Epistemical and ethical troubles in achieving reconciliation, and then beyond

Rory J. Conces
University of Nebraska at Omaha, rconces@unomaha.edu

Recommended Citation

EPISTEMICAL AND ETHICAL TROUBLES IN ACHIEVING RECONCILIATION, AND THEN BEYOND

RORY J. CONCES

University of Nebraska at Omaha

ABSTRACT

My optimism towards reconciliation in places like Bosnia and Kosovo has become increasingly guarded because of certain epistemical and ethical issues. Reconciliation presumes the making of moral judgments about a wrongdoing, judgments that are empirically informed. If the perceptual judgments that are used to do the informing are made suspect because of a lapse in the commonplace self-restraints (or controls) on reasoning or glitches in the regulative ideals or epistemic goods like understanding and intelligibility, then the moral judgments on which they are grounded become suspect as well. This happens to both fanatic and non-fanatic. In this article I explore these issues by starting with spousal-like relationships that must sort out the demands for truth, moral decency, and harmony. Sometimes epistemical difficulties preclude a couple from forgiveness and, thus, reconciliation, in which case harmony may only be achieved through a moral forgetfulness of the wrongdoing. The broader contention is that epistemical difficulties surrounding stories of competing ethno-national communties are even more imposing, thus making reconciliation ever so difficult. Although moral forgetfulness is sometimes used in spousal-like relationships in order to maintain harmony, it is more difficult to adopt within post-conflict situations between ethno-national adversaries, thus leading some to accept a separate co-existence as the last resort on the road to peacebuilding.

Key words: commonplace self-restraints on reasoning, conscientiously held belief, epistemic goods, ethno-nationalism, fanatic, identity, moral forgetfulness, moral judgment, reconciliation, stories

1. Preliminary considerations

An important debate is being waged within transitional and post-conflict societies concerning the need for retribution or reconciliation. In the wake of various forms of aggression and serious human rights abuses, should the emphasis be on holding individuals accountable for their actions or on social harmony and tranquillity? Should the focus be on retributive justice and offender accountability or on restorative justice and the re-establishment of interpersonal relationships between victim and perpetrator (Little 1999; DeLaet 2006)? Although it is difficult to predict which path a society will follow, some will choose the path of reconciliation and restorative justice; when they do, they will be confronted with additional issues.

Some theorists think that the best, and perhaps the only way to achieve reconciliation in places like Bosnia and Kosovo is to attain restorative justice. Given the degree of victimization that has occurred, they recommend the application of the restorative justice model "in an effort to provide reparations, restore

community, resolve conflict, restore both perpetrators and victims into the moral and social realms.., and provide accountability for the actions of perpetrators" (Staub and Pearlman 2001, 210). In this view, then, restorative justice becomes more or less a part of reconciliation. Yet not all instances of reconciliation require such justice, in which case it seems only wise to separate the two and to view restorative justice as a tool to be used in the healing and reconciliation process when victims require reparations. It is reconciliation as detached from restorative justice, with a particular eye to how epistemical and ethical issues are related to reconciliation and beyond, that will be the focus of much of this work.

I assume that reconciliation is needed and achievable in places like Bosnia and Kosovo. What I do not take for granted—which is a presumption widely held by theorists and practitioners alike—is the ease with which reconciliation can be achieved in post-conflict environments. It is anything but easy as shown by those who study the shame/rage spiral that follows torture, rape, and assault (Cloke 2001, 91-92). However, my optimism towards reconciliation has become increasingly guarded not only by understanding the debilitating effects of shame and rage, but also by becoming aware of certain epistemical and ethical issues, issues that become more formidable once we move from ordinary situations involving a couple to those situations involving ethno-nationalism in post-conflict societies. But what is this illusive process called reconciliation that is supposedly so difficult to achieve and yet so needed for long lasting peace in places that suffer from the ravages of ethno-nationalism?

