MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.,
PERSONALISM, AND MORAL LAW

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Martin Luther King, Jr. was not the first Afrikan American to study the philosophy of Personalism at Boston University. However, King is the Afrikan American most often associated with this philosophical tradition. Indeed, had he not written in his application to Boston University Graduate School that he wanted to study there both because Edgar S. Brightman (1884-1953) was teaching Personalism there, and because one of his professors at Crozer Theological Seminary (a Boston alum) encouraged him to do so?[1] King earned the Ph.D. degree in philosophical theology[2] at that institution in 1955. While there he was much influenced by Brightman and L. Harold DeWolf (1905-1986).

DeWolf wrote of his own influence on King. "At nearly all points his system of positive theological belief was identical with mine, and occasionally I find his language following closely the special terms of my own lectures and writings."[3] King's most original and creative contribution to the Personalist tradition was his adamant persistence in translating Personalism into social action by applying it to the trilogy of social problems—racism, poverty/economic exploitation, and militarism[4]—that he believed plagued this country and the world. By focusing on social-ethical Personalism (which is grounded in the metaphysics of Personalism) King, although unknowingly, was only following the precedence set by John Wesley Edward Bowen (1855-1933), the first Afrikan American academic Personalist,[5] and Francis J. McConnell (1871-1953).

This essay endeavors to do three things: 1) To address the impact of Personalism on Martin Luther King, Jr. because some King scholars, e.g., David Garrow, downplay the importance of Personalism on King's formal theological development.[6] It is crucial that we remember at all times that King himself affirmed that Personalism or Personal Idealism was his fundamental philosophical point of departure.

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> This personal idealism remains today my basic philosophical position. Personalism's insistence that only personality—finite and infinite—is ultimately real strengthened me in two convictions: it gave me metaphysical and philosophical grounding for the idea of a personal God, and it gave me a metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all human personality.[7]

Notice that King did not say that he first came to believe in a personal God and the dignity of persons through his study of Personalism. These were beliefs that were instilled in him through his family upbringing and teachings at the Ebenezer Baptist Church pastored by his father in Atlanta, Georgia. Therefore these were beliefs that King brought to the study of Personalism, which in turn provided the metaphysical grounding he sought. Indeed, Susan Harlow brings a sharp clarity to the point in a paper she wrote on King.

> The church of his parents and grandparents had imparted an understanding of God and of the purposes of Christian ministry that could not be displaced by theological sophistication. *His study of personalism reinforced his beliefs rather than supplanted them.* It gave him a metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all persons.[8] (Italics mine)

2) To consider *his* contribution to what may be cautiously referred to as "Boston Personalism." 3) To assess the meaning of his Personalism for the Afrikan American community today. I begin with a brief discussion of the meaning and development of Personalism, followed by consideration of several of its chief traits and how King interpreted them. Consideration is also given to the significance of King's belief in the existence of an objective moral order and the moral law system. These and related beliefs contributed to King's faith in the possibility of the achievement of the *beloved community*, and his insistence on nonviolence as a way of life. Finally, I discuss the meaning of the Kingian type of Personalism in relation to the phenomenon of intracommunity black violence and murder.

MEANING AND DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONALISM

What is Personalism? It is the view that reality is personal and persons are the highest—not the only!—intrinsic values. It is a type of idealism which maintains that PERSON is the supreme philosophical principle—that principle without which no other principle can be made intelligible. The type of Personalism here considered, and which prompted King to claim it as his fundamental philosophical standpoint,[9] maintains that the universe is a society of interacting and intercommunicating selves and persons with God at the center. Personalism provided for King a philosophical framework to support his long held belief in a personal God; the idea of the absolute dignity and worth of persons;[10] and his belief in the existence of an objective moral order.

The term *personalism* was first introduced by the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher in 1799, although he did not develop it philosophically. Both English and American scholars[11] used the term in their writings in the mid-nineteenth century. However, like Schleiermacher, they did not develop its philosophical meaning.

Personalism was made a growing concern in the United States by Borden Parker Bowne (1847-1910), who is remembered as "the father of American personalism."

Bowne was called to Boston University in 1876. Vigorously reacting against impersonalistic and naturalistic philosophies of the likes of Herbert Spencer,[12] Bowne argued persuasively that the personal (or mind) can never be derived from an impersonal "Unknown," and that only mind or intelligence can produce intelligence. Indeed, for Bowne the most acute argument for theism is the argument from intelligibility.[13] Much influenced by the idealism of René Descartes, Bishop George Berkeley and Immanuel Kant, Bowne gave primacy to self-certainty; the immaterialism of all phenomenal objects (which led to the view that all objects in nature are the manifestation of God's will and thought); the practical reason; a dualistic and activistic epistemology; the primacy of the good will; and the intrinsic dignity of the person.

Bowne's systematic development of Personalism as a worldview and as a way of living in the world led to the characterization of his philosophy as "systematic methodological personalism."[14] This meant that Bowne, more than any of his contemporaries, with the possible exception of George Holmes Howison,[15] pushed the personalistic argument to its logical conclusions in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of religion, and ethics. As a result of Bowne's leadership, Boston University was known as the great bastion of personalistic studies until (roughly) the end of the 1960s. For my purpose I date the decline of Personalism by the year of King's assassination in 1968. I do so because King was the chief social Personalist in this country who both explicitly identified himself as a Personalist and was devoted to making Personalism a reality in human relations.

