Imposing Morality: Cultural Perspectives on Truth, Apologies, and Forgiveness in the U.S.A.
(A Critical Analysis of American Political Philosophy)

by
Anthony Sean Neal

Introduction

"In an experience, things and events belonging to the world, physical and social are transformed through the human context they enter, while the live creature is changed and developed through its intercourse with things previously external to it." John Dewey, Art as Experience, [1]

The implication of the ability to impose morality is projected through the conceptual framework introduced in the nomenclature, Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). If this is to be accomplished, there are criteria TRCs must satisfy.

Indeed, if the moral case for TRCs in a democratic society is to be made it must satisfy three critical criteria: It must (1) substitute rights and goods "that are moral" and equivalent (or "compatible") to the justice forgone; (2) be broadly inclusive so as to foster social cooperation among all citizens who have legitimate claims on the society being reconstructed; and (3) be "moral in practice" and intimately connected to the democratic ethos of the successor government so that the retribution being sacrificed can be appreciated in terms of the realization of specific, not general, forms of societal benefit. [2]

The purpose of a TRC has been heavily debated in recent years, with most participants agreeing that the utmost concern of TRCs must be sociopolitical change and transitional justice. Typically, TRCs are established in nations where there has been great human injustice made apparent through the suffering of a large group of individuals for a long duration of time. Under these circumstances, such widespread and perennial injustice is perceived as making the possibility of peace between opposing factions unlikely without some interventionist act. Ideally, TRCs are able to accomplish the daunting task of

---

[1] John Dewey , Art as Experience (New York, NY: Penguin Putnam, 1980), 257.
[2] Robert I. Rotberg and Dennis F. Thompson, Truth v. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 8.

intervening to normalize peaceful interactions when they effectively expose truth, broker reconciliation, and facilitate a transformation in an errant state of affairs for the purpose of imposing moral authority. In light of the historic and systemic injustices perpetrated against persons of African descent in the U.S., it is likely that without the benefit of a TRC the imposition of morality – as suggested in the nation's Declaration of Independence and other seminal documents – will remain dubious, at best.

Each society has its own ideas of the nature of morality and each society has its own perceptions of moral authority. These ideas and perceptions influence the character of a society, and they also make apparent the inclination of a society to give deference to new sources of moral authority. This inclination arises from the lived experience which demonstrates the subjection of individuals to the immediate external influences of their environment. In the United States, much of the perceptual framework regarding moral authority is bound by the ideals found in the nation's formative documents, and these documents are understood as having authority in the determination of what America's moral culture will look like.

The imposition of a shift in the ethos of a society necessarily requires a great catalyst; this is certain because held within the ethos of a society are the foundational ideas from which its character and identity have derived. If the ethos is accepted as the basis for the foundational ideas of the society, then it is the ethos through which societal members filter incoming information received from external experiences. This process can be thought of as subjective based upon the necessary connection between the foundational ideas, the ethos and the interpretation of external experiences. This connection creates the perceptual framework which determines how individual members of a society see

themselves in relation to their experiences and how meaning is found in those experiences. It can be argued that the experiences are not just interpreted by the perceptual framework, but in fact, are created through the perceptual framework. The identity created by this perceptual framework for the individual, as well for the society, can be compared to the atomic nature of a solid in terms of stability and resistance to change. In other words, the identity can be changed, but only through the instigation of a great catalyst.

As alluded to earlier, the forces influencing America's moral character can be found in the documents (e.g., Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution), that were written during the formative stages of this nation. In these documents, certain recurrent markers of the then budding U.S. territory indicate that the founders believed in an emergent, shared and uniquely American identity. Building on the ideas in these documents, this chapter will establish a general understanding of American cultural perspectives on moral philosophy. From there, a general definition of morality will be given using traditional moral philosophy in conjunction with the way the term is used in foundational American writings. Given this premise, it will be argued that for America the sincere adherence to moral authority and the actuation of oppression cannot simultaneously exist; one is naturally sacrificed for the other. Also, using the definition and the nuances of culture, an analysis of the ideals of truth, apology, and forgiveness will be presented.

The Development of American Moral Character

"The colony was scarcely established when slavery was introduced…" Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America[3]

---

[3] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (New York, NY: Barnes and Noble, 2005), 43.

