* social action, such as civil disobedience. In the former case, its social action is direct personal and interpersonal against other persons, groups, or structures without regard to any specific ethical or moral commitment. Rather, its design focus is on strategic and tactical efforts to compel an opponent in a conflict to do or not do something that the actionist⁷ (the person engaging in direct action) finds objectionable. In the latter case, the actionist's commitment and behavior in the conflict is informed and instructed by moral or ethical principles and values. These may be philosophical or religious in nature. For example, the love principle is the core value from which the person acts.

But there is an argument that nonviolence should be framed as three forms.⁸ It adds to the spectrum beyond such *direct action* as civil disobedience, protests, non-cooperations, and resistance, even when carried out with the principled faith and hope in humankind as an arc of the universe that bends towards justice. In the three forms, the emphasis is not on the *character* of the action, i.e., whether there is an ethical commitment. Rather it focuses on the social action *form* itself.

The three forms of nonviolence, I argue, are direct action (with or without moral commitment), structural action, and cultural action. Direct action is commonly well known, but what exactly do we mean by structural and cultural action?⁹ However, how do we use these three nonviolence forms to make or change the social edifice? These are the questions Martin Luther King Jr. has left for us to answer in the title of the book *Where Do We Go from Here Chaos or Community*.

Whether something is violent or nonviolent depends on the means used, the ends obtained, or both. That is true of social structures and revolutions – of every kind. One way to think about the relationship between social structures, revolutions, violence, and nonviolence is to understand the latter two as revolutions themselves. Recall that we define violence as direct, physical, and

⁶ It is important to note that her definition of nonviolence is related to not acting violently directly and personally, as in the form of non-violent direct action.

⁷ I use this term referring to people who use the direct action techniques in seeking nonviolent social change.

⁸ Mack, 2019.

⁹ Mack, 2016.

interpersonal hurt or harm. Significantly, people often believe it is the ‘nature’ of humans. There is much to argue here (That’s another article).

Then there is the less observable, but no less violent social order itself, where individuals realize the preventable, if unintentional, harm that limits the life chances, for example, of society’s powerless and marginalized. Thus, institutions and structures can cause hurt and harm. Recall that hurt and harm may be direct, physical, and immediate, as when one person strikes another person at a moment *in time*. Such violence may also be indirect, causing (a continuum of) hurt or harm that takes place *over time*. That form of hurt and harm scholars call structural violence or institutional violence. Indeed, there is where means and ends come into play. That is, the structure can be the means of the violence, specifically when intentional or, even if unintentional in means, the result (or end) can constitute hurt or harm. What is significant to this discussion is the inculcation and institutionalization of violence as both a means and an end to social change and our human development mores and norms that mediate human action, i.e., the edifice. In that case, we assume or accept such structures as the *natural order* of change and development or how humans experience the world order, ignoring that the social edifice is a human structure comprising the decisions we make regarding the principles and values of its design. In other words, *that hurt or harm is avoidable*.

So, answering King’s question, where do we go from here, we must also understand how we got here, and answer the question, where is here? King understood that the social structures, the social edifice, the edifice that produces beggars, the edifice that produces war, the edifice that produces poverty and racism, reflects the values that we humans have decided to adopt; they are not the nature of social organizations, per se or of our human nature. So, what are they? Another question is how did we get here? Well, consider the following statement: We are what we are today because of what happened yesterday, and until we have the necessary confrontation with yesterday, our tomorrows will forever be the same. My argument is ‘here’ is our existential lived experiences, individually and collectively. How we got here reflects our value-informed choices, *in time* and *over time*. We humans choose a values framework that informs and instructs how the social edifice operates in our lives, determining who we are and what we do. It informs and instructs who enjoys society’s benefits and who suffers its burdens.

A central question remains: How do we restructure the social edifice? One of the brilliant things King did was to rearticulate the teachings, the lessons, the examples of Mohandas K. Gandhi. Not only did King, but the whole cadre

of ‘Black Gandhians’, African American civil rights champions who visited the Mahatma, learned of his teachings, followed his examples and applied them in the United States civil rights movement *to the specific circumstances of their lived experience*. And if that was what the non-violentists of the mid-twentieth century did to achieve their gains, how much more must we in the twenty-first century do the same? We spend a great deal of time praising what others have done in the past, but we don’t use that same creative drive and energy to realize the changes we seek today. Yes, we’re quite comfortable recounting the love and the faith and the courage of those we admire so much. But, we forget that *nothing splendid has ever been achieved except by those who would dare believe that something inside of themselves is superior to the circumstances*. That is as true for us today as it was for Gandhi, Mandela, King and those others of the U.S. civil rights movement in the mid-twentieth century.