As one might suspect, conflict resolution that is defined as achieving a cessation of violence and an acceptance of co-existence is necessary but not sufficient for a stable and harmonious peace between former ethno-national adversaries. Needed for such harmony is reconciliation, the development of a mutual, conciliatory accommodation between formerly antagonistic groups (Kriesberg 2001, 48). At the heart of reconciliation is "*a psychological process, which consists of changes of the motivations, goals, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions of the majority of society members*" (Bar-Tal and Bennink 2004, 17).[1] Achieving reconciliation, however, requires the transaction of asking for and giving interpersonal forgiveness, which entails the recognition of a moral judgment followed by a letting go instead of seeking revenge (Auerbach 2004, 157).[2] And forgiveness as a process of letting go of the past and awakening of a more promising future has dramatically-felt consequences for those who forgive, for it is a way of releasing themselves from the pain, anger, shame, and guilt they have experienced at the hands of their tormentors. Accordingly, the central mission of those seeking to free themselves and others from the bitterness and the grievances of a protracted conflict

---

[1] See also Lederach 1997.

[2] Much of the research on forgiveness has focused on interpersonal forgiveness (see, for example, Enright, Freedman, and Rique 1998; Jankélévitch 2005). However, some researchers have concentrated on intragroup forgiveness, which is how they believe forgiveness should be thought of in situations involving ethno-national conflicts. See Griswold 2007; Hewstone et al. 2008.

is to set in motion this cognitive and emotional process through which conflicted relationships become more amicable.

In order to achieve reconciliation, people of different ethno-national identities living in post-conflict societies are often advised first to listen, understand, and tolerate stories that oppose theirs; and then finally to accept, at least in part, those stories as legitimate.[3] The underlying presumption is that stories, which run the gamut from accurate, real-life testimonies of conflict situations to life narratives that are metaphors of reality to folktales to parables, present us with opportunities for learning, growth, and change (Cloke and Goldsmith 2000; Senehi 2000; Botcharova 2001; Paterson 2008). While fictional tales may be taken as sources of assumptions and truths about us as well as those with whom we are in conflict, it is those stories presented in the form of testimonies that are most important in this regard, and thus are most helpful in bettering understanding.

So it appears that the regulative ideal at work in reconciliation is that of understanding, coherence, or intelligibility (Dwyer 1999, 85-86). Stories can be used to help people *understand* the past. They can also help people *deal* with the past insofar as testimonies are thought to be instrumental in building bridges between adversaries. Stories do this by identifying common ground and discovering how each perpetrated injuries on the other, particularly with atrocities and gross violations of human rights. By placing reconciliation on the "level of meaning-making," some theorists have abandoned forgiveness as a necessary component in the reconciliation process. Instead, the task of reconciliation is about "bringing apparently incompatible descriptions of events into narrative equilibrium" (Dwyer 1999, 89). In other words, the reconciliation process moves forward as the disputants develop a mutually tolerable set of interpretations of events that allows them to manage the tension between them.

I think this is right as far as it goes. What I want to add, however, is that the regulative ideals or epistemic goods go well beyond understanding and intelligibility to include trustworthiness, credibility, and knowledge (Zagzebski 2009, 9-16). There are also the intellectual virtues that are often cited, such as humility (vs. arrogance), empathy (vs. narrow-mindedness), integrity (vs. hypocrisy), perseverance (vs. laziness), and autonomy (vs. conformity). Last, but not least, is the moral obligation to care about true belief itself (Zagzebski 2009, 9-19). If we must care about having true beliefs in the domains in which we have a caring interest as well as those in which we *must* have a caring interest, and morality is a domain that we must care about, and reconciliation falls within the domain of morality, then morality demands of us that we conscientiously hold beliefs (i.e., beliefs that are guided by a concern for truth) about the workings of reconciliation. Although this conscientiousness in belief may well cover some of the

---

[3] It is worth noting that a similar regard for others' views is shown by some who argue for deliberative democracy, particularly those who highlight "internal deliberations," which lead to the internalization of others' perspectives. See, for example, Goodin 2003, 169-93.

other epistemic goods like understanding and intelligibility, caring about the truth appears to be a very important part of our lives, for the truth helps to adjudicate disputes. When people's beliefs conflict with one another, the adjudication process includes the weighing of evidence for those beliefs to determine which one(s) are true and which one(s) are false.

Earlier I mentioned that stories, especially in the form of testimonies, play an important part in understanding. One way they do this is by disclosing moral judgments pertaining to wrongdoing. That sort of disclosure is extremely important in any reconciliation process. However, stories also make truth claims about the objects of those judgments, without which the application of moral theories and concepts to human situations would be arbitrary.[4] It is the disclosure of truth claims that is crucial for the re-establishment of interpersonal relationships through the process of reconciliation.