KING AND PERSONALISM

There is not one, but nearly a dozen types of personalisms.[16] Yet even within the most systematically developed type, viz., *theistic personalism,* which King studied, there are divergent viewpoints. For example, not all in this tradition of Personalism accept the idea of an omnipotent-omnibenevolent God. Nor do all adhere to the idea of the temporality of God. But differences notwithstanding, Personalism has a number of distinguishing features shared by all.

First, Personalism maintains that *PERSON* is prominent both metaphysically and ethically. This means that the Supreme Reality (i.e., God) is both personal and the cause and sustainer of human and non-human life forms. This idea has important implications for the treatment of persons in the world, for it implies that because the Supreme Person *chooses* or wills to create persons we are of infinite value to the Creator and thus should be respected and treated like beings who possess infinite dignity and worth. King often said that persons should be loved and respected precisely because God loves them. "The worth of an individual," he said, "does not lie in the measure of his intellect, his racial origin, or his social position. Human worth lies in relatedness to God. An individual has value because he has value to God."[17] Persons as such possess a fundamental sacredness because they are created and loved by God. For King the biblical tradition of the Jewish-Christian faith points to the quality of innate dignity in persons, an idea he believed to be implicit in the concept of *the image of God.* This led him to conclude:

This innate worth referred to in the phrase the image of God is universally shared in equal portions by all men. There is no graded scale of essential worth; there is no divine right of one race which differs from the divine right of another. Every human

being has etched in his personality the indelible stamp of the Creator.[18]

King believed that every person has not only an inborn sense of worth, but is of ines-
timable value to the Creator. This necessarily implied for him the obligation of persons to
treat self and others with respect. The idea of an inborn ideal of worth is prominent in the
ethical system of Bowne,[19] the Black Church tradition, and the Jewish-Christian tradition,
each of which influenced King.

Second, the type of Personalism that appealed to King is *THEISTIC*. Personalists
believe in a Personal God who is the creator and sustainer of the created order. In theistic
Personalism we find metaphysical grounding for the biblical belief that in God we live and
move and have our being. Such a God is perceived as infinitely loving, caring, responsive,
active, righteous, and just. We get a sense of the thoroughgoing nature of theistic
Personalism in Bowne's contention that God is the only foundation of truth, knowledge,
and morals.[20] Although he argued that it is impossible to demonstrate the existence of
God, Bowne was eager to show that the problems of the world and life cannot be solved
without God as the fundamental assumption.[21]

There is no question that King believed the universe to be under guidance of a person-
al and loving Creator God. Nowhere did he express this more clearly and movingly than
when he reflected on some of the hardships and threats made against him and his family
during the civil rights movement.

> I am convinced that the universe is under the control of a loving purpose, and that
> in the struggle for righteousness man has cosmic companionship. Behind the harsh
> appearances of the world there is a benign power. To say that this God is personal
> is not to make him a finite object besides other objects or attribute to him the limi-
> tations of human personality; it is to take what is finest and noblest in our con-
> sciousness and affirm its perfect existence in him.[22]

King believed God to be "a Personal Being of matchless power and infinite love," and that
"creative force" in the universe who "works to bring the disconnected aspects of reality
into a harmonious whole."[23]

Third, in addition to holding that reality is personal, Personalism is *FREEDOMISTIC*. In
fact, the two organizing principles of Personalism are *PERSON* and *FREEDOM*.
Accordingly, all being is both personal and free. To be is to be free and to act or have the
potential to do so (although it is more than this!). Indeed, at bottom, to be free is what it
means to be a person; to be a person is to be free, or an agent capable of acting, whether
for the good or evil. This sense of self-determination is what the Creator intends, a view
which has important implications for the ethical and political freedom of persons in the
world and what they ought to be willing to do to assert, protect, and defend their essen-
tial freedom.

Persons are not first created, and then *given* freedom. Rather, the nature of PERSON is
freedom. That is, it is the intention of the Creator that persons come into existence as free
beings and with the capacity to be self-determined moral agents. That some persons lack
moral agency because they are mentally challenged raises the theodicy question. That the
extent of the existence of moral agency in some is questionable because of the denial of
basic life-chances also raises fundamental difficulties that have both moral and socio-politi-

cal implications. For example, to what extent can we say that young Afrikan American males who engage in intracommunity violence and murder are *morally* responsible? There is no question that the one who pulls the trigger in a driveby shooting is legally responsible. But morally? At any rate Personalism maintains that in the most fundamental sense to be is to be free. It is because of this essential freedom that *all* persons who are moral agents[24] are morally obligated to resist fiercely anybody and anything that undermine or seek to crush that freedom.

King said three things about this essential freedom. First, freedom is the capacity to be self-determined and self-directed. It is "the capacity to deliberate or weigh alternatives." Secondly, freedom "expresses itself in decision." Once I choose a particular alternative I necessarily cut off other choices. And thirdly, King held that freedom implies responsibility. Once I make a choice I am responsible both for it and its most foreseeable consequences.[25] It may also be reasoned that any practice that threatens my freedom is a threat to my personhood and impinges on my ability to weigh alternatives, to make decisions, and to be responsible for my choices.

