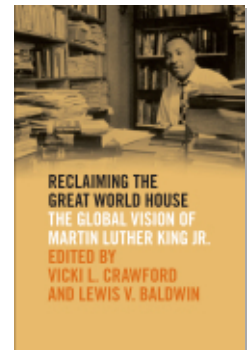




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PART I

**CREATIVE LIVING IN
THE GREAT WORLD HOUSE
THE VISION OF
MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.
IN CONTEXT—
WHERE WE WERE THEN**

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CHAPTER 1

FOR THE BEAUTY OF THE WORLD

VISION AND MORAL ORDER IN

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.'S WORLD HOUSE

VICTOR ANDERSON AND TERESA DELGADO

Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.

CARL JUNG, *Letters*, volume 1

Frequently there appears on the stage of history individuals who have the insight to look beyond the inadequacies of the old order and see the necessity for the new. These are the persons with a sort of divine discontent. They realize that the world as it is is far from the world that ought to be. They never confuse the “isness” of an old order with the “oughtness” of a new order. And so in every age and every generation there are those persons who have envisioned some new order.

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., “THE VISION OF A WORLD MADE NEW”

This chapter explores Martin Luther King Jr.'s moral philosophy of nonviolent resistance through the lens of what moral philosophers describe as dispositional ethics. Here we explore King's moral disposition, which is his ethical orientation toward reality and the world. Ethics is not only about moral norms, principles, styles of reasoning, critical judgments, and accounts of goods and ends. However, King's moral philosophy has much to do with how he came to see the world inhabited by all. It reflects his moral attitude and his basic moral orientation toward the world and humans who inhabit it and interact with it not always carefully or with the health of the planet in mind. King's moral philosophy literally comes to terms with how he saw the world, social reality, and possibilities for worlds to come. Powers of seeing, of insight, are a characteristic aspect of prophetic moral visionaries such as King.

In the first section of this chapter, we describe King's moral view as stereoscopic. To see stereoscopically is to see through binoculars. It is to see the world and social reality clearly, in three dimensions. In the second section, we discuss King's pilgrimage to India in 1959 to see Mohandas Gandhi's influence there. King would come to see India as light in the darkness, and Gandhi and

India would be moral compasses guiding his vision of the world house. In the third section, we track King's return to the United States and his enthusiastic and deep commitment to nonviolent resistance as the means toward ordering the world house even as he faced great challenges to his vision and disappointments. The chapter concludes with a critical assessment of King's vision of the world house in light of twenty-first-century social realities.

To See More Clearly:

Moral Vision through Stereoscopic Lenses

"In each of us," Martin Luther King Jr. says, "there are two basic faculties, the ethical and the aesthetic, our sense of duty and our sense of beauty."¹ Together they form stereoscopic lenses for King's moral attitude and orientation toward the world. To clarify what we mean by "stereoscopic," a familiar example might be helpful. In a typical eye examination one is asked to read a chart of letters on a distant wall, scaled from largest on top to smallest at bottom. One is then asked to view the chart through different lenses, with one eye open and the other shielded. Next one views the chart through various lenses to find the lens that provides the greatest clarity on the smallest letters on the chart. This procedure is repeated with the other eye. The goal is to eventually see and read the letters as clearly and distinctly as possible with both eyes open, stereoscopically.

Stereoscopic sight simultaneously brings into focus two angles of vision, thus producing a richly defined three-dimensional perspective on the world and reality. Moral philosophers have too often regarded the ethical and the aesthetic as two separate spheres to be observed one at a time, as if with one eye open and the other closed. Ethics, however, is more than deliberating over courses of action to take or what one's duty requires when confronted with dilemmas. Ethics also presents us with competing aesthetic pictures or visions of the world: alternative visions of what comprise good, cooperative communities, planetary flourishing, and human fulfillment. This wide moral scope that includes aesthetics fills out King's moral vision of the world house.

Further, as King understood so well, one's moral vision of the world must take into view human desires, conflicting purposes, and subjectivity that motivate social relations and politics. These aspects of human personality support ethical senses of duty, responsibility, obligation, and vision. Further, moral aspirations and expectations are also affected by our experiences and by how we see the world. For instance, we experience life in part as subjects being acted upon by circumstances, such that sometimes our aspirations are thwarted despite our best intentions. To be sure, human survival and prospects we hold for

planetary equilibrium depend on our creative abilities that include not only cognition but also aesthetic sensibilities, which take account of human survival needs and capacities for seeing beauty, harmony, wonder, and mystery in the world. This powerful unity between thought and beauty is needed to address moral quandaries, with all of their ambiguities. We aspire for beauty and peace but experience ugliness and conflict, and our moral aspirations are constantly met by limits and feelings of inadequacy and sometimes futility. But we are not at the whims of fate. King was convinced of this, and it was the moral core of his stereoscopic vision of the world house. With both eyes open, despite seeing a world pervaded by human conflict and tragedy, he nevertheless envisioned a moral ordering of a common humanity living in peace.