The United States of America is a great and mighty nation which from its beginning has been intent upon infusing the value of freedom into the consciousness of its citizens; unfortunately, this value was not actualized for all from the nation's early beginnings. Even so, many of the early participants in the formation of the U.S. focused on the creation of a space, which would have a higher moral standing for its citizens than the spaces they were departing. Since the nation's founders were primarily of British descent, British theories of political morality were targeted as the benchmarks for the new nation. Having inherited the intellectual lineage of the ideas formed during the Enlightenment, the founder's believed the existence of a monarchy to be antithetical to the moral grounding necessary to build cohesive national boundaries. This thinking was in large part due to political ideas espoused by theorists of the day who saw themselves as being akin to early philosophers who were not content to allow traditional ideas or religious doctrine to control them without the benefit of rational scrutiny. As a result, the American moral character has held as grounding the tenet that freedom is normative -- a very novel concept in that day. Interestingly, this moral ideal of freedom emerged through concepts leveraged from a small group of manuscripts that includes Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan and John Locke's Second Treatise of Government. Subsequently, it was the ideals presented by philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke that found illumination in the U.S. Declaration of Independence and select sections of the nation's Constitution and Bill of Rights.

A period of revolution existed in England from 1649 to 1700 (e.g., regicide, civil war, and political disorder). The catalyst for this period was the fact that British subjects were growing increasingly leery of the claims of divine authority by the monarchs. Similar to the days of ancient Greece, political philosophers were motivated to discover a rational basis

for legitimate government. In their view, such a government would be grounded in the existential conditions of the day and not an invisible deity. Thomas Hobbes' work, The Leviathan, was written during this era, and was aimed at an explication of the best type of government based upon the fundamental nature of humanity.

Hobbes assumed that the absence of government was not an option because such absence would cause society to evolve into a perpetual state of war or anarchy among individuals. The state of perpetual war was presumed to hinder the development of "eudaimonia" or "good life"[4] for any individual or group of individuals. The major premise upon which Hobbes' work is based is that at all times all humans are equal, free in the state of nature and potentially at war with each other. Hobbes, of course, expands the definition of war but nevertheless insists that when there was a time in human history without a common authority, humans were inclined to make their way in life by always considering their individual benefit and survival first. To escape this threat, Hobbes suggests that humans enter into an agreement or social contract which would allow for the creation of a common authority. He also suggests that individuals cede all their individual rights to the decision making process of the common authority or sovereign. Hobbes would agree that ceding all power to the sovereign creates a monster (i.e. The Leviathan) in the sovereign; however, he clearly believed that the opposite or anarchy was worse. Hobbes' theory is based on fear.

John Locke's work, Second Treatise on Civil Government, was written thirty years after The Leviathan; even so, it takes as its impetus the same factors as Hobbes: a rational basis for a legitimate government. Like Hobbes, Locke begins with the premise that in the

---

[4] The search for the good life is a concept that drives the basic activity of political philosophy as the philosopher focuses on the best possible political life within a political community.

state of nature when humans were without a common authority, they were free; however, Locke deviates from Hobbes by purporting that humans are basically good by nature. Locke proposed that governments restrict freedom, but there are some interactions, which take place among humans that are less complicated when a common authority exists. So, according to Locke, while all humans are free and basically good, they are under no obligation to respect the property of others, -- which puts their free status and property in a precarious position; this has the possibility of leading to anarchy. Similar to Hobbes, Locke believed that a social contract was needed to protect against anarchy; however, Locke considered the ceding of all authority to the government to be unwise. Locke's ideas on this subject expose his belief that the maintenance of personal freedom is of far greater importance than the maintenance of a strong a national boundary. For this reason, Locke suggested that the government be given some powers, but not all. Although Locke felt revolution was a negative state of affairs, he believed that revolution was the final check and balance when a government was ill-functioning and/or overstepping its limits. Accordingly, Locke believed that only an irrational people would give all power and authority to a sovereign common authority since he believed freedom was the normative experience of being human.

The founders of the United States of America immersed themselves in the philosophies espoused by Hobbes and Locke, and sought to combine those philosophies with their own ideal of freedom as a basic human right. This ideal became the basis for the development of an American theoretical framework upon which principles of justice and equality for all would reign. The founders believed, based upon the ideas of the time, that governments needed the consent of the governed in order to be considered legitimate and

to maintain moral authority. The avoidance of governmental tyranny was clearly a focus of the carefully crafted Declaration of Independence; ultimately, it was the Declaration that advanced and shaped American political ideology and moral character.