So important was freedom for King that he concluded with Brightman that without it there can be no persons. Freedom is a capstone of Personalism. Following Brightman and Bowne, King emphasized both the ethical and the speculative significance of freedom. Without freedom neither morality nor knowledge is possible, since each depends on the capacity to deliberate and choose. In graduate school King wrote an essay on the Personalism of the British philosopher John M.E. McTaggart (1866-1925). He argued against McTaggart's rejection of freedom. "In rejecting freedom," he said, "McTaggart was rejecting the most important characteristic of personality."[26] For King freedom is an abiding expression of the higher spiritual nature of persons. "Man is man," he said, "because he is free to operate within the framework of his destiny. ... He is distinguished from animals by his freedom to do evil or to do good and to walk the high road of beauty or tread the low road of ugly degeneracy."[27]

Finally, Personalism conceives of *REALITY AS THROUGH AND THROUGH SOCIAL*, relational, or communal. Accordingly, it views the universe as a society of selves and persons who interact and are united by the will of God. The individual never experiences self in total isolation. Rather, the self always experiences something which it did not invent or create, but finds or receives from her or his "interaction and communication with other persons."[28] This idea is similar to the Afrikan worldview which emphasizes the importance of the relational or communal, rather than the isolated individual. The focus is on the *WE* rather than the *I*.[29] No person exists in isolation, but in community.

In any event, the emphasis on the communal nature of reality has been present in Personalism since the time of Bowne. The focus on the personal was never intended to point to individuals in a vacuum. Instead, in Personalism the reference has always been to "persons set in relations to one another, which relations are as much a fact as is the separate existence of the individuals."[30] Walter Muelder expressed this idea in his term *persons-in-community*. He writes that "man is a socius with a private center...."[31] This description effectively holds in tension the primacy of both the person and the community, neither of which can be adequately understood apart from the other.

King's idea of the communal nature of reality and persons, and his idea of *the beloved*

community were grounded in his doctrine of God. Although he followed more closely Bowne's concept of God than Brightman's, he had deep affinity with the latter's view that while God does not need us for God's existence as we need God for ours, God is love, and love is a social category. Persons cannot love to the fullest in isolation. We are created to live together and can be fully human only in community. Brightman seemed to have this in mind when he said: "The maxim, 'Think for yourself,' is basic; but the further maxim, 'Think socially,' must be added if philosophy is to do its whole duty."[32] This implies that the nature of persons is such that we need relationship with like beings and thus possess *a natural urge toward community*.

King took as his own Personalism's view that this is what is required among Christians. "The real Christian world," wrote Albert C. Knudson, "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."[33] For King love is the essence of the Christian faith. "I think I have discovered the highest good," he said. "It is love. This principle stands at the center of the cosmos. As John says, 'God is love.' He who loves is a participant in the being of God. He who hates does not know God."[34] Since love is at the center of the universe so, necessarily, is the idea of community. Indeed, this idea roots deep in the Afrikan American familial, religious, and cultural heritage. Personalism helped King to ground this idea philosophically.

King frequently expressed the idea of the interrelatedness of all life and that persons are by nature social. We see in him both a focus on the centrality of the person and of community. "All life is interrelated," he said. "All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny."[35] This led King to reason that what affects one person directly, affects all persons indirectly. "We are made to live together because of the interrelated structure of reality."[36] To treat even a single person unjustly, therefore, is an affront to *all* persons, including the Supreme Person.

MORAL LAW AND THE MORAL LAW SYSTEM

In the literature on Personalism a moral law is defined as a principle which is intended to be *universal in application*. It applies to all cases and is valid for all persons. It was Brightman who first developed a *moral law system*, which was later enhanced and-or enlarged by some of his followers.[37] Brightman intended that this system be relevant and meaningful in every culture. He seemed to recognize, however, that cultural differences may require certain adaptations of the respective laws.

Brightman distinguished moral law from civil, religious, natural, and logical law.[38] Moral law has two necessary conditions: 1) It must be a universal principle or norm. 2) It must apply to the obligation of the will in choosing.[39] Because it is a universal norm it is a law. Because it requires the will to choose, it is moral. Accordingly, Brightman held that no act is moral merely because it conforms to a social code. An act is moral only if it conforms to moral law.[40] Therefore, every code is subject to critique by moral law.

The moral law system is regulative, not prescriptive. That is, it does not tell us what specific moral choices to make. The laws are intended to guide us as we endeavor to make responsible moral choices. Because it is a "system" its use requires effort and intentionality on the part of those who use it. For in order to accomplish what Brightman

intended the moral law system must be seen in its totality, and one must be aware at all times of the place and role of each law, as well as their interrelationship with each other and the entire system.