King articulated his vision of moral order by asserting: "A widely separated family inherits a house in which they have to live together. This is our common inheritance. This is the great new problem of mankind. We have inherited a large house, a great 'world house' in which we have to live together." From one angle of vision, King saw a dysfunctional family living in a perpetual state of war. From another view, he saw moments of mutuality and creative exchange that modeled the actualization of peaceful community, diverse peoples that had "learned to live with each other in peace."² For King, post-independence India provided a moral case study and included both strife and creative actualization.

Moral visionaries like King offer stereoscopic perspectives on the world, a world of violence and strife but a world too in which enlightened people sometimes act in ways that foster peace and justice, that empower mutually transformative understanding, appreciation, and cooperation. To shut off such possibilities was a mistake, King believed, and this was his criticism of revolutionary members of the Black Power movement. The world is vast, and the word "world" is not necessarily limited to being synonymous with our home, the earth. Religious philosopher Victor Anderson metaphysically describes the world as "fluid, dynamic, processive, and exhibit[ing] the possibilities of tragedy and irony in human experience. In its concrete actuality and transcendent potentiality," the world discloses "the paradoxical, rhythmic push and pull of formation and deformation, life and death, and emergent galaxies and collapsing universes."³ The world then is an expansive whole that even extends to interstellar and intergalactic relations.

King was well aware of the ways that science and technology were making inroads into space exploration. With an air of enchantment he wrote: "Physical science will carve new highways through the stratosphere. In a few years astronauts and cosmonauts will probably walk comfortably across the uncertain pathways of the moon." He was dazzled by human creativity in physical science

and medicine and its potential for curing cancer and heart disease, and by technology, automation, and cybernation, all making “for working-people to have undreamed-of amounts of leisure time.”⁴

For King, human creative intelligence and inventiveness were aspects of the beauty of the world house. With one eye he regarded “all this [as] a dazzling picture of the furniture, the workshop, the spacious rooms, the new decorations and the architectural pattern of the large world house in which we are living.” Yet with the other eye he saw that this same creativity and inventiveness were misused and misdirected toward destructive ends: “One hundred years ago military men had not yet developed the terrifying weapons of warfare that we know today—not the bomber, an airborne fortress raining down death; not n-atom, that burner of all things and flesh in its path.”⁵

Inasmuch as King acknowledged evil in the world, he also stereoscopically saw a bigger picture, one that included ethical and aesthetic values necessary for moral order. He deeply perceived the world’s ambiguities and complexity. When King was a student at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, his moral disposition was developing and critically informing his vision of the world and moral reality. Discussing Edgar Brightman’s *Philosophy of Religion* and its treatment of human value and personality, King concluded: “If courage and meaning are imparted to life by a short {look} into the future, how much more dignity, hope, and perspective arise from the faith that every life capable of purposive development is eternal. Immortality symbolizes the intrinsic value of the individual person, the intrinsic value of shared, cooperative living, and the goodness of God.”⁶ King affirmed here a vision of human worth from the perspective of the goodness of God.

In another paper, titled “Religion’s Answer to the Problem of Evil,” King turned his eye to the world’s dark side: “At the heart of all high religion there is the conviction that there is behind the universe an ultimate power which is perfectly good. In other words, the theist says: the power that is behind all things is good. But on every hand the facts of life seem to contradict such a faith. Nature is often cruel. ‘Nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another,’ says John Stuart Mill, ‘are nature’s everyday performances. Nature kills, burns, starves, freezes, poisons.’ Not only that, but the world seems positively immoral.”⁷ Later in the paper, young King concluded: “Evil is a reality. No one can make light of disease, slavery, war, or famine. It might be true that God is in heaven, but all is not right with the world, and only the superficial optimist who refuses to face the realities of life fails to see this patent fact.”⁸ King was no superficial optimist. He saw clearly in Mill’s theodical contentions

a dark truth about the world even as he clearly saw the tendency toward beauty, personality, and goodness in the world. Given the paradoxical character of the world, King maintained simply, "There is evil as well as value."⁹

This is a core insight into King's moral vision of the world house. On June 4, 1957, King addressed YMCA and YWCA student members at the University of California, Berkeley, and explained his moral philosophy of nonviolent direct action. He was keenly aware that his philosophy and its moral norms of agape and justice were not likely to win over black radicals and young people skeptical of religion and religious morality. He did not and could not presume any rhetorical advantage for his vision among these students, even as he tried to explain the ways in which agape was compatible with robust social activism and nonviolent direct action compatible with the demands of social justice. He was face to face with students who could not accept what he took for granted, namely that agape and justice are the only sure foundations undergirding the beauty of the world. King said to the students:

I am quite aware of the fact that there are persons who believe firmly in nonviolence who do not believe in a personal God, but I think every person who believes in nonviolent resistance believes somehow that the universe in some form is on the side of justice. That there is something unfolding in the universe whether one speaks of it as an unconscious process, or whether one speaks of it as some unmoved mover, or whether someone speaks of it as a personal God. There is something in the universe that unfolds for justice and so in Montgomery we felt somehow that as we struggled we had cosmic companionship. And this was one of the things that kept the people together, the belief that the universe is on the side of justice.¹⁰

King's stereoscopic vision of the world house is based on an all-pervasive confidence that the universe is measured by a moral arc bending toward justice and ordered by agape.

Two years after this speech, from February 3 to March 10, 1959, King made a pilgrimage to India. It proved to be a life-changing experience for him and his travel companions (wife Coretta Scott King and Montgomery Improvement Association colleague Lawrence Reddick).¹¹ He had studied the philosophy of Mohandas Gandhi, had deployed Gandhi's nonviolent direct action as means of social change in Montgomery, and had defended it before skeptics, and now he was taking a pilgrimage to post-independence India to see Gandhi's influence for himself. India proved to be a determinant moral case study and validation of King's moral philosophy of nonviolent resistance.

India: A Light Shining in Darkness

With King recovering from a near-fatal stabbing in Harlem, and shortly after the Montgomery bus boycott had come to a successful conclusion (the city passed an ordinance authorizing black passengers to sit anywhere they chose), friends urged: "Why don't you go to India and see for yourself what the Mahatma, whom you so admire, has wrought?"¹² The visit forever enlarged King's perspective on the African American struggle for freedom and civil rights and fed his global vision of a crowded and diverse humanity living in peace. Young King had come to India with a mind already somewhat swayed: "For a long time I had wanted to take a trip to India. Even as a child, the entire Orient held a strange fascination for me—the elephants, the tigers, the temples, the snake charmers, and all the other storybook characters."¹³ Edward Said describes such Orientalism as a "virtual European invention." Since antiquity, he says, the East has been "a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences." It is also the site of "Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestations, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other."¹⁴

It would be an overstatement to say that King's India visit changed his views of the exotic Orient. But it is fair to say that it reshaped his vision of India, making it a more moral and spiritual one. His account mentions no elephants, tigers, or snake charmers. He certainly visited temples and shrines, but their aura fades along with the storybook characters of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, replaced by visions of crowded humanity living together in relative peace. These dominate page after page of his account, following conversations with Richard Wright in Paris on the way to India, on the French attitude toward "the Negro question," while dining on "the best French cooking."¹⁵

King's account exudes a heightened sense of celebrity, with recognition at grand receptions, generous Indian hospitality, and long talks with national, civic, and spiritual leaders, including Vinoba Bhave, the sainted leader of the Bhoodan movement. He seems to have enjoyed the spectacle and some of the attention of being a celebrity, but the latter appears at times to have been nearly overwhelming. King would write: "Since our pictures were in the newspaper very often it was not unusual for us to be recognized by crowds in public places and on public conveyances. Occasionally I would take a morning walk in the large cities, and out of the most unexpected places someone would emerge and ask: 'Are you Martin Luther King?'"¹⁶

King would recall "hundreds of invitations," "the opportunity to share our views with thousands of Indian people," "endless conversations at numerous

discussion sessions,” and speaking to “university groups and public meetings all over India.” He would surmise, “Because of the keen interest that the Indian people have in the race problem these meetings were usually packed.” With every encounter, King would recollect, he had sensed mutuality and kinship: “We were looked upon as brothers, with the color of our skins as something of an asset. But the strongest bond of fraternity was the common cause of minority and colonial peoples in America, Africa, and Asia struggling to throw off racism and imperialism.”¹⁷

King’s meeting with Bhave proved to have a lasting impact on the formation of his moral vision of the world house. Bhave’s Bhoodan movement started in 1951 with his travels by foot all over India, on a mission to initiate voluntary land redistribution from India’s wealthy landowners to people of small villages throughout India, from which sustainable cooperative economic developments among India’s landless poor could prosper.¹⁸ The Bhoodan land reform movement struck a chord with King. With excitement, he wrote: “The Indians have already achieved greater results than we Americans would ever expect. For example, millions of acres of land have been given up by rich landlords and additional millions of acres have been given up to cooperative management by small farmers. . . . India is a tremendous force for peace and nonviolence, at home and abroad.”¹⁹