The Declaration of Independence begins with the claim that all men are created equal in spite of any empirical evidence as to the validity of this statement. The claim rests upon the beliefs of the people and their indebtedness to the idea of the right to personal freedom. Personal freedom is at the core of what makes the American experience distinctive; however, personal freedom is also what creates the largest obstacle for collective change.

There are five major principles expressed in the Declaration; these principles continue to shape legislative creations, bind judicial interpretations, and give executorial credence, in spite of the fact that the document sets no laws in place. These five principles are:

1. All men are created equal.

2. All men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.

3. Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness are among the unalienable rights of all men.

4. To secure these unalienable rights for its citizens, governments are instituted among men and derive their powers from the consent of those citizens.

5. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends of assuring the unalienable rights of its citizens, it is the right of those citizens to alter or to abolish the government and to institute a new one.

For hundreds of years it would go unacknowledged and unaddressed by the U.S. government that the primary beneficiaries of the Declaration's lofty proclamations were limited to Americans of European ancestry, leaving what would become millions of inhabitants of African descent to endure a particularly oppressive moral, political and social structure for centuries. This was because there was an inherent disconnect between much of the stated content of the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights and the practices of the newly formed nation. While the efforts of the founders were successful in creating a space for some Americans to experience these ideals, others would be forced to labor, sacrifice, and in many cases lose their lives for the privileges of personal freedom.

Defining and Imposing National Morality

"Again, how does the desire for freedom compare in intensity with the desire to feel equal with others, especially with those who have previously been called superiors?" John Dewey, Freedom and Culture[5]

What is morality? There are many ways in which this question can be answered, but if the answer is to be less than general and approaching the specific, it must be decided if it is western morality or another worldview, pragmatist or Christian, or even pragmatist Christian. There are many possible frameworks from which to examine morality, but ultimately the answer is culturally specific based on the customs and values of a community. When determining the nature of a group or individual's morality it is necessary to examine certain cultural factors such as, but not limited to: economics, religious beliefs and practices, languages spoken, and education. These factors, in conjunction with others,

---

[5] John Dewey, Freedom and Culture (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), 11.

are examined to understand moral practices, and they also resemble many of the factors that are examined when attempting to understand custom. Custom can be defined as traditional practices or ways of doing things accepted by a particular community over a period of time. However, along with the development of ways of doing things also comes the development of ways not to do things. These ways of doing and not doing things, or the community's orthopraxy, in some cases eventually become standardized and passed to subsequent generations as a way of being. From this passing down and educational process comes the basis upon which the community's values are derived; these values are reflections of the community's moral philosophy. Morality, then, is at least akin to custom, but not just any customs, particularly those customs, which can be valued by all citizens. It can be assumed that to be immoral within a given society is to commit acts outside the bounds of the community's moral philosophy or outside the community's customs.

How can this understanding of morality be applied to America or American identity? Can a nation be moral? Nations certainly are not created through the passing down of customs only, nations are founded or created upon a certain set of ideas or preexisting customs and moral philosophy. When this nation was founded, it was assumed that its purpose was to secure the core freedoms outlined in the Declaration of Independence. These core freedoms were believed to give those who would be protected under the nation's laws the possibility of actualizing their greatest potential. Reaching the greatest potential in this scenario is understood to be good, therefore when a nation creates space for this possibility it is, in effect, creating space for those it protects to have a good life. Accordingly, the morality of this nation can be determined by whether space is created for the possibility of the good life for all of its members.

National morality, in this framework, is theoretically imposed through the extension of the same opportunities for the possibility of a good life -- or simply put a homogenous experience of the good. In order to insure the availability of this experience, institutions must be created to efficiently extend equal opportunities to all. Where the allocation of equal opportunity for all is absent, there is oppression: "a situation in which one, or more, identifiable segments of a population in a social system systematically and successfully act over a prolonged period of time to prevent another identifiable segment, or segments, of the population from attaining access to the scarce and valued resources of that system."[6] Oppression assaults morality and hinders the ability of different groups to exist in community. Essentially, those for whom opportunity is denied become skeptical of the ideal of freedom.

The absolute imposition of morality by America, a nation founded upon the ideals of freedom, equality and justice for all cannot exist in tandem with the existence of oppression. These ideals must surely become a homogeneous experience for all if there will be a shared sense of morality among the nation's citizens. Each of these moral ideals is antithetical to oppression; where they exist, oppression cannot exist. Freedom, equality and justice for all are the founding principles that establish the moral code of conduct for this nation in its foreign and domestic affairs. Thus, hindering freedom is tantamount to increasing oppression and also taking an immoral posture. This is to say that in the treatment of its citizens this nation cannot be both moral and oppressive. Therefore, upon committing an oppressive act, it becomes necessary to repair the action if the restoration of moral authority is desired.

