

Johan Galtung: A Preface to Martin Arnold's Gütekraft

Martin Arnold has done social science in general, and peace studies in particular, a huge favor through the enormous feat of producing this book on power by being, and doing, good. It is easily the most thorough work on both the philosophy and the politics of nonviolence in one book.

His methodology is as simple as it is effective: to get at the essence of nonviolence by comparing three deeply engaged and very different nonviolent persons. Hildegard Goss-Mayr is rooted in German culture and a Christian tradition "liberating the force of God", Mohandas Gandhi is rooted in an Indian tradition and Hindu faith in the unity-of-life, and Bart de Ligt, atheist, freethinker and deeply spiritual, rooted in a Dutch background, one woman two men, two white one brown. Martin Luther King Jr. belongs here, but the book is long enough. The nonviolent philosophies of different backgrounds which Arnold has explored have been successfully applied. The efficiency is well proven in history.

One strength of the book lies in the combining three fascinating persons and their life trajectories with the analytical extraction and construction of the effectiveness of their concepts by identifying common factors as well as differences. Arnold has explored that effective power from a general human background and he succeeded in finding a description without resorting to a particular religion or philosophy.

Another strength, basic to my own theory and practice, is the focus on the relations among actors rather than on their attributes. This is an oriental more than an occidental tradition, Buddhist more than Christian. But that is where conflict has its point of gravity, like violence and peace and indeed like power of all kinds. Western individualism often steers our thinking toward attributes only; possibly a major civilizational fallacy. Arnold charts the territory of nonviolence by doing both, solving that philosophical conflict very well.

Congratulations and thanks to Martin Arnold!

Alfaz, 31 January 2010

Johan Galtung