Brightman's moral law system is comprised of three sets of laws: *FORMAL LAWS* (Logical Law, Law of Autonomy); *AXIOLOGICAL LAWS* (Axiological Law, Law of Consequences, Law of the Best Possible, Law of Specification, Law of the Most Inclusive End, Law of Ideal of Control); and *PERSONALISTIC LAWS* (Law of Individualism, Law of Altruism, Law of the Ideal of Personality). Each category, and the laws in them, presuppose the law which came before and anticipates or points to the law which follows in the line of progression toward the most concrete law in the system. Each law beyond the Logical Law (the first law in the system) includes more content than the one that precedes it. Brightman sums up the contribution of each set of laws to the system. "The Formal Laws deal solely with the will as a subjective fact. The Axiological Laws deal with the values which the will ought to choose. The Personalistic Laws are more comprehensive; they deal with the personality as a concrete whole."[41] In the Personalistic Laws the emphasis is on the person and persons-in-relationship as the subjects of the preceding laws. The Law of the Ideal of Personality is, for Brightman, the summary law of the entire moral law system. It states: "All persons ought to judge and guide all of their acts by their ideal conception (in harmony with the other Laws) of what the whole personality ought to become both individually and socially."[42]

KING AND MORAL LAW

King was first introduced to Brightman's personalism during his student days at Morehouse College.[43] It is significant that during his student days at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania (1948-51), King took a third of all courses with George Washington Davis[44] in theology and philosophy of religion. Under his careful guidance King got a more thorough exposure to the personalism of both Brightman and DeWolf.

When King matriculated at Boston University in the Ph.D. program he was a student of Brightman's for only a brief period, for he died less than two years after King began his work. King wrote of Brightman's strong influence on his character development.[45] Since King also studied under DeWolf (who became his major advisor when Brightman died) there is no question that he was familiar with Brightman's moral law system. Indeed, during his first year of graduate study he wrote a paper in DeWolf's class on personalism entitled, "The Personalism of J.M.E. McTaggart Under Criticism." At several points King contrasted McTaggart with Brightman. In the discussion on the significance of freedom King cited passages in Brightman's book, *Moral Laws*, to support his criticism of McTaggart's rejection of freedom. At one point he wrote: "As Brightman has cogently put it: 'If choice is not possible, the science of ethics is not possible. If rational, purposive choice is not effective in the [control] of life, goodness is not possible.'"[46] King believed that without freedom persons would be little more than automatons. And then in a passage reminiscent of Bowne's emphasis not only on the ethical, but the speculative significance of freedom,[47] King again cited Brightman's text, *Moral Laws*, approvingly. "'Without freedom, we are not free to think, for the power to think means that the individual can impose on

himself the ideal of logic or scientific method and hold it through thick and thin.' "[48] This requires self-determination or power of will.

It may be argued that long before his formal study of Personalism, King had developed a sense that the structure of the universe itself is on the side of justice and righteousness; that there is a higher law than human law, of which persons violate at great risk. Because of this he could easily resonate to Brightman's view of the existence of an *objective moral order* in the universe which persons ought to obey. Said Brightman:

> 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 existence 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.[49]

For Brightman as for King, the cause of both the physical and the objective moral orders is God. King's belief in the existence of such an order can be seen in a passage in his sermon, "Our God is Able." "God walks with us," said King. "He has placed within the very structure of this universe certain absolute moral laws. We can neither defy nor break them. If we disobey them, they will break us."[50] Elsewhere King could say: "There is a law in the moral world—a silent, invisible imperative, akin to the laws in the physical world—which reminds us that life will work only in a certain way."[51]

When King often made the statement that "the arc of the moral universe is long, [but] it bends toward justice,"[52] he was implying his fundamental faith that no matter how much injustice exists in the world there is something at the seat of the universe which sides with good and justice. The basis of this faith was his belief in the existence of an objective moral order created and sustained by God, and before which every knee shall bow. His many references to his belief that freedom fighters have cosmic companionship further solidified his faith that the very grain of the universe is on the side of right and justice.

One who knows the moral law system of Brightman and has read King's writings will be able to detect King's appropriation of these laws in his writings and speeches. What one should not look for in King, however, is explicit reference to or naming of the individual laws, although there is clearcut evidence that his moral reasoning was influenced by the moral law system. Furthermore, unlike Brightman and other moral law theorists King sought to apply and work out these laws in the context of his social justice work. So while he did not specifically name the laws he often cited the basic principle of a given moral law. For example, when he works through the practical application of the Logical Law he does not cite the Logical Law as such, but we do find him citing the principle involved, namely, "logical consistency."[53]

Both Walter Muelder and John Ansbro have addressed the subject of the moral laws in the work of King. Although Kenneth Smith and Ira Zepp, Jr. considered the influence of the existence of an objective moral law on King's thinking, they did not examine his appropriation of the moral law system as such.[54] However, Muelder and Ansbro have done an admirable job of this.[55]

Ansbro suggests that in several instances King appropriated the moral laws differently than Brightman. Consideration of two of these will suffice for our purpose. Although King

appealed to both the *Law of Individualism* and the *Law of Altruism*, Ansbro suggests that he identified more with the latter law. This implies that there was in King's ethics a stronger other-regarding sentiment than we find in Brightman. The Law of Individualism points to the idea of the individual as the basic moral unit and thus the importance of self-love. It expresses what Bowne meant when he said that no person should ever be used as fuel to warm society.[56] King accepted the validity of the Law of Individualism, but seemed to place less emphasis on it than did Brightman. Instead, King focused more on regard for the other, or the ethics of agapé. This ethic emphasizes the need of the other, not of the self.[57]