---

[6] Adalberto Aguirre and David V. Baker, Structured Inequality in the United States: Critical Discussions on the Continuing Significance of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 25.

Restoring Moral Authority

"The limits of my language mean the limits of my world." Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, Ludwig
Wittgenstein[7], 5.6

While it is impossible for a government to impose absolute morality in the hearts

and minds of its citizenry, it is indeed possible for a government to conduct itself with

moral intent, clarity and outcome. One way to assure citizens of an authority's commitment

to moral behavior is that government's provisions for equal opportunities for the good life

for *all* its citizens. In those cases where a governmental authority's credibility has been

breached due to an apparent lack of commitment to those provisions, actions can be taken

to restore the assurance of morality and install or repair communal trust among the entire

citizenry.

In this section, focus will be placed upon three actions frequently considered

essential to the process of restoring a government's commitment to moral outcomes and

installing or repairing communal trust. These actions are: 1) telling the truth about the

oppressive acts and their effects, 2) issuing an apology and a warranty against future

wrongful acts, and 3) seeking forgiveness and the consent to be governed from the

oppressed. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions can facilitate these actions. The

following passage by Priscilla Hayner demonstrates the primacy a Commission places on

truth.

A human rights commission set up to investigate abuses of the past can serve many

different, often overlapping, purposes. The most straightforward reason to set up a

---

[7] (Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 5.6)

truth commission is that of sanctioned fact finding to establish an accurate record of a country's past, and thus help to provide a fair record of a country's past and thus, help to provide a fair record of a country's history and its government's much-disputed acts. Leaving an honest account of the violence prevents history from being lost or re-written, and allows a society to learn from its past in order to prevent a repetition of such violence in the future.[8]

As stated above, morality is associated with the customs of a community, and it is derived from the values of that community. One of the highest values of a community necessarily has to be the maintenance of cohesiveness within the community itself. The community cannot intentionally work towards the goal of fragmentation, since fragmentation would lead to the eventual demise of the community. Therefore, any concept that increases the possibility of a fragmented society (e.g., the oppression of certain groups) cannot be thought of as having value or be held as part of the community's moral code. This is again, because the moral code or community's morality is derived from the community's values. These values would have to be ideas or actions thought of as the best of their kind. So, when considered in this manner, and because of their ability to thwart fragmentation, the concepts of truth, apology, and forgiveness have a connection to the imposition of morality that become glaringly apparent.

Truth

---

[8] Priscilla Hayner, "Fifteen Truth Commissions," *Human Rights Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (November 1994): 607.

For some, ascertaining a depiction of a historical event or period in history which can be understood as the "truth" seems outside the reach of human capabilities, especially in an era where the scientific theories of relativity and evolution drive historical interpretations and imply that truth is dynamic and subjective. Given this tendency to question the reliability and validity of what is true as it relates to certain historical episodes, we might wonder if we can ever know truth. And if so, whose truth will be known?

Before a society can engage in a legitimate discussion concerning reconciliation, a way of reaching agreed upon accounts of occurrences must be made. The keys to supporting this agreement exist in the creation of many venues for the discussion of particular occurrences by affected parties, political leaders and academics. In order for a mutually agreed upon truth to be derived, a way of understanding that honors cultural and historical memories, complexities and motivations must also exist. It cannot be assumed that one community's understanding of the words used to describe particular historical events or periods in history have interchange or carryover to all communities within national bounds. Still today, discussions surrounding the history of slavery are complicated by differences in the cultural memories of members of the oppressed and oppressor groups. This phenomenon inhibits this nation's ability to create a common context for such a discussion.

In an era such as this, epistemologies or ways of knowing are full of complications that stem from cultural vernaculars isolated through geography and demography. These ways of knowing are further complicated when they attempt to draw upon the experiences of an individual or community for purposes of enlightening and/or educating those

individuals in different and possibly nemesis communities. This complicates the achievement of shared meaning and interpretation; each group believes its understanding to be based upon truth.