It is the empirical informing of moral judgments, however, that makes reconciliation through the use of stories a messy business because even though people generally agree on the importance of truth, what is taken to be the truth regarding the past (and present) is often the subject of fierce debate. This is not something that only a fanatic, whose reasoning leads to conclusions that seem to many to be contrary to both common sense and the most rudimentary of ethical prohibitions, is prone to do, however. The same lack of commonplace self-restraints on reasoning (i.e., epistemic goods, intellectual virtues, and one's background beliefs and values) that leads the fanatic to be self-righteous, intolerant, overly certain, and zealous can also plague the non-fanatic who simply wants to "get it right." In short, it can happen to the best of us. Regardless of these obstacles, the effectiveness of storytelling may still depend on "people believ[ing] personal narratives in a way that they believe nothing else from an adversary" (Gopin 2000, 130). Assuming that all disputants are good epistemic agents, that is, persons who believe propositions because they have epistemic reasons (which increase the probability that one's beliefs are true), the opposing stories would have to satisfy the demand of empirical credibility. In a very real sense, then, meeting epistemic requirements is continuously demanded of us.

However, it is whether the stories of one ethno-national community offer propositions to another ethno-national community that are as worthy of its believing as those of its own stories, which casts doubt on the efficacy of using stories for reconciliation. It does not seem to be self-evident that claims about the nature of the crimes and identities of those responsible are likely to be endorsed by different ethno-national communities that have been engaged in a bitter and protracted conflict, which is in part about ethno-national identities. My skepticism arises in two ways. First, the commonplace self-restraints on reasoning are likely to be undermined by defensive maneuvers that protect one's ethnic identity. If "conflicting narratives serve as the cornerstones of the

---

[4] For discussions on the relationship between moral arguments and empirical claims, see Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 14-15; Louden 1992, 127-29.

respective collective identities and are, therefore, almost immune to change" (Auerbach 2004, 157), then it is not surprising that people indulge in maneuvers such as self-deception and reliance on sympathetic sources for their favored beliefs when their ethnic identity is perceived to be threatened (Adler 2007, 267). This is especially true in post-conflict situations. It may seem as though it is only ethno-nationalist fanatics lacking self-restraints, the absence of which prevents them from adequately testing the veracity of their claims, who believe they have "gotten it right." This is wrong, however.

The second source of skepticism arises from the fact that no matter how hard we want "the world to determine what we believe," thus providing us with some sort of bedrock objectivity, it must not be forgotten that our reliance on evidence to restrain new beliefs is set against our background beliefs and values that possess a dominant and foundational status for us. There is no guarantee that those beliefs and values are right, warranted, or justified, or that we will "get it right" when we filter the evidence through our background beliefs and values. Skepticism informs not only perceptual judgments but also normative judgments of all who are less than fanatical. Left with doubts at a most fundamental epistemic level, we ponder whether the truth claims of one ethno-national community could ever be taken as defensible by another such community. And if the truth claims are placed in doubt, then the moral judgments upon which they are empirically informed are also placed in doubt; thus making it ever more difficult to re-establish interpersonal relationships that are at the heart of a reconciliation process which strives to achieve harmony. It is these difficulties associated with truth, morality, and reconciliation that will be discussed in the course of this rather different sort of project.

I will approach these concerns in a circuitous way by examining how the twin demands for *truth* and *moral decency* within personal relationships (i.e., spousal-like relationships) are tempered by the further demand for harmony. Although it is reasonable to believe that forgiveness followed by reconciliation may be the only means to achieving the restoration of relationships and healing (Lederach 1997; Shonholtz 1998; Wilmer 1998; Botcharova 2001; Hicks 2001; Staub and Pearlman 2001; Volf 2001; Bar-Tal and Bennink 2004), and thus a harmonious state, given the difficulties inherent in defending the perceptual and normative claims upon which reconciliation ultimately rests, it is also reasonable to believe that bringing about a harmonious state by anything short of a "moral forgetfulness" of a wrongdoing may be extremely difficult at times. The broader contention is that the epistemical concerns surrounding stories of competing ethno-national communities within post-conflict settings are even more imposing, thus making forgiveness and reconciliation both more difficult and more necessary for there to be harmony between former adversaries. Yet the fact that epistemical concerns may make the acceptance of normative judgments and the ensuing reconciliation difficult does not mean that moral forgetfulness as a means to achieving social harmony is readily achievable. Indeed, the fact that atrocities and gross violations of human rights

were perpetrated may make forgetting that they ever took place unthinkable to many because of the strong sense of retributive justice felt by those who have suffered.