According to King agapé "is the love of God working in the lives of men. When we love on the *agape* level," said King, "we love men not because we like them, not because their attitudes and ways appeal to us, but because God loves them."[58] It is this understanding of love which led King to the controversial conclusion that "unearned suffering is redemptive."[59] But King went further. "...I pray that, *recognizing the necessity of suffering*, the Negro will make of it a virtue. To suffer in a righteous cause is to grow to our humanity's full stature."[60] (Italics mine) As for the need to abide by the philosophy of nonviolence King liked to speak of "a willingness to accept suffering without retaliation, to accept blows from the opponent without striking back." He quoted Gandhi approvingly in this regard. "'Rivers of blood may have to flow before we gain our freedom, but it must be our blood.'"[61] There was no question in King's mind that "suffering...has tremendous educational and transforming possibilities."[62]

Ansbro contends that King "was convinced that *agape* may at times demand even the suspension of the law of self-preservation so that through our self-sacrifice we can help create the beloved community."[63] King did not believe that such self-sacrifice necessarily precludes self-respect and self-love, although one surely wonders about this when it is known that he frequently placed the moral onus on those who are actually suffering oppression and injustice. That is, more often than not King expected the oppressed to make sacrifices in order to love their oppressors. In one place he said that "there will be no permanent solution to the race problem until oppressed men develop the capacity to love their enemies."[64] King believed that in the best interest of the redemption of others and the establishment of the beloved community it is sometimes necessary for individuals to sacrifice all for such an end. Ansbro rightly concludes that more than Brightman, King's application of the Law of Altruism was more open to self-sacrifice.[65]

This is an interesting point, since in Personalism the self is the basic moral unit. A necessary precondition of respect and regard for others is that one respect and love self. Said Bowne:

> The condition of owing anything to others is to owe something to myself. The humanity which I respect in others, I must respect in myself. I am not permitted to act irrationally toward myself any more than toward others.[66]

In this regard duties to self are not of secondary, but primary importance. Bowne believed such duties "must take first rank in ethics," and that one is never more responsible for others than for self. This, he believed, is important because of the social or communal implications. "Every one must be a moral object for himself, and an object of supreme impor-

tance; for *he is not simply the particular person, A or B, he is also a bearer of the ideal of humanity,* and its realization depends pre-eminently upon himself."[67] (Italics mine)

Personalistic ethics condemns not self-interest, but selfishness. Since the time of Bowne this type of ethics has sought a balance between self and other-regarding interests. Just as the individual is not to disregard the needs and interests of society, society is not to unduly sacrifice the individual for its ends either. Both the individual and society have values that must be respected.[68]

As the basic moral unit the individual always has rights against others and society. However, King seemed more likely to sacrifice this principle than did Brightman or Bowne. It is precisely here that I diverge from King. For one wonders how it can be expected that a person can have proper regard for others if not first and continuously for self. If I have little or no regard for myself it is inconceivable to me that I will have a healthy regard for the neighbor, let alone for those who oppress me and demean my humanity. And while it may be conceded that it is difficult to maintain a good balance between the Law of Individualism and the Altruistic Law, I would say that for a period of time it behooves groups like young Afrikan American males to place more emphasis on healthy regard for self. Because they have never been taught the importance and meaning of love of self, I understand perfectly why so many of them live only to be murdered or to murder in their community. The need for a much higher regard for self among young Afrikan American males is absolutely crucial in light of the alarmingly high incidence of black on black violence and murder. Yet I want to be careful not to suggest that King was not aware of the need for self-love among young Afrikan American males, for he most assuredly was.

CONCLUSION

The question now before us is what is the meaning of King's Personalism in the light of intracommunity violence and murder perpetrated by young Afrikan American males? Indeed, what might one under the influence of King's Personalism say to the Black community regarding this problem?

Martin Luther King, Jr. was aware that the quantity and quality of the choices available to young Black males are so limited that no matter what they choose the result tends to be self-defeating and demeaning. When King took the movement to Chicago in 1966 he lived in a slum apartment. There he met and talked with many of the angry young Black males who had no sense of hope or purpose because this society offered them nothing of substance. Many of these young men resorted to violence against each other and other members of the Chicago black ghetto. Reflecting on this experience King said:

> I met these boys and heard their stories in discussion we had on some long, cold nights last winter at the slum apartment I rent in the West Side ghetto of Chicago. I was shocked at the venom they poured out against the world. At times I shared their despair and felt a hopelessness that these young Americans could ever embrace the concept of nonviolence as the effective and powerful instrument of social reform.

> *All their lives, boys like this have known life as a madhouse of violence and degradation.*

Some have never experienced a meaningful family life. Some have police records. Some *dropped out of the incredibly bad slum schools,* then were *deprived of honorable work,* then took to the streets.

To the young victim of the slums, this society has so limited the alternatives of his life that the expression of his manhood is reduced to the ability to defend himself physically. No wonder it appears logical to him to strike out, resorting to violence against oppression. That is the only way he thinks he can get recognition.