What, then, is truth? On a metaphysical level, it could be said that truth is what actually is; this means that despite the human propensity to be subjective, phenomena do indeed occur objectively. Unfortunately, because humans ascertain meaning through culturally-specific perceptual frameworks, it is these frameworks that determine how we understand and depict phenomena. What we describe follows our interpretation, which is based intently on what our frame of reference has prepared us to take notice of and give credence to. To further complicate matters, at the moment a verbal description is attempted other more individualized factors – such as the language we speak, our educational background, and our socio-economic status -- influence and limit our understandings, interpretations and our subsequent communications. Our ability to retell the occurrence or phenomena we observed cannot exceed our ability to describe the phenomena in words. Consequently, limitations and deficiencies in human linguistic abilities – among other restrictions associated with our humanness – can cause distortions, misrepresentations and inaccuracies in efforts to objectively depict and describe historical phenomena.

Much of the current discussion in the U.S. concerning truth stems from the rise in the humanistic philosophies of Renaissance Europe. Many of the Renaissance thinkers rejected what they considered to be reductionist teachings of the church leaders of their time. Consequently, they exchanged these teachings for philosophies which they felt were more in keeping with their lived experiences. The concept of truth continued to be the

object of inquiry, but not a truth based on faith. Instead, the truth that was hoped for was a truth based on knowledge and objective interpretation of lived experiences. However, the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, among others, did much to change the direction of modern quests for qualifying truth. Nietzsche's writings infer that along with a loss of traditional values there is also a loss of objective truth. This loss of objective truth, for Nietzsche, represents the need to abandon attempts to hold on to these traditional values and instead, embrace a radical subjectivism which brings forth total freedom. Nietzschean thought on radical subjectivism has found its way into popular culture. Consequently, many now believe that the meaning of even well-published historical events or moments in time can only be understood in a subjective manner, by questioning everything, even the very occurrence. Without the necessary epistemology of truth, agreed upon accounts of phenomena, and occurrences cannot be had. This presents a challenge for reaching agreement on truth and synchronizing cultural memory in a democratic heterogeneous society.

The cultural memory surrounding the experience of being a descendant of the oppressed Africans who were enslaved in the U.S. is filled with a sense of indescribable pain and horror. Even in the twenty-first century, there is still much discussion on whether the history is too extreme to be included in the instruction of elementary-aged children; thus, we have the watered down versions of slavery taught in the nation's schools. However, because there is such an emotional connection to this experience, many descendants of oppressors belittle the occurrence of the events as understood in the cultural memory of African Americans, and they also discount the degree to which those events are still seen as destructive to the development of African Americans today. While it

may be true that some contemporary struggles of the African American pale in comparison to the horrific atrocities of slavery and the dehumanizing practices of the Jim Crow era (with such comparisons possibly even nullifying the real violence and pain associated with these historical experiences), there can be no denial that these experiences of the experiences of slavery and Jim Crow continue to feed the truth understood by the oppressed African American collective. And although it is well documented that deadly violent oppression did occur on a large scale over a long period of time in the U.S., the oppressors' denials of its continual influences indicates that their interpretation of what is true (or what they choose to believe as true), varies greatly from the truth of the oppressed. However, because the oppressors are the ruling elites in American society, when these ruling oppressors and their descendants determine a truth, attempts at reconciliation based on actual truths or the truths of the traditionally oppressed can often have little or no effect on outcomes.

Apology

      In addition to the exposure of truth, another means of supporting reconciliation is to have the perpetrator of offenses apologize. Apologies can go a long way in demonstrating sincere repentance; consequently, they can buoy reconciliation efforts. This is because an apology, by its very nature, cannot be passive. Even if the word apology is written in a particular sentence, and the syntax suggested the usage of the word apology was to be understood in a non-action oriented context, the cultural semantics attached to the term imply some action in the fulfillment of its meaning. In other words, apologies by default necessitate a verbal or physical action, which can be detected by someone other than the

apologizer. Apologies always have a doer and a receiver of the action. So then an apology is something offered by an offender in acknowledgement of an offensive act. To this end, apologies must follow the offensive act; they cannot precede the act, as there can be no acknowledgment of a non-occurring offensive action, only the acknowledgement of the possibility of an offensive action.

An apology is made necessary, not by the occurrence of the offense, but by the desire of the offender to demonstrate moral behavior. As stated earlier, part of a community's moral behavior must include the maintenance of the community. So then, an apology must occur in reparation of harm caused by an offensive act, which has the possibility of breaking communal bonds. Therefore, the timing of the apology is dictated by the emphasis community leaders place upon maintenance of community. Where maintenance is considered to be of great importance, the apology will occur more immediately, especially if the maintenance of community is not considered to be an extension of force.