2. Epistemical and normative concerns within personal relationships—harmony?

I want to begin with some reasonable propositions. First, personal relationships, or to be more exact, spousal-like relationships, are much sought after by many people. People want enduring and intimate relationships. Second, once people find themselves in such a relationship, it is common for their relationship to be plagued by various disputes. Some arise due to relatively minor disagreements about physical surroundings, while others are caused by morally contentious situations that stress pit one member of the relationship against the other. In other words, some disputes are over how the world is, while others involve how the world should be. Theses references to the world can include the relationship in question described in terms of how it *does* exist versus how it *should* exist.

Although both kinds of dispute can be extremely emotional, sometimes leading to the use of disrespectful language and even acts of violence, it has long been held that people stay clear of emotionally charged language and other rhetorical devices that manipulate people into acknowledging the veracity of claims. Instead, arguments or some other rational method of defending or justifying statements is deemed to be the epistemically preferred means of adjudication. Rational methods are given preferential status because evidentiary concerns are crucial to determining a claim's truth. The use of evidence is thought to be part of the proof for the correctness of a person's description of the world. Consequently, each member of a spousal-like relationship may cite evidence for claims that assert, for example, that certain physical objects exist nearby or that the couple has a very loving, caring, and affectionate relationship; and these individuals do so in both cases by pointing to the objects themselves or to the practices that denote such a relationship.

The epistemic approach is one that is not exhibited to the same degree by every person in resolving a dispute over matters of fact. Some give up far sooner than they should. Let us examine two cases of perceptual claims, the first involving the perception of a mountain and the second involving the perception of flirtatious behavior.

Imagine a couple is walking through Baščaršija, the old town of Sarajevo. While looking at the various people passing by and the different structures that have been built over the centuries, the Bosnian woman turns to her American partner and says, "I see that that is Mt. Trebević rising behind the buildings on the other side of the Miljacka River." The American is new to the city, so he asks, "How do you know it's Trebević?" The woman turns and politely says to him, "I have lived here all my life, and I can *see*

that it is." If he wants to eat dinner at Princess Park restaurant, which is on the north slope of Trebević, and continues to have many doubts about what she claims to see, he might ask, "What makes you *think* that's Trebević that you see?" In this case, what is asked for is another statement in relation to which "That is Mt. Trebević" is more probable than not (Chisholm 1957, 54-58). The woman is asked to delve into her background beliefs to support her perceptual claim.

One possible response could be the following: "I can see that the mountain rises from the eastern portion of the city and that it has a large communication tower on its peak. There is no other mountain that looks like that anywhere near Sarajevo." So the original perceptual claim about Mt. Trebević is now justified by reference to a different perception, one that claims that the mountain is located in a certain part of the city and that it has a man-made structure on its peak, as well as by a statement of independent information (i.e., "no other mountain … looks like that anywhere near Sarajevo").

Of course, the man may continue to harbor grave doubts about whether she sees Mt. Trebević, at which point he may either challenge her statement of independent information ("Why do you say that there is no other mountain with that appearance in Sarajevo?") or question the new perceptual statement ("Why do you think that you see a communication tower on the peak?"). If he continues to challenge her perceptual statements, she will continue to provide more of them. In a defense of the claim to see a communication tower, she might say, "I see it's rectangular and that it's white." If questioned further, she could respond by saying that "it *looks* white from this spot in Baščaršija, and if anything that far away looks white, it is probably white." This is not a perceptual claim, but one that says something about what *appears*. In reality, however, it is likely that she will not tolerate this questioning for very long, at which point she may simply say "Take a look for yourself!" as she walks away.

Is this discussion about the veracity of perceptual claims of a mountain too much like doing analytic philosophy in a British sort of way? I do not think so—not in a discussion about the difficulties that disputes pose to people and the way people sometimes use a variety of strategies, like the use of stories, to resolve them. Understanding the difficulties that arise when stories are used in rebuilding relationships between peoples of different ethno-national communities is aided by inquiring into the difficulties that people face when even their most modest claims, especially those that are perceptual in nature, are challenged.