And so, we have seen occasional rioting—and, much *more frequently and consistently, brutal acts and crimes by Negroes against Negroes.* In many a week in Chicago, as many or more Negro youngsters have been killed in gang fights as were killed in the riots here last summer.[69] (Italics mine)

Clearly King was not unfamiliar with the phenomenon of intracommunity violence and murder among young Afrikan American males.

One who takes King's Personalism seriously would emphasize at least three things that necessarily must happen if we expect realistically to put a stop to the day-to-day incidents of black-on-black violence. I know that at some point it will be necessary to take on the powerful and privileged who control the structures of this society and even benefit from intracommunity black violence and murder. But it seems to me that the first order of business is to send these three interrelated messages to the Afrikan American community.

First, because GOD IS THE CREATOR AND SUSTAINER OF *ALL* PERSONS OR OF *NO* PERSONS, every person, regardless of gender or race, class or health, age or sexual orientation or preference has been imbued with the image, fragrance, and voice of God. Because God willingly creates persons every single one of us has absolute and infinite value, which means that all owe respect to each other and to self. No person or group should be easily sacrificed for the wellbeing of another.

King himself would remind Afrikan American adults (many of whom have forgotten) and inform scores of Black youth (many of whom have never known!) of their infinite worth. He would emphasize that it is not merely the spiritual aspect of the Black self that is so precious and valuable to God, but the *whole* self; that mind and body are as two sides of a single coin, and that both needs the other in order for either to exist in human form. Created persons are not disembodied selves and cannot *be* in this world without either mind or body. In addition, the best in the Jewish-Christian and Afrikan American traditions suggests (against the classical Platonic-Aristotelian view!) that mind is not superior to the body, nor is the body instrinsically evil. King would stress the infinite worth of the whole Afrikan American person—mind *and* body.

The Kingian Personalist would say, especially to young Black males today, that their bodies are sacred.[70] Indeed, it is through the body that we humans come to know and understand life; that we know about emotions; that we are able to see, hear, touch, receive, give, fuse, separate, procreate, etc. The human person has no better means, no better instrument for communicating love (or anything else for that matter!) than the body. That God created the human body and then breathed into it the breath of life, suggests its worth and sacredness. Robert Bruce McLaren rightly observes that God's action

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in this regard "clarifies that a human being is not essentially a soul inhabiting a body [as if to say that it is imprisoned by the body], but a body made to live by God. This eliminates the dualism of classical philosophy."[71]

One influenced by the Kingian type of Personalism would drive home the point that *the bodies of Black folk have an inviolable sacredness of their own*, and therefore should be cared for and protected. She or he would plead with Afrikan American youth to love, care for, and respect not only their own bodies, but those of others. Indeed, such a one would join with Toni Morrison's character, Baby Suggs, in highlighting the importance of loving black bodies.

> 'Here,' she said, 'in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. *You* got to love it, *you*! ... This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved.[72]

LOVE YOUR BODY! That's the message of Kingian Personalism to young Black males today, and is the message all of us must try to convey to them.

A second point is necessarily related to the first. Black youth must learn, celebrate, and be proud of their heritage and their race. Once they are shown the way to a healthy sense of the dignity and worth of their mind-body, this will open the way to self-esteem and being proud and not ashamed of their blackness. This can only lead to a heightened sense of self-love, which means less temptation to abuse either one's self or others. No one who truly loves self, people, and heritage perpetrates their destruction. In his final presidential address to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, King said "...we must massively assert our dignity and worth. We must stand up amidst a system that still oppresses us and develop an unassailable and majestic sense of values. We must no longer be ashamed of being black."[73] This admonition implies the need to make a conscious effort to learn about black history, including both Afrikan and American contributions. For King insisted that whether we like it or not Afrikan Americans are an amalgam of Afrika and America.[74] But realistically we can be certain today that Black youth will not learn about their heritage and history in this nation's educational institutions. This means that the responsibility of so educating them falls to the Afrikan American community.

King's urging that we be proud of being black also implies that we are endowed with the capacity for developing such pride. What is needed is *the will* and *the effort* to do so. In addition, what is important is not what those outside the black community think about Afrikan Americans. On this point King would join with Malcolm X in saying that it is necessary that Blacks look to themselves. "We've got to change our own minds about each other," said Malcolm. "*We have to see each other with new eyes. We have to see each other as brothers and sisters.* We have to come together with warmth so we can develop unity and harmony that's necessary to get this problem solved ourselves."[75]

Finally, Kingian Personalism points to the *NEED FOR THE BLACK COMMUNITY TO OWN RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL THAT HAPPENS AND IS ALLOWED TO HAPPEN THEREIN*. This raises the issue of *moral agency* that has been so difficult for Afrikan Americans to discuss openly for fear that the white man will use what is said to appease his own conscience, and to diminish his sense of responsibility for creating the conditions that have made young Black males an endangered species. Yet I think the Kingian Personalist would say that there is too much at stake for us to continue to remain silent about moral agency and owning responsibility for the many specific acts of violence and murder in the Afrikan American community. So we must risk breaking silence on the question of moral agency.