A major concern surrounding apologies is how to discern the truth or sincerity of the apology. Given the ability of humans to disguise their motives, accurate discernment of the genuineness of an apology is ideal, but can be difficult. The application of Aristotle's dictum, *we are what we do most*, could support more precise determinations of the authenticity of apologies. In this case for example, the sincerity of an apology could be judged to be true or false through observance of successive actions and events initiated by the party issuing the expression. In other words, the treatment of the injured party by the offender after the apology has been rendered is the best determination of the sincerity of

the apology. If the offender continues to commit other offensive acts which are also in need of apology, then it can be presumed that the initial apology lacked sincerity.

Within the moral framework that has been outlined earlier, an argument will now be made that portrays the refusal of a true apology as an immoral act, based on the assumption that a true apology can be known. From the previous description of the reconciliatory event, in terms of maintenance of the community, consent must be given for the creation of the community and consent must be constantly given to maintain the community. This requires performative acts by all parties involved. The consent must be continuous, meaning that the communal bond is tenuous. Therefore, in order to maintain these bonds, there must be reciprocity when dealing with reconciliatory events. In other words, communal values, which are here being equated with communal morals and are also dependent upon the maintenance of communal bonds, demand the acceptance of apologies received. This is because, in the same way that the lack of an apology can cause fragmentation, so can the lack of acceptance of an apology cause fragmentation.

Forgiveness

The acceptance of an apology and the granting of forgiveness for the harm, in the communal sense, necessarily mean that all bonds are repaired. Therefore, if all bonds are repaired, then relations between all participants must resume unhindered by the former fragmentation. Thus, the act of forgiveness, (just as that of apology), should be put to the test of time and the tracking of behavior to discern the sincerity or truthfulness of the act. If the actions over time consistently demonstrate absolution, then the forgiveness can be said to be true, but if not, then the forgiveness is false. Forgiveness is essentially performing the communal tasks as if there were never a breach of community. In other words, the

members of the injured group surrender their consent, which in turn recreates the communal bonds. The injured group may be scarred from past events and the scars may remind the injured group of those events; however, the presence of the scars should not provoke members of the injured group to engage in behaviors demonstrating the imputation of blame.

There is, however, always the danger in large communities of the possibility that some injuries are more difficult to forgive than others; indeed, some wounds take longer to heal. Sometimes cultural and/or religious barriers make forgiveness of some harms nearly impossible. The inherent problem with this situation is that all people are subjects and not objects, so the occurrence of slow healing, and in some cases, non-healing wounds, cannot be easily predicted. In spite of this difficulty, the importance of apology and forgiveness in healing injury and moving communities toward reconciliation cannot be overstated. If these types of wounds are allowed to persist, there is the possibility that they can have a devastating effect on the community as a whole. To avoid the devastation, the perpetrator of harm must be willing to extend apology to the point of discomfort in order that the community might be saved, with the realization that the possibility of devastation to the community negatively affects all involved. Similarly, they should acknowledge the degree to which reconciliation positively affects all involved.

Reconciliation

As stated previously, American Democracy, because of its heterogeneity, requires the consent of the people; it also requires the implied agreement or social contract between citizen communities to maintain social cohesion. This social cohesion lies at the very heart

of the founding principles of the American nationalist movement. However, because of the

conflicting treatment of some communities, (especially with respect to these founding

principles), by oppressive forces of the majority community, America has been less than

effective in creating and maintaining social cohesion. Consequently, a contradiction stems

from a reluctance by these oppressive forces and others to make much needed actions

towards reconciliation. A similar reluctance has been exhibited by communities in other

parts of the world that have been either violent, oppressive or both to minority groups.

Ervin Staub, a specialist in the psychology of reconciliation, writes, "To protect themselves

from the emotional consequences of their actions, perpetrators often continue to blame

victims and hold on to the ideology that in part motivated, and to them justified, their

violence"[9] In order to gain a greater cognitive understanding of the ideas that have created

this frame of reference, certain questions must be advanced. What is the nature of

reconciliation? Is reconciliation possible? What conditions must be met to bring about true

reconciliation? Is reconciliation necessary? What creates the need for reconciliation i.e.

Violence?