The case of seeing a physical object like a mountain is one thing. Not much typically rides on such disputes. But what happens when we are dealing with something more important, such as whether this couple has a loving and respectful relationship. That one partner is alleged to have flirted with someone else is important because spouse-like partners tend to define their relationship in ways that allow certain practices and disallow others (which typically includes flirting with someone other than one's partner), thereby placing specific demands on each other in terms of equality, deserts, and

rights. Indeed, it is quite common to hear one partner or the other at some point use statements like "I deserve to be treated with respect" and "I have the right to be treated is such and such a manner." If the case of the disputed mountain could lead to a spiralling defense, a situation involving the charge of misconduct could prove to be even more difficult to resolve because an important feature of the guilt or innocence of a person is whether that person intended to engage in that kind of behavior or whether it was an accident or even the result of an unfortunate set of circumstances beyond her control.

Let us suppose that the same couple is on their way from Split to Rijeka by train. After a long day of carrying heavy bags, the couple hurries to the closest passenger car and is the first to take up seats in a compartment meant for four. Before the train leaves the station just before midnight, two women join them in the compartment. Pleasantries are exchanged, but eventually the lights are turned off so that they can all sleep. All four eventually doze off, though the woman wakes up and stares at her partner. She sees that the woman closest to her partner has edged closer to him with her back such that their backsides are both touching. This continues for much of the night. Upon the train's arrival in Rijeka, the couple goes to a hotel, at which point the woman confronts him with the allegation of flirtatious behaviour.

How might this be played out? She might say, "I saw you rubbing up against that woman on the train, and you must have enjoyed it." He looks confused upon hearing this and begins to ponder that there are two issues, one dealing with the physical touching per se, and the other having to do with enjoyment and intentionality. Addressing the physical issue first, he might say, "What makes you think that I made contact with her in that manner?" She might say, "I am a woman, and I know what I saw, and I saw your bodies touching in that way. I was up most of the night watching you." If he continues to have doubts about what she claims to have seen, he might ask, "What makes you think I was intentionally rubbing against that woman instead of experiencing incidental contact?" Her response might be the following: "Your rear end was moving with hers and no other part of your two bodies was touching. If it was incidental contact, you would have jerked away. But you didn't." So what was first justified by reference to perception ("I saw you rubbing up against that woman on the train") is now justified by reference to a different perception, albeit recollected (seeing a certain part of two bodies moving together), as well as a statement of independent information (i.e., "if it was incidental contact, you would have jerked away. But you didn't.").

Let us suppose that he tires of doubting her perceptual claims but challenges her statement of independent information. He might ask, "Why do you say if it was incidental contact I would have jerked away?" She might respond, "You would have jerked away because you would have felt uncomfortable. But you didn't move, so you enjoyed it, and that was very disrespectful towards me." This leads into the second issue of enjoyment and intentionality, as well as the related normative issues of respect and trust, which are ultimately the issues that burden relationships.

It now becomes clear that the woman is relying on certain key background beliefs concerning actions. One of those is the belief that if the flee response is not exhibited by her partner when he touches another, then the touching that is exhibited is intentional. Another belief is that if there is continued touching, thus suggesting that the touching is intentional, then there is some degree of enjoyment being experienced by both individuals. However, whether the touching is intentional is predicated on the man's being aware of what was going on. The fact that the touching continued is not sufficient evidence that he was aware of the situation as his partner saw it. Indeed, it is quite reasonable to think that the man was sleeping, in which case it is difficult to understand how his actions were intentional and, thus, blameworthy.

The moral judgment-making above is clearly more questionable than it would have been had the man been awake and acting with the intention of affecting people around him in specific ways, but whose actions had unintended consequences that could be construed as flirtatious. Blame could be assessed against him if it were reasonable to assume that he should have taken those consequences into account. But in the case at hand, the man is not aware of what is going on because he is sleeping. To make a moral judgment against him if he is aware of his actions is quite different from making such a judgment against him if he is not awake, at least to the extent that he would need to be in order to be held accountable for his actions.