Afrikan Americans can and *should* blame the powerful and privileged who manage and control racist institutions for the conditions that have created in so many Black youth a sense of hopelessness, lovelessness, and mean-spiritedness. But as for the specific acts of violence we—Afrikan Americans—must find in ourselves the courage and the wherewithal to proclaim that inasmuch as our boys pull the trigger that maims or takes the lives of others in our community, they must answer—*not to White America!*—but to the Black community. For both they and their victims belong to us. On the other hand, inasmuch as Afrikan American adults allow incidents of black-on-black violence and murder to continue unabated, we must be able to say that *WE* are responsible, and *WE* alone can put a stop to the violence. *WE* alone can and must take back from our boys the streets of our neighborhoods.

No matter how bad things get we are at bottom the "masters of our own destiny," said Malcolm. *We may not be responsible for what has caused our condition, but we are responsible for the response we give to it.* During an interview with Kenneth Clark in 1963, Malcolm said emphatically that no one framed him when he was arrested and incarcerated prior to joining the Nation of Islam. "I went to prison," he said, "for what I did...."[76] "FOR WHAT *I* DID"! Malcolm owned responsibility for what he did, even though he knew the American legal system to be unjust and racist. Indeed, the Kingian Personalist would say that until Afrikan Americans come to terms with our own responsibility for intracommunity black violence and murder among our boys, the problem will be with us for many years to come. This means that the future of the Afrikan American community will be jeopardized in a way heretofore unknown.

NOTES
1. See "Fragment of Application to Boston University," Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1992), 1:390.
2. See Kenneth Clark, *King, Malcolm, Baldwin: Three Interviews* (Wesleyan University Press, 1985), p. 21.
3. L. Harold DeWolf, "Martin Luther King, Jr., As Theologian," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, vol. IV, no. II, Spring 1977, p. 10. In light of the charge of plagiarism lodged against King posthumously, one wonders whether DeWolf's statement that "occasionally I find his language following closely the special terms of my own lectures and writings" might have been an implied concern that King bordered dangerously on plagiarism in some of the written work for DeWolf's courses.
4. See Martin Luther King, Jr., "A New Sense of Direction," *Worldview*, April 1972, p. 11, and King, "Where Do We Go from Here?," in James M. Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope: The*

Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr. (New York: Harper, 1986), p. 250.

5. See Rufus Burrow, Jr., "John Wesley Edward Bowen: First Afrikan American Personalist," *Encounter*, vol. 56 no. 3, Summer 1995, pp. 241-260. Bowen actually studied Personalism under Borden P. Bowne (1847-1910), "the father of American Personalism." Indeed, at that time Bowne was not using the term personalism, but *objective idealism* and *transcendental empiricism*. But his emphasis at each stage in the movement toward Personalism was on the centrality of the self or person.

6. See David Garrow, "The Intellectual Development of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Influences and Commentaries," Garrow, ed., *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Civil Rights Leader, Theologian, Orator* (New York: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1989), II:451, n. 23.

7. See King, *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), p. 100.

8. Susan Harlow is a master of divinity candidate at Christian Theological Seminary. With her permission this quote is taken from a paper she submitted in a class on the Theological Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April, 1997.

9. King, *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 100.

10. Ibid.

11. These include the Englishman, John Grote, and the Americans, Walt Whitman and A. Bronson Alcott.

12. Borden P. Bowne, *The Philosophy of Herbert Spencer* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1874).

13. See Rufus Burrow, Jr., "Borden Parker Bowne's Doctrine of God," *Encounter*, vol. 53, no. 4, Autumn 1992, pp. 381-400.

14. Albert C. Knudson, *The Philosophy of Personalism* (New York: Abingdon, 1927), pp. 85, 433.

15. However, it should be noted that there was a similar movement afoot at the University of California under the leadership of George Holmes Howison (1836-1916). Unlike Bowne, who came to consider himself "a Personalist, the first of the clan in any thoroughgoing sense," Howison named his philosophy Personal Idealism. There are several differences between their philosophies, the chief of which is that Howison was a non-creationist, believing that God is the Final, not the First cause. Bowne, on the other hand, was a creationist. He insisted that God is the fundamental cause of all things. I have discussed at length some similarities and dissimilarities between Bowne and Howison in my presently unpublished book, *Personalism: A Critical Introductory Exposition.*

16. The types of personalisms include (but may not be limited to): Atheistic Personalism, Pantheistic Personalism, Absolutistic Personalism, Relativistic Personalism, Ethical Personalism, Theistic Personalism, Realistic Personalism, Political Personalism, Panpsychistic Personalism, Anthropormorphic Personalism, and Afrikan American Personalism. See my unpublished essay: "Francis John McConnell and Personalistic Social Ethics."

17. King, "The Ethical Demands For Integration," in Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, p. 122.

18. Ibid., p. 119.

19. See Bowne, *The Principles of Ethics* (New York: American Book Company, 1892), pp. 97, 203, 216-17.

20. Bowne, *Studies in Theism* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1879), pp. 411-12.

21. Ibid., p. 4.

22. King, "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," in King, *Strength to Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 141.