King’s vision of the moral ordering of the world house had a basis in reality. Nearly a decade after this encounter with Bhave, King would assert: “A genuine program on the part of the wealthy nations to make prosperity a reality for the poor nations will in the final analysis enlarge the prosperity of all. One of the best proofs that reality hinges on moral foundations is the fact that when men and governments work devotedly for the good of others, they achieve their own enrichment in the process.”²⁰

Given King’s disposition to see reality stereoscopically, it is not surprising that he saw more than mutuality and beloved community in India. One eye was focused fully on the plight of India’s poor, but even then he saw hopeful signs:

Everywhere we went we saw crowded humanity—on the roads, in the city streets and squares, even in the villages. Most of the people were poor and poorly dressed. In the city of Bombay, for example, over a half million people—mostly unattached, unemployed, or partially employed males—slept out of doors every night. Great ills flowed from the poverty of India but strangely there was relatively little crime. This was another concrete manifestation of the wonderful spiritual quality of the Indian people. They were poor, jammed together, and half-starved, but they did not take it out on each other.²¹

India's caste system, however, was repugnant to King, as was the plight of the Dalits, or Untouchables, specifically. King witnessed not only poverty and overcrowding but also discrimination in employment, housing, and education. King and his companions felt grief for the Dalits but also a sense of social solidarity.

In a sermon preached on July 4, 1965, some years after his first encounter with the Dalits, King would reflect on this experience. In his sermon, King would describe having given an address in India at a school where the principal introduced him as "a fellow untouchable from the United States of America." King would recall:

For a moment I was a bit shocked and peeved that I would be referred to as an untouchable. . . . I started thinking about the fact: twenty million of my brothers and sisters were still smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in an affluent society. I started thinking about the fact: these twenty million brothers and sisters were still by and large housed in rat-infested, unendurable slums in the big cities of our nation, still attending inadequate schools faced with improper recreational facilities. And I said to myself, "Yes, I am an untouchable, and every Negro in the United States of America is an untouchable."²²

In King's view, however, the government of India was at work to assure the civil rights of the Dalits, and in this he saw repentance and acts of atonement. While such efforts would never pan out the way King hoped, he bemoaned that India was far ahead of the United States in rectifying discrimination, and he contended: "From the prime minister down to the village councilmen, everybody declared publicly that untouchability is wrong. But in the United States some of our highest officials declined to render a moral judgment on segregation, and some from the South publicly boasted of their determination to maintain segregation. That would be unthinkable in India."²³ King's judgment was optimistic, however, and he would subsequently acknowledge the limits of legislative intervention and how deeply caste was embedded in Indian cultural norms, undergirded by religious authority and socioeconomic privilege. Still King would note, "Although discrimination has not yet been eliminated in India . . . , it is a crime to practice discrimination against an untouchable."²⁴

Before leaving India, with its crowded humanity living in mass poverty and its outcastes stationed to a life of starvation, disease, illiteracy, murder, rape, prostitution, and in some cases bonded servitude, King joined his wife Coretta and his other travel companion as they retreated to the shores of Cape Comorin.²⁵ They went there perhaps to rediscover some of the beauty of India after seeing its ugly side. King described the cape as the place where the "mass of India ends" and "the vast rolling waters of the oceans" begin. Sitting on a rock

looking out into the sea, enthralled by its immensity and listening to “oceanic music,” they watched as the sun sank into the ocean in the west while the moon rose in the east. “The radiant light of the rising moon shone supreme,” King later recalled. And he reflected:

God has the light that can shine through all the darkness. We have experiences when the light of day vanishes, leaving us in some dark and desolate midnight—moments when our highest hopes are turned into shambles of despair or when we are victims of some tragic injustice and some terrible exploitation. During such moments our spirits are almost overcome by gloom and despair, and we feel that there is no light anywhere. But ever and again, we look toward the east and discover that there is another light which shines even in the darkness, and “the spear of frustration” is transformed “into a shaft of light.”²⁶

King and his companions returned to the United States on March 18, 1959. He may have gone on his pilgrimage with childlike excitement, anticipating the wonders and adventures that the Orient would provide, but he arrived back in the United States “more convinced than ever before that nonviolent resistance was the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.” “It was a marvelous thing to see the amazing results of a nonviolent campaign,” he reported. “I returned to America with a greater determination to achieve freedom for my people through nonviolent means. As a result of my visit to India, my understanding of nonviolence became greater and my commitment deeper.”²⁷

Without a Vision and Moral Order We Perish

Nine years passed. It was 1968. Notwithstanding some legislative and judicial civil rights gains in the United States, King’s own light shining in the darkness seemed to have dimmed somewhat under the canopy of pervasive disappointments. The exhilarating insight and the commitment King felt upon returning to the United States from India was being tested by a slew of struggles and assaults. Racial segregation, the jailing and murdering of civil rights activists, the bombing of black homes and churches (including the killing of four girls in Birmingham), the raging war in Vietnam, mass poverty, slum housing, and rioting across the country: together these overshadowed hard-won legislative and judicial achievements. Violence appeared to be the norm, making King’s vision of a peaceful great world house an even harder sale to many black students and organizers whose earlier skepticism had by then hardened into cynicism. The explosion of violence concomitant with the rise of the Black Power movement

personally and ambiguously affected King more than anything else he encountered. Even as he empathized with the movement's exasperation and resentment over the gradual pace in legislative racial reform and perpetual assaults on the dignity of black humanity, he recoiled against its philosophical nihilism as he saw it.

