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The Movement of Justice through Dénucleation:

Levinas, King and the Personal Dynamics of Peace

Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Luther King were both philosophers of non-violence and love. Their work calls upon me personally, uniquely, and endlessly to locate the resources to prioritize the claim of the Other upon me. In the MAP program at Seattle University, training therapists explore the context of the healing relationship through the lens of Levinasian Ethics by asking the question, “Who is this for?”. This question calls the therapist to engage with the client at the level of what Levinas calls “dénucleation” (Levinas, 1981/1998) or the process of being constantly decentered by the Other. This means that my humanity is continuously invested by the vulnerability of the Other, a process that leaves intact the infinite mystery of the Other’s ongoing becoming and, in turn, my deepening capacity to serve. This paradox of power and weakness (Kunz, 1998) is exemplified also in Kingian nonviolence and the foundation of the agapeic beloved community (King, 1957). At the radically local psychological level, how does dénucleation establish a platform for peace? At the social level, how can we create the conditions for the ongoing “revolution of conscience” (Moses, 1997)? To explore these questions, I examine the dynamics of the individual and personal claim of responsibility beyond a mere stay of a striking hand or retaliatory reductive objectifying word, or beyond simply the abstention of violence. Through the philosophies of these kings of love, I explore what it might be like experientially for us to prioritize the hollowing out of subjectivity through the decentering paradoxical power of vulnerability, which offers and creates more resources to give than we ever knew we could.

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