This leads to the issue of how this relationship can once again be harmonious. It might be thought that reconciliation will be the appropriate way to achieve the restoration of the relationship, and thus harmony. However, the obstacle that the woman faces in undergoing a change in her beliefs, attitudes, and emotions towards the man is that forgiveness is required, an act that involves "giving up the rage, the desire for vengeance, and a grudge toward those who have inflicted grievous harm" on her (Deutsch 2008, 478). And for there to be forgiveness, the man must recognize the moral judgment concerning the wrongdoing and responsibility that his partner has made against him (Little 1999, 71-72; Saunders 1999, 44-46).[5] It is only when this happens that it is even possible for her to let go of his supposed indiscretion and the emotions that are

---

[5]   It might be said that forgiveness does not require an acknowledgment of wrongdoing on the part of the wrongdoer. To be sure, we may forgive someone who is dead or absent, in which case there is no such acknowledgment and forgiveness becomes more or less "self-help therapy" for the injured party. In a deeper sense, however, forgiveness not only has the "effect of preventing the wrong from continuing to damage one's self-esteem and one's psyche" (North 1998, 18), but "forgiveness is a gift to others" (Enright, Freedman, and Rique 1998, 48). And as a gift, forgiveness "is supposed to make a difference *to the wrongdoer* as well as to ourselves, and it makes a difference in how we interact with the wrongdoer and with others" (North 1998, 19). If the gift of forgiveness is not accepted by the wrongdoer, an acceptance which would be predicated on the recognition that she has done something wrong in the first place, then the wrongdoer will not be impacted in a way that will allow her to enter into harmonious relations with the injured party. Given the relatedness that this work has with atrocities committed in the Balkans, it should also be noted that forgiveness in any sort of deep sense might not be a *real* possibility, for the wrongdoer might be a sadist. Furthermore, forgiveness might become a "*conceptual* impossibility" insofar as the sadist, seen as unredeemable, might be regarded "as so monstrous that we dismiss him from the moral universe which we inhabit" (North 1998, 28). I suggest, however, that such exile is only related to ruling out forgiveness, for it seems to be quite appropriate to make moral judgments about people like Karadžić and Mladić.

associated with it. However, the man has scrutinized the perceptual claims and the statements of independent information offered by the woman to the point that these claims and statements have lost their efficacy. If he is an epistemic agent who will acknowledge the woman's moral judgment of him only if he has epistemic reasons, and if those reasons are not forthcoming, then he will not be forgiven. Reconciliation will not be achieved. In a sense, her story has not been accepted by him. Strange as it may seem, *restoration of harmony* may be still achieved but only if the parties engage in moral forgetfulness, meaning that the incident is forgotten *at that moment* and both continue in their relationship as though the incident never took place. This event is forgotten for now insofar as each of them adopts exclusionary reasons for ignoring the event, though it cannot be discounted that moral forgetfulness may eventually lead to literal forgetfulness.

Let me stress that my point is that social harmony rather than forgiveness and reconciliation is predicated on moral forgetfulness. The caring interest that each partner has in re-establishing harmony in their relationship makes up the exclusionary reason that comprises their forgetfulness of the troublesome incident. There is a connection between forgetfulness and forgiveness/reconciliation but only insofar as the former is a result of the failure of the latter. But if that is the extent of this relationship, then the standard view of forgiveness which says that "forgiving is not the same as *forgetting*" (Enright, Freedman, and Rique 1998, 48); that "in forgiving, people are not being asked to forget" (Tutu 1999, 271) is not compromised.[6] The question now becomes, can moral forgetfulness be deemed morally acceptable?

For present purposes, two points in this perspective are crucial. First, being morally forgetful is not a situation that is relevant to a general philosophical reflection about the nature and justification of moral principles à la Kant. The experience of forgetfulness does not arise on the more abstract level of rational discourse within which the moral grounds of personal responsibility are examined and decided upon. Instead, it occurs in situations in which persons face an immediate need to decide what to do about an actual moral problem. In the case under investigation, the consequence may be the couple's remaining together or choosing to end the relationship. The situation, at least to one of the parties, is that important. Thus, the decision to remain with the other would count as an exclusionary reason to put aside the harmful affair at least for now in order to edge closer to a more harmonious relationship. Second, moral forgetfulness will not/cannot be an option for the restoration of harmony when the couple is either unwilling or unable to examine the incident and to address it in at least a cursory evidentiary way. For example, the woman has not been portrayed as the deferential partner who feels the need to accept *absolutely* and *indefinitely* the suppos-

---

[6] Aurel Kolnai (1973-74, 94) makes a distinction between forgiveness and various forms of "not taking offence," such as indifference and non-imputation. Whereas forgiveness "digs deep into its object before it sets aside indignation and cancels the retributive attitude,"indifference, for example, simply "looks away from" the wrong. In the case of moral forgetfulness, however, the "looking away from" is only temporary.