The light in the east shining in darkness had provided King a life-changing, beautiful vision of the great world house and a greater commitment to build its foundation by nonviolent means and with the moral norms of agape and justice. The Black Power movement, in King's estimation, sorely challenged the vision, the means, and the norms. While interracial civil rights campaigns had been successful, leading to the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965, this tack was challenged by the competing vision of increasingly militant Black Power, marching under its own banner and to a different drumbeat.

The Black Power movement strained King's moral disposition. While he understood the political aims of the movement—advancing a robust consciousness of black pride, self-empowerment, and economic autonomy by any means deemed necessary for achieving revolutionary outcomes—King derisively considered its ideology divisive, politically impotent, and a dead end. He decried the moral disposition of Black Power leaders, sensing nihilism fueled by black frustrations, rage, and disenfranchisement: “Black Power is a nihilistic philosophy born out of the conviction that the Negro can't win. It is, at bottom, the view that American society is so hopelessly corrupt and enmeshed in evil that there is no possibility of salvation from within.”²⁸

This sense of hopelessness that King perceived in the Black Power movement led him to critique its roots: the failures and limits of liberal legislative reforms, malaise among white compatriots marching and campaigning with blacks in freedom movements, and the insurgent white backlash throughout the South. Some of King's sternest critiques were aimed at the black middle class, which, he charged, had succumbed to the sin of forgetfulness. He declared: “Many middle-class Negroes have forgotten their roots and are more concerned about ‘conspicuous consumption’ than about the cause of justice.” He went on to condemn their moral apathy as “shameful ingratitude,” and he accused middle-class blacks of sitting “in some serene and passionless realm of isolation, untouched and unmoved by the agonies and struggles of their underprivileged brothers.” “This kind of selfish detachment,” he added, “has caused the masses of Negroes to feel alienated not only from white society but also from the Negro middle class. They feel that the average middle-class Negro has no concern for their plight.”²⁹

King himself had been subject to this critique in 1966, when he and members of his Southern Christian Leadership Conference were in Chicago waging a housing campaign and meeting with residents and local gang leaders in the Lawndale community of the city's West Side. Looking back on those experiences, King judged that discontent among the residents and gang leaders rendered them bitter and "uncertain about the efficacy of nonviolent direct action as a strategy for improving their living conditions." King became a target in venting their bitterness and frustration, and his moral lens turned inward. His sense of inadequacy and futility are evident in these words from his last book:

In all the speaking that I have done in the United States before varied audiences, including some hostile whites, the only time that I have been booed was one night in a Chicago mass meeting by some young members of the Black Power movement. I went home that night with an ugly feeling. Selfishly I thought of my sufferings and sacrifices over the last twelve years. Why would they boo one so close to them? But as I lay awake thinking, I finally came to myself, and I could not for the life of me have less than patience and understanding for those young people. For twelve years I, and others like me, had held out radiant promises of progress. I had preached to them about my dream. I had lectured to them about the not too distant day when they would have freedom, "all, here and now." I had urged them to have faith in America and in white society. Their hopes had soared. They were now booing because they felt that we were unable to deliver on our promises. They were booing because we had urged them to have faith in people who had too often proved to be unfaithful. They were now hostile because they were watching the dream that they had so readily accepted turn into a frustrating nightmare.³⁰

Against the nightmarish U.S. social realities of the 1960s, the aura of King's revelatory light shining in the darkness appears to have been almost extinguished and with it a beautiful vision of a great world house at peace. Almost! King's paradoxical dictum persists: "There is evil as well as value."³¹

King's book *Where Do We Go from Here?* is a powerful moral critique of the light of reform and the darkness of despair in the world house. As a young student at Crozer, King was clear-sighted enough to see that evil is a reality and "only the superficial optimist who refuses to face the realities of life fails to see this patent fact."³² In 1967, writing *Where Do We Go from Here?*, King insisted, "The Negro's disappointment is real and a part of the daily menu of our lives." He continued: "The only healthy answer lies in one's honest recognition of disappointment even as he still clings to hope, one's acceptance of finite disappointment even

while clinging to infinite hope." This infinite hope requires an infinite vision and moral ordering of the world house inhabited by all. With a sense of moral urgency, King warned: "The large house in which we live demands that we transform this worldwide neighborhood into a worldwide brotherhood. Together we must learn to live as brothers or together we will be forced to perish as fools."³³