So, where are the believers today? Who are the believers today? What is that internal commitment that will take the fundamental principles and values of nonviolence and rearticulate them for today’s peace and justice challenges and opportunities? We are what we are today because of what happened yesterday. Therefore, we cannot suddenly change the world. No, we will not change the edifice in an instant or an act of civil disobedience alone. That is why it is important to consider the means of nonviolence. We must account for nonviolent social change activities, particularly those involving direct action, and assess their effectiveness. We argue with those who might criticize the approach and say that direct, non-violent action simply does not have enough effect to challenge the exigencies of violence. However, what makes violence in the social edifice work is our cooperation, whether it is direct physical violence, indirect structural violence, or the ubiquitous cultural violence that legitimizes the other two forms.¹⁰ In other words, over time we have accepted certain notions as the inevitability of our humanity, even we who subscribe to the idea of nonviolence.

My work falls under the title, ‘After confrontation, then what?’¹¹ We talk about non-violence being non-cooperation, resistance etc., but after we have protested, after we have not cooperated, after resistance and intervention and we do not achieve our desired ends, then what? If we view nonviolence only as direct action, and if we view direct action only in the terms or in the framework of direct physical engagement, and we do not achieve our goals,

¹⁰ Galtung, 1996.

¹¹ Mack, 2016.

what do we do then? Or, if we topple an authoritarian regime, only for it to be replaced by another authoritarian regime, then what?

Are there other forms of nonviolence that we can use in this revolution? The answer to that question is ‘yes’ We can inculcate, as King asks, a revolution of values into the social edifice. That is a form of social action we often overlook, but King anticipates it in his call. After all, the social edifice that we have inherited over time is the culmination of past decisions that humans have made *and our present cooperation with those decisions*, which have brought us to where we are right now, in our time and space. So, the answer to the question of where we go from here is *to that revolution*. King admonishes that it must be done through peaceable power. Such power is the same process that has brought us *here*, but *informed by nonviolent values* to effect social change and to promote the development of humanity in the World House.

The key to changing the social edifice is understanding that we humans act in accordance with the truth as we perceive it or believe it to be. Therefore, if we can change the way we think, we can also change the way we act. If *we* non-violentists change the way we collectively think and, therefore, how we collectively act, so can others. But, how do we change the way we think? Well, we make decisions about *how we want the social order to operate within our lives*, then diffuse and infuse them throughout the social structure. We do that in political, private sector, and civic institutions or social structures; that is, the social edifice. Our value choices permeate virtually every institution we have, whether they are physical or anthropomorphic¹² institutions. Anthropomorphically, we understand, teach, practice it, for example, as collective consciousness.

That means that structural and cultural action processes within our structural and cultural institutions inform our collective consciousness, or, as Paulo Freire calls it, conscientization — *a critical consciousness*. That form of consciousness informs and instructs not only our individual and collective actions, whether direct or cultural but also the *actions* of the social edifice.¹³

¹² Galtung, 1996.

¹³ This argument invokes Anthony Giddens’ structuration concept, which posits the relationship between social structures and human interaction within them, where structures foster specific human behaviors that, in turn, produce and reproduce the structures. Social constructionism argues that our society is constructed through our interactions and language, emphasizing that our discourse shapes our understanding of reality, providing the mores and norms,

Such action is the work of civil society, i.e., the efforts of ordinary citizens and the civic structures and institutions they create. This point requires much more detail and discussion than our time allows, and it would be another article. Let us settle for now with the idea that the revolution of values that King calls us to wage points us to his question: where do we go from here? From here, we must not only restructure existing structures, but also form new civic structures.