According to Ervin Staub, reconciliation is defined as "mutual acceptance by

members of formerly hostile groups of each other. Such acceptance includes positive

attitudes, but also positive actions that express them, as circumstances allow and

require."[10] Staub clearly believes that reconciliation is necessary for the peaceful cohesion

of a nation. Cohesive community relations are a necessary factor to which all governments

must concern themselves, regardless of the moral stance of a nation's leaders. Community

---

[9] Ervin Staub et al., "Healing, Reconciliation, Forgiving and the Prevention of Violence after Genocide or Mass Killing: An Intervention and Its Experimental Evaluation in Rwanda," Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology 24, no. 3 (2005): 1-3, doi:10.1521/jscp.24.3.297.65617.
[10] ibid

relations must be encouraged in order to build and maintain unification. There are many possibilities by which a nation can create this unification and many of the possibilities have been used throughout the ages, but violence ranks among the top.

In essay number ten of The Federalist Papers, written by James Madison, he details some of the earliest American political thoughts concerning factions. Therein, Madison leans heavily upon Thomas Hobbes' theory that all individuals and groups of individuals or communities have developed appetites and aversions.[11] These appetites create certain desires that can be referred to as *the good*. Factions develop from the competition of individual appetites or quests for the good. Madison puts forth the idea that government (which Hobbes calls the *sovereign*) is needed to control disputes between factions. It is in this observation that Madison winces, understanding as he describes, "There are again two methods of removing the causes of faction: the one, by destroying the liberty which is essential to its existence; the other, by giving to every citizen the same opinions, the same passions, and the same interests."[12] It is implied, though not overtly stated, that there will always be factions whose appetites cannot be allowed to be satisfied. Their appetites for goodness are appropriated secondarily to those of the majority and the authority (or government/sovereignty). However, even in the recognition of these possibilities, nations that decidedly make the choice to be the best nation possible must consider the best possible options for maintaining a unified national status.

Reconciliation cannot, by definition, involve only one party; it is dependent on a mutual agreement to take joint action to resolve the conflict and unite to support mutual

---

[11] Kenneth Murray. Knuttila and Wendee Kubik, *State Theories: Classical, Global, and Feminist Perspectives* (Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood, 2000), 35.

[12] Madison, James. 2004. Edited by Benjamin Wright. "*The Size and Variety of the Union as a Check on Factions*," The Federalist Papers. New York, NY: Barnes and Noble.

peace. If we can accept that reconciliation is action-dependent and involves at least two parties, then each party is assumed and expected to be actively participating in the advancement of the reconciliatory proposition. If one of the two parties is working against advancement, then he cannot truly be said to be involved in reconciliation. The active participation by all parties must also be personal; it cannot be done vicariously.

The actions taken must be taken at the same time. In order for the actions performed by participating parties to be considered mutual, and since these action cannot be passive but must be active, then all participating parties must be active at the same time. This is so that it cannot be said that one party is either being passive or inactive. If one party is not actively participating at the same time, there is no true reconciliatory event because at the first moment of their inactivity, they are not working towards mutual acceptance. There is significance in the coincidental actions of each participating party, because non-participation has the ability to negatively effect the perception of the reconciliatory event. This consequence has the potential to cause less than mutual acceptance from all participants.

Reconciliation involves an internal desire to produce a positive, mutually accepted and intentional act. Mutual acceptance must be demonstrated; this demonstration among formally hostile communities usually implies equal political power and/or economic potential. Full acceptance must also have actual spatial and chronological reference taking place in the time and space in which the people live; it should not be reserved for the *ideal* world. Lastly, each group's ways of being must also be given due consideration. One culture cannot continuously be considered mainstream and all other cultures be classified as

tributaries. If this happens, it devalues all cultures not considered mainstream. To be accepted is to be fully accepted.

Among the many components that accompany a true reconciliation are apology and forgiveness. True apology and forgiveness represent the summative or consummate acts in a reconciliatory event. These acts are identified with the release of tension and hostility between all sides to be reconciled. Apology and forgiveness can be linked with the emotional element of a reconciliatory event, given that objective and detached logic cannot be the sole determining factors of whether or not they occur. These two elements arise from the internal desire spoken of above, the inner goal of reconciliation. The effect of a true apology is it demonstrates to the harmed community that regret is present and also that the actions that caused the need for reconciliation will come to an end and possibly never occur again. While forgiveness demonstrates the desire to "move on," not focusing on the possibility of getting revenge.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that each society has its own unique philosophies of morality and perceptions of moral authority. Additionally, it has noted that while the imposition of morality upon citizens is a near impossibility, a government can conduct itself in such a manner to support its own moral behaviors and thereby influence the moral conduct of its citizens. Where a government does not have a historical record of moral conduct in its domestic and foreign affairs, a great catalyst -- such as that manifested through the work of a Truth and Reconciliation Process can be utilized to shift the nation's comportment to be more consistent with a higher standard of morality.