23. King, "An Experiment in Love," in Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, p. 20. I find it interesting that King does not characterize God's power as absolute or omnipotent, but as "matchless." This seems a subtle qualification of the classical view of divine omnipotence. Even Brightman, whose doctrine of God King both appreciated and criticized, would appreciate the idea of the "matchless" power of God. For this idea does not mean that God possesses absolute power in the classical sense, and thus has affinity with Brightman's idea of the finite-infinite God.

24. Here I follow the distinction that Paul W. Taylor makes between *moral subjects* and *moral agents*. Any conscious being is a moral subject, even if unable to make responsible moral choices. In any event they are beings to whom moral agents owe responsibilities. Moral agents, on the other hand, are moral subjects whose faculties are such that they are capable of making responsible moral choices, anticipating the consequences of those choices, willing to take responsibility for these, and able to assess the outcome and apply what is learned in new situations calling for moral choice. See Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 14-16.

25. King, "The Ethical Demands of Integration," p. 120.

26. King, "The Personalism of J.M.E. McTaggart Under Criticism," in Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, II:73. This paper was presented to DeWolf on December 4, 1951 in his class on Personalism.

27. King, *Strength to Love*, p. 90.

28. Edgar S. Brightman, *Nature and Values* (New York: Abingdon, 1945), p. 117.

29. John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), p. 49.

30. Francis J. McConnell, *Personal Christianity* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1914), p. 48.

31. Walter G. Muelder, *Moral Law in Christian Social Ethics* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1966), p. 124.

32. Edgar S. Brightman, *An Introduction to Philosophy* 3rd ed. rev. by Robert N. Beck (New York: Holt Rinehart Winston, 1963), p. 353.

33. Knudson, *The Principles of Christian Ethics* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1943), p. 118.

34. See Lotte Hoskins, ed., *"I Have a Dream": The Quotations of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1968), p. 71.

35. King, "The Ethical Demands For Integration," p. 122.

36. King, "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," in Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, p. 254.

37. These include Peter A. Bertocci and Richard Millard, Walter G. Muelder, L. Harold DeWolf, Paul Deats, Jr., and J. Philip Wogaman.

38. Brightman, *Moral Laws* (New York: Abingdon, 1933), pp. 35-45.

39. Ibid., p. 45.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., p. 204.

42. Ibid., p. 242.

43. See Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 35.

44. John Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Making of a Mind* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis), p. 15.

45. Cited in Leo Sandon, Jr., "Boston University Personalism and Southern Baptist Theology," *Foundations*, vol. 20 (April-June 1977), p. 105. King wrote about Brightman's influence in a 1957 publication in *Bostonia* (Spring 1957) 7. He also mentioned in his application to Boston University Graduate School the influence of Brightman's ideas on his thinking as a seminarian at Crozer Theological Seminary [See Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1992), I:390]. King noted Brightman's presence at Boston University as one of two reasons that institution appealed to him.

46. King, "The Personalism of J.M.E. McTaggart Under Criticism," in Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, II:72.

47. See Bowne, *Theory of Thought and Knowledge* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1897), p. 239.

48. Cited in Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, II:72-73. It should be noted that this quote is not exact. King both omits and adds words and phrases without alerting his reader. Brightman's exact words are: "...without it we are not even free to think, to say nothing of making other moral choices. The power to think means that the individual can impose on himself the ideal

of logic or scientific method and hold it through thick and thin" (Brightman, *Moral Laws*, p. 282).

49. Brightman, *Moral Laws*, p. 286.

50. King, "Our God is Able," in King, *Strength to Love*, p. 105.

51. Hoskins, ed., *"I Have a Dream": The Quotations of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, p. 79.

52. Ibid., p. 63.

53. See King, "Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience," in Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, p. 48.

54. See Kenneth Smith and Ira Zepp, Jr., *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1974), pp. 110-13.

55. In 1983 Muelder addressed this topic in a paper read at Morehouse College on "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Moral Laws."

56. Bowne, *The Principles of Ethics* (New York: American Book Company, 1892), p. 199.

57. King, "An Experiment in Love," in Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, p. 19.

58. King, "Nonviolence and Racial Justice," in Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, pp. 8-9.

59. Hoskins, ed., *"I Have a Dream": The Quotations of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, p. 138.

60. Ibid., p. 139.

61. Cited in King, "An Experiment in Love," in Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, p. 18.

62. Ibid.

63. Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Making of a Mind*, p. 85.

64. Hoskins, ed., p. 71.

65. Ansbro, p. 86.

66. See Bowne, *The Principles of Ethics*, p. 113.

67. Ibid., p. 209.

68. Ibid., pp. 197-98.

69. King, "A Gift of Love," in Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope*, pp. 62-63.

70. King, *The Measure of a Man* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) [1959], pp. 13-14.

71. Robert Bruce McLaren, *Christian Ethics: Foundations and Practice* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1994), p. 109.

72. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), p. 88.

73. King, "Where Do We Go From Here?", in Washington, ed., p. 245.

74. King, "A Testament of Hope," in Washington, ed., p. 318. See also King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 53.

75. George Breitman, ed., *Malcolm X Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1989) [1965], p. 40.

76. Clark, ed., *King, Malcolm, Baldwin: Three Interviews*, p. 38.