The social edifice is a human construct; society is a human project of social change and human development. A natural order does not predetermine our present social condition. We make society what it is. We can view it as a three-legged table, with the state or government leg, the market or business leg, and the people leg, civil society. The problem is that we have a robust government leg and a powerful business leg but a very underdeveloped and dependent third leg in civil society. Its dependence lies at the whim of the government and the market. How do we fully develop that third leg of the social edifice? The answer to that question is the answer to King's question, 'Where do we go from here'?

From here, we must change the values that King finds violent in the edifice. As we noted earlier, he calls these values the triple evils of poverty, racism, and militarism. How should we understand these values? We can understand poverty as a function of cupidity or greed. That is, poverty is the result of the inequity in the distribution of benefits and burdens within the social edifice. Racism is simply a form of bigotry; it is a form of prejudice against a person or group. Moreover, militarism, or war, is a function of violent rivalry. So, we can rearticulate King's three evils of poverty, racism, and militarism as cupidity, bigotry, and rivalry, all forms of violence because they cause hurt and harm that limits the potential and life chances of individuals and groups. They, for example, produce beggars!

Can we employ processes of social action that infuse and inculcate a different set of values into the social edifice? If we can, what is that set of values that King refers to, and what are the processes? We said that the values that he wants to *change* we can rearticulate as greed or cupidity, bigotry, and violent rivalry. The question is, what do we replace those with?

identities, and institutions that inform and instruct our behavior. Ultimately, critical theory scrutinizes societal structures, norms, and mores to reveal the power structures that determine who benefits and who is burdened by them.

We can replace them with community, dignity, and liberty. Here is why. In discussing how humans can integrate the World House, King refers to these values. He recognizes that all humans have equal *dignity* and worth. He insists that denying a person's freedom or *liberty* is to deny them life itself. Moreover, he insists that if we are to live as a society fully integrated into the World House, we must live in harmony as a *community*.¹⁴ These values - dignity, liberty, and community - we might call the 'triple goods' If 'good' is not good enough, then how about the triple virtues? Whatever we call them, we must also live them in the same way we live the three evils: as a fundamental part of the social mores and norms that inform our structures and instruct our interaction with each other.

So, the question of where do we go from here to obtain this revolution of values is the urgency that calls us as civil society to account for how we organize, mobilize, and establish value systems and civic structures that foster dignity, liberty, and community as the values upon which we choose to live in the World House.

Martin Luther King Jr. admonished us to study nonviolence, even at the United Nations. I have often thought, what does he mean? Does he intend for the United Nations to create a non-violent army or force? Maybe so. However, who will take the time to thoroughly examine these forms of nonviolence and devise the mechanisms and strategies of social action within structures and cultures? We must build them into our social edifice. They must be part of the institutional, discursive, and cultural continuities of our social action and order. That means we must teach them, preach them, monetize them, gamify them, advertise them, and promote them.

Who is responsible? All of us are responsible. That said, we should be mindful that most of the social change, particularly in the Western world, that has taken place over the last hundred years has come from young people (people mainly between the ages of 18 and 35). There is one problem with youth, however. Their intervention does not last very long. It is transient. They somehow grow up and out of their conscientization into life's exigent realities, not so much about making a life as about making a living. How do we inculcate a value framework so that children and youth carry nonviolent values and principles into adulthood, making decisions in business, government, and the civil sphere? Once again, that is King's question: Where we go from here? The

¹⁴ King, 1962.

answer is the work of nonviolent social change and human development for this century.

Some might argue that this framework is as ineffectual as the principled form of nonviolence. However, before dismissing it, carefully consider that it has been the same form of social change and human development that has brought us *here*! Indeed, it is the very form of social change that is occurring today. As we navigate and grapple with the emerging ‘new world order’ of this century, which challenges our commitment to democracy, fosters our acceptance of oligarchy, and persuades us to appreciate autocracy, even against our self-interest – individually and collectively – we are engaging in a revolution of values! Right *here*! Right now! The difference is the values we use; thus, King’s call for a values revolution.

That is the kind of study, work, and praxis that we must do if we intend to restructure the social edifice. After all, if something seems untenable about consistent, contentious politics, at some point, confrontation itself is not enough. If we can create the cultural and institutional framework that changes the social edifice, we can have a more just and peaceful World House. Moreover, remember, *nothing splendid has ever been achieved except by those who would dare believe that something inside themselves is superior to circumstances.*

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