In the U.S., the driving forces influencing the nature of America's ideal moral character are found in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution written in the early days of the formation of this nation. Indeed, these documents reflect the moral concepts and values deemed most important by the Founding Fathers in their establishment of what they perceived to be a uniquely American commitment to freedom, equality and justice for all. However, the commitment to these values was not initially actualized for all Americans, and in fact, their access was for the most part restricted to those of European descent. Consequently, the application of the nation's framework for morality (and ultimately, the good life) was not extended to all; and therein exists the paradox. Where the allocation of equal opportunity for all is absent, there is oppression, and where there is oppression there is no moral conduct.

As discussed above, the advancement of sincere and acted upon apology by the oppressor and the rendering of genuine forgiveness by the oppressed can support a community's reconciliation and cohesiveness. However, the qualifying elements -- sincerity, action, and genuineness, must be met. Unfortunately, the verbal overtures of the 2008 and 2009 Congressional apologies to African Americans were not sufficient reconciliatory events. The inclusion of the disclaimer in the Senate version of the apology and the failure of the U.S. government to act on the apologies suggests their designation of nothing more than mere words on paper. Additionally, nothing about the apologies suggests the inner desire for mutual acceptance by all parties, nor did they actively change the status of parties. Other concerns with the apologies are their failure to consider the importance of *agreed-upon truths* in their construction, and their lack of inclusion of a sufficient percentage of the African American communal group in their construction. In

other words, there was no community involvement in the construction of what might have constituted acceptable apologies or what might be done to advance reconciliation following their issuance. Ultimately, the apologies have produced no tangible results for any parties.

Demonstrations of national morality cannot escape the necessity of reconciliatory events that celebrate the humanity of all citizens. America has, for quite some time, postured itself as a moral agent to the rest of the world. The implementation of a Truth and Reconciliation Process that involves representatives of all parties – those traditionally oppressed and their oppressors, and includes all necessary components – truth, apology, mutual acceptance, action and forgiveness – based on the nation's commitment to the moral conduct and values prescribed in its founding documents is always a possibility. However, for the United States to become the moral nation it purports itself to the world to be, such a possibility must become a reality.

References

Aguirre, Adalberto, and David V. Baker. Structured Inequality in the United States: Critical Discussions on the Continuing Significance of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. 2000.

Cohen, Stanley. States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering. Malden, MA: Polity Press. 2001.

Dewey, John. Art as Experience. New York: Putnam. 1958.

_____. Freedom and Culture. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. 1989.

Graybill, Lyn S. Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Miracle or Model? Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers. 2002.

Grugel, Jean. Democratization. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE. 2013.

Gutmann, Amy, and Dennis Thompson. The Moral Foundations of Truth

Commissions. In Truth v. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions. edited by R. I. Rotberg and D. Thompson. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 2000.

Harris, Leonard. Philosophy Born of Struggle: Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy from 1917. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Pub. 1983.

Hayner, Priscilla B. Fifteen Truth Commissions - 1974-1994: A Comparative Study. Human Rights Quarterly 16 (4): 597-655.
Hobbes, Thomas. The Leviathan. 1994.

Locke, John. 2013. The Second Treatise on Government. Accessed 0ctober 12, 2013 htto://gutenberg.org/files/7370/7370-h/7370-h.htm

Madison, James. The Federalist papers 10.

Newton, Huey P. War against the Panthers: A Study of Repression in America. New York: Harlem River Press. 1996.

Pausewang, S. The Quest for Peace in Africa. Transformations, Democracy and Public Policy edited by Alfred G. Nhema. Development and Change, 38: 345–346. D doi: 10.1111/j.1467-7660.2007.00415_1.x. 2007.

Rotberg, Robert I., and Dennis F. Thompson. Truth v. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 2000.

Solomon, Robert C. From Hegel to Existentialism. New York: Oxford University Press. 1987.

Staub, Ervin, Laurie Anne Pearlman, Alexandra Gubin, and Athanase Hagengimana. "Healing, Reconciliation, Forgiving and the Prevention of Violence after Genocide or Mass Killing: An Intervention and Its Experimental Evaluation in Rwanda." Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology 24, no. 3 (2005): 297-334. D doi:10.1521/jscp.24.3.297.65617.

Tocqueville, Alexis de. Democracy in America. New York, NY: Barnes and Noble. 2005.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. 1918.