Vision and Moral Order in the World House

Seeing through stereoscopic moral lenses, Martin Luther King Jr. did not discount the harsh realities of the social ills persistent in the United States any more than he discounted the plight of India's Dalits. Still, marshalling evidence, he persisted on the validity of his vision of the world as a house of peace. He recounted legislative reforms dismantling the hold of Jim Crow segregation in transportation, business and commerce, and education, and culminating in the monumental Voting Rights Act of 1965, and he noted President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society initiatives. To King, these were hard-won gains wrought by nonviolent means in campaigns from Montgomery to Selma, campaigns based on norms of agape and justice. They were also a rearranging of the old furnishings of the world house.

Challenging the moral strength of King's vision was the malaise of white compatriots and the black middle class. Earlier, at the beginning of the Montgomery movement, King had cautioned: "The danger facing the American Negro is that because of . . . astounding advances he will become complacent and feel that the overall problem is solved. . . . We must not become so complacent that we forget the struggles of other minorities. We must unite with oppressed minorities throughout the world."³⁴ Simultaneous challenges came from competing revolutionary moral visionaries within the Black Power movement and from hopelessness and rage among young blacks, who turned to riotous violence as a consequence of promises and dreams deferred.

King's recognition that "there is evil as well as value" brought into sharp focus that the ethical and the aesthetic both demanded attention. Obligation mattered, and cooperation was necessary. For humans' highest ideals to be actualized in the world house, King wrote, "we have to live together—black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Muslim and Hindu—a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace."³⁵

Fifty years have passed since the publication of *Where Do We Go from Here?*, and one is tempted to repeat the adage, "As much as things change, they re-

main the same." What parallels strike contemporary readers of King's book! As during King's time, there have been reforms, and there has been backlash. In the United States, the past fifty years have witnessed strengthened and expanded civil rights through laws covering discrimination based on race, gender, and sexuality, and judicial affirmation of same-sex marriage, even while women's reproductive rights have been under increased attack. The same five decades have been an era of technological and scientific advances unimaginable in King's day. Through economic globalization, the future validated King's assertion: "All inhabitants of the globe are now neighbors. This worldwide neighborhood has been brought into being largely as a result of the modern scientific and technological revolutions."³⁶ Taken for granted is King's insistence that all are interdependent and that all life is interrelated—but the vision is mostly militaristic and economically competitive, not one of mutual assistance and harmony.

And we are not saved, as Derrick Bell has noted. Twenty years after the publication of King's last book, announcing his vision of a great world house, Bell would write:

Jeremiah's lament that "we are not saved" echoes down through the ages and gives appropriate voice to present concerns of those who, flushed with the enthusiasm generated by the Supreme Court's 1954 holding that segregated public schools are unconstitutional, pledged publicly that the progeny of America's slaves would at last be "Free by 1963," the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation. That pledge became the motto for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's 1959 convention in New York City, where were gathered, in jubilant euphoria, veterans of racial bias and society's hostility who believed that they had finally, and permanently, achieved the reform of the laws that had been for centuries vehicles for the oppression of black men, women, and children. Not even the most skeptical at that convention could have foreseen that, less than three decades later, that achievement would be so eroded as to bring us once again into fateful and frightful coincidence with Jeremiah's lament. With the realization that the salvation of racial equality has eluded us again, questions arise from the ashes of our expectations.³⁷

In the midst of these changes and the rearrangement of the furnishings in the world house, there are renewed efforts to place the furniture back where it was, under the rationale that the reasons for rearrangement are no longer valid. The 2013 U.S. Supreme Court case *Shelby County v. Holder* ruled in a 5–4 decision that a central component of the 1965 Voting Rights Act was unconstitutional and no longer applicable as it had been when the law was enacted.³⁸ The dissenting

opinion, articulated by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg, noted that gutting this key provision of the Voting Rights Act was akin to “throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you’re not getting wet.” Not surprisingly, 53 percent of the states implicated in the ruling acted immediately to instate or reinstate voting restrictions that disproportionately disenfranchised poor people of color, precisely the communities the act was envisioned to protect. Gerrymandering, redistricting, cutting voting hours, eliminating same-day registration, moving polling places without significant advance notice to locations out of the reach of public transportation, eliminating constable positions held by persons of color: these are but a few examples of the measures enacted post-*Shelby* to move the furniture of the world house back to arrangements more reminiscent of the plantation house.

