



## The Black Intellectual Tradition and the Great Conversation with Dr. Angel Parham

### Lesson 8: Martin Luther King Jr., Part II

#### Outline:

Review from the last lecture:

- **King's encounter with Marx and communism.**
  - We should read all kinds of works, but this does not mean that we accept all ideas.
  - In a dialectical process of reading, you take in what is good and expel what is not good.
  - *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and King's response:
    - Marx is arguing that there is a historic logic of class struggles.
    - What is distinctive about the capitalist era is there are only two great classes:
      - Bourgeoisie, who own the means of production,
      - Proletariat, who do not own the means of production
    - Means of production is anything that can be used to produce profit.

This lecture:

- The distinguishing feature of communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition bourgeoisie property.
- The theory of the communist summed up: Abolition of private property.
  - Marx is saying that we are not opposed to property, but are opposed to bourgeoisie private property that is so exclusive and monopolized by the few for the exploitation of the many. This sucks in the majority of the population into subservience and oppression.
    - Capital is a social power.
- King's dialectical response to reading and thinking, three primary criticisms:
  - I rejected their materialistic interpretation of history.
  - I strongly disagreed with communism's ethical relativism. There is no fixed immutable principle.
  - I opposed communism's political totalitarianism.



- “Capitalism is always in danger of inspiring men to be making a living than to make a life.” Martin Luther King Jr.
  - When the focus of education is so ordered toward industry and money making, students can be too focused on making a living and miss out on making a life.

## **King and the Concept of Love**

- He wonders how far can love take us when we live in the middle of an evil system.
- In reading Gandhi, King recovers his hope for the power of love in individual and social transformation.
- King had begun to think that Jesus’ approach to love was mainly applicable in person to person relationships, but it can’t be applied to challenging social evil.
- What he found in Gandhi’s work was that the principles of Jesus in his ministry were applicable to all of the evils that he was seeing around himself. It could be socially transformative.
- As King goes further in his study of pacifism and his study of Gandhi, he knows there were many people who critiqued his approach.
- True pacifism is not nonresistance to evil, but nonviolent resistance.

## **The Lure of Liberalism**

- He was brought up in a fundamentalist form of faith.
- He is drawn to liberal tradition and the power of reason.
- He starts to wonder about the liberal tradition.
- At the basis of many of the liberal writers there seems to be an underlying assumption about the innate goodness of man.
- Dante and the philosophers at Hell.
- “Reason is darkened by sin.” Martin Luther King Jr.
- “Reason devoid of the purifying power of faith can never free itself from distortions and rationalizations.” Martin Luther King Jr.
- Even at the pinnacle of human reason, it only takes you so far without divine truth.
- How do we balance the ideas of sin and grace?
  - “Pessimism concerning human nature was not balanced by an optimism concerning divine nature.”
- King is not afraid to call out what is wrong, but he is always there to extend the grace of God.

## **King’s Speeches**

- “A boycott is not an end within itself...the end is the creation of the beloved community.” We are trying to get a particular kind of transformation within the oppressors.



- “We must blot out the hate and injustice of the old age with the love and justice of the new.” Martin Luther King Jr.
- *Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience:*
  - “Students avoid internal violence of spirit. This is why the love ethic stands so high in the student movement.” Martin Luther King Jr.
  - Three Greek words for love:
    - **Eros** – an aesthetic love, a romantic love
    - **Philia** – a reciprocal love, friendship
    - **Agape** – understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill to all men, an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return
      - Jesus meant agape love when he said, “Love your enemies.”

### *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*

- King invokes Socrates, *The Allegory of the Cave*.
- He gives us an invitation to rise unfettered from the darkness into the light of brotherhood and goodness.