Still, King’s vision entailed worldwide “brotherhood” and was not limited to voting rights, the African American community, or the United States. His experience of India’s crowded humanity informed that vision and the war in Vietnam sharpened it. King’s April 4, 1967, speech from New York City’s Riverside Church, “Beyond Vietnam,” delivered exactly one year prior to his assassination, focused that vision on the giant triplets racism, materialism, and militarism and challenged listeners to understand that the world house would never be a place of refuge and peace if its inhabitants were constantly pitted against each other. King urged: “If we will only make the right choice, we will be able to transform this pending cosmic elegy into a creative psalm of peace. If we will make the right choice, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our world into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.”³⁹

The spaces of crowded humanity that exploded with grief and fury in the United States after King’s assassination in April 1968—Detroit, Newark, Baltimore, New York, Washington, and Pittsburgh—have become fifty years later the crowded spaces of gentrification. The result is less a beautiful symphony of human kinship and more a discordant pushing of poor people to the outskirts of cities that have housed them for decades. A similar phenomenon is occurring around the world, in Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam, where wealthy developers and the tourists their properties attract have premier access to prized coastal lands, pushing the poor to areas not supported by basic infrastructure.⁴⁰ And Puerto Rico, a colony of the United States that experienced devastating hurricanes in September 2017, is now struggling to maintain its population from another mass out-migration sparked by economic ruin, while venture and disaster capitalists are all too eager to “rescue” the island for personal profit.⁴¹ What part of King’s world house are we left to salvage when its legacy has morphed into a question of who gets to live in the upper quarters and who is relegated to

the basement, where such hierarchies are not always delineated in black and white?

King's vision of the world house did not account for the land itself—the planet—upon which that house would be built. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) waged a searing critique of the damage inflicted by chemical pesticides on the ecosystem, and King's compatriot Cesar Chavez would take up that cause twenty-six years later in a thirty-six-day fast, but the moral order and vision of the world house did not extend past the front door.⁴² As much as King was enthralled by the cosmos, marked by his experiences in India, and fascinated with the technological advancements evident in space exploration, his vision was refracted by the anthropocentrism of Christian theology that, up to that point, had framed salvation in exclusively human terms.

While King's razor-sharp analysis articulated the intersections of racism, materialism, and militarism, his stereoscopic view was not panoramic enough to see how all of these converged upon the planet itself. We now know how closely race, poverty, war, and environmental degradation are intertwined. A King contemporary and fellow peace and civil rights activist, Trappist monk Thomas Merton, was beginning to deepen his own awareness, an earth consciousness, most notably in his "Letters to a White Liberal" (1963), around the same time that he was inspired by and in communication with King.⁴³ Perhaps more direct engagement between these two moral visionaries would have broadened King's view of the world house. Indeed, such a retreat was planned for late April 1968, but King died before that could take place.⁴⁴

Audre Lorde's classic essay "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" questioned white feminists at the time, asking: "What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable."⁴⁵ Should a similar question be asked in relation to King's vision of the great world house, where an anthropocentric Christian understanding of justice and beauty are embedded in both its foundation and frame? Is King's vision of the great world house too limited and narrow in view of what the world, indeed the cosmos, needs at this time? Are justice and beauty and a peaceful world house only possible after the current house is razed and a new one is constructed?

The work of contemplative activists who refuse to perpetuate the dualism and anthropocentric hierarchies of Christian tradition force those committed to King's world house legacy to broaden the aperture of his vision. Eco-womanist voices like that of Melanie L. Harris invite new and exciting possibilities for engaging human-earth consciousness that extend an ecumenical dialogue of a

kind that was so much a part of King's own theological development.⁴⁶ The ethical and the aesthetic are ecumenically intertwined and, as King wrote, "caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny." That mutuality must be recognized as encompassing the entire planet if it is to be true to the spirit in which those words were penned from a Birmingham, Alabama, jail in 1963.⁴⁷

King's words, spoken exactly one year before his death, serve as a poignant reminder necessary for any appraisal of the vision and moral order of the world house: "[L]et us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter, but beautiful, struggle for a new world."⁴⁸ Justice and beauty—the ethical and the aesthetic—are often privileged points of reference for King's world house legacy. "There is evil and there is value," and it is the struggle against evil and the search for value that focus and sharpen a stereoscopic vision of the world house. Rededication to this struggle, in our time as distinct from King's, is needed for a stereoscopic vision of justice and beauty to emerge and a new kind of world house to be imagined and constructed. Without sustained and faithful rededication, the vision of the world house is but a faded blueprint, and without a new vision the structure will not accommodate its inhabitants or cohere with the environment on which it is built.

NOTES

The epigraphs are from Carl Jung, BrainyQuote, <https://www.brainyquote.com/>; and Martin Luther King Jr., "The Vision of a World Made New," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 6, *Advocate of the Social Gospel, September 1948–March 1963*, edited by Clayborne Carson, Susan Carson, Susan Englander, Troy Jackson, and Gerald L. Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 182.

1. Martin Luther King Jr., "Pharisee and Publican," unpublished sermon, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, October 9, 1966, King Papers, Library and Archives of the Martin Luther King Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Atlanta.

2. Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967; rpt., 1968, 2010), 167.

3. Victor Anderson, *Pragmatic Theology: Negotiating the Intersections of an American Philosophy of Religion and Public Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 111.

4. Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here?*, 168–69.

5. *Ibid.*, 168.

6. Martin Luther King Jr., "A Comparison and Impression of Religion Drawn from Dr. Brightman's Book, Entitled *A Philosophy of Religion*," in Martin Luther King Jr., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 1, *Called to Serve, January 1929–June 1951*, edited by Clayborne Carson, Ralph E. Luker, Penny A. Russell, and Louis R. Harlan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 414. French brackets in original.

7. Martin Luther King Jr., "Religion's Answer to the Problem of Evil," in *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 1, 416.

8. *Ibid.*, 417.
9. Martin Luther King Jr., “A Conception and Impression of Religion Drawn from Dr. Brightman’s Book, Entitled *A Philosophy of Religion*,” in *ibid.*, 414.
10. Martin Luther King Jr., “The Power of Nonviolence (1957),” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 13–14.
11. The Montgomery Improvement Association was formed December 5, 1955, by black clergy and community leaders in Montgomery, Alabama.
12. Martin Luther King Jr., *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by Clayborne Carson (New York: Warner Books, 1998), 121. For King stabbing, see *ibid.*, 117–20.
13. *Ibid.*, 121.
14. Edward Said, “Orientalism (1978),” in *The Edward Said Reader*, edited by Mustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin (New York: Vintage, 2000), 67–68.
15. King, *Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 122.
16. *Ibid.*, 123.
17. *Ibid.*
18. “Biography—Vinoba Bhave, a Missionary for the Mother Earth,” n.d., <http://vinobabhav.org/index.php/biography>.
19. King, *Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 126.
20. Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here?*, 180.
21. King, *Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 124–25.
22. *Ibid.*, 131.
23. *Ibid.*, 133.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Conditions for Dalits have not changed much nearly half a century later. See Hillary Mayell, “India’s ‘Untouchables’ Face Violence, Discrimination,” *National Geographic*, June 2, 2003, <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/06/indias-untouchables-face-violence-discrimination>.
26. King, *Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 127–128.
27. *Ibid.*, 134.
28. Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here?*, 36–37, 44.
29. *Ibid.*, 131–32.
30. Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here?*, 45.
31. King, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 1, 414.
32. Martin Luther King Jr., “Religion’s Answer to the Problem of Evil,” in *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 1, 417.
33. Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here?*, 46, 171.
34. Martin Luther King Jr., “The Peril of Superficial Optimism in Race Relations,” in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 6, *Advocate of the Social Gospel, September 1948–March 1963*, edited by Clayborne Carson, Susan Carson, Susan Englander, Troy Jackson, and Gerald L. Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 215.
35. Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here?*, 167.
36. *Ibid.*, 167–68.
37. Derrick Bell, *And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 3.
38. John Schwartz, “Between the Lines of the Voting Rights Act Opinion,” *New York Times*, June 25, 2013. For more analysis of the court ruling, see Myrna Pérez and Vishal

Agraharkar, "If Section 5 Falls: New Voting Implications," Brennan Center for Justice, June 12, 2013, <http://www.brennancenter.org/publication/if-section-5-falls-new-voting-implications>.

39. Martin Luther King Jr., "Beyond Vietnam," in *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard (New York, Warner, 2001), 163–64.

40. Peter Penz, Jay Drydyk, and Pablo S. Bose, *Displacement by Development: Ethics, Rights and Responsibilities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Erhard Berner, "Poverty Alleviation and the Eviction of the Poorest: Towards Urban Land Reform in the Philippines," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24, no. 3 (June 28, 2008): 536–53; Rowland Atkinson and Gary Bridge, *Gentrification in a Global Context: The New Urban Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2005).

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43. Monica Weis, *The Environmental Vision of Thomas Merton*, Culture of the Land (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011).

44. Patricia Lafevere, "Merton and King: Spiritual Brothers Who Never Had a Chance to Meet," *National Catholic Reporter*, April 4, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/>. Merton died suddenly in December 1968.

45. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 110–14.

46. Melanie L. Harris, *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2017).

47. See Martin Luther King Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: New American Library, 1963), 77.

48. Martin Luther King Jr., *Testament of Hope*, 243.