edly humiliating incident in order to keep her man; the man has not been described as someone who "pockets" his partner's love for him, and who takes that as giving him license to do what he pleases no matter how disrespectful and inconsiderate he is towards her. *Forgetfulness has become an option in this case because forgiveness has in fact become epistemically problematic.* The perceptual claims and the statements of independent information that empirically inform the moral judgment against the man come with difficulties that are uncovered by an epistemic agent, e.g., the man himself. Consequently, if there are evidentiary concerns that prevent the man from accepting the moral judgment made against him, then forgiveness and reconciliation will not be a possible means to achieving harmony. Those same difficulties do not accompany the act of moral forgetfulness, though they must be faced in order to reach the act of forgiveness.

The simple act of forgetfulness is often taken to be a morally unacceptable response to serious transgressions within a spousal-like relationship for three reasons. First, it is thought that the individual who forgets an incident becomes less than an autonomous agent. But it is not in the classic sense of autonomy introduced by Kant that the person is said to be less autonomous. Kant took autonomy to be the foundation of human dignity and the origin of morality because autonomy is a property of the wills of adult human beings who show themselves to be moral legislators by prescribing *general moral principles*. (Kant 1785, 1948). Here, however, to be autonomous includes the situation in which a person A allows herself to adopt a second order reason q as an exclusionary reason to refrain from acting on reason p concerning situation Z until she has had sufficient time to assess the seriousness of Z, as well as her future. Since forgetfulness requires the adoption of an exclusionary reason, doing so would mean that the woman does in fact treat herself in a fundamentally respectful manner. But in what sense is the woman in question different from the Deferential Wife, one who exhibits the attitude of servility, thereby undermining her autonomy (Hill, Jr. 1973, 5-6)? Perhaps what sets the morally forgetful woman apart from the Deferential Wife is that even though the latter has an exclusionary reason (i.e., to stay with her man), she does not intend to assess this matter at a later date. In a sense, she gives up for good, but giving up is not something that an autonomous person can do.

The other two reasons can be grouped together. First, because to simply forget about a harmful and/or humiliating action is not to do what one can to make sure that that sort of action does not happen again. Perhaps it seems to condone what has been done. Second, there is a healing aspect to forgiveness that is not present in forgetfulness: "[Forgiveness] erases the humiliation that was suffered, replacing it with pride and positive self-esteem" (Cloke 2001, 88). The same cannot be same of moral forgetfulness, which is in no way as satisfying as forgiveness. These reasons, however, fail to recognize the importance of moral forgetfulness when epistemical concerns cannot be met. Indeed, moral forgetfulness may not be an objectionable alternative in terms of addressing the incident and promoting healing. Although forgetting about the incident

is not the same as dealing with it at the moment, temporary forgetfulness will place the incident on hold until a time when the parties are better able to deal with the situation and its underlying issues. A period of relative calm can lead to clearer thinking and a new perspective of what happened in the past, a way of looking at things that cannot be attained at the time of the incident because of the emotional overlays of anger and resentment. Dwelling upon (or in) the incident can sometimes be the least efficacious way of resolving issues and promoting healing.

By postponing further discussion of the incident, however, the man must acknowledge that there is a perception on the part of the woman that his actions were questionable and that he should consider that future situations of this nature could lead to similar breakdowns in the relationship. Forgetfulness should not be taken as license to continue this "supposed" behavior, but rather as a time of reflection. The healing aspect of moral forgetfulness can also be an expression of love that signals the ability to weather this crisis, a crisis that is grounded in epistemical difficulties and not matters of the heart. This takes a magnanimous gesture on the woman's part that is rooted in love and that must eventually be responded to in kind.

The difficulties that couples have in maintaining harmony when faced with epistemical difficulties whether related to perceptual claims regarding mountains or flirting are no doubt common. These difficulties hamper forgiveness and, thus reconciliation, leaving both parties to consider the even more difficult moral decision to forget a hurtful incident just as people who use ethno-national stories may never be able to reconcile with their adversaries but may resort to forgetfulness in order to re-establish social harmony.

3. Identities and ethno-national stories

This discussion may suggest that epistemical difficulties leading to interpersonal disputes are simply due to a peculiar merging of the self-restraints on reasoning, including background beliefs and values, that each person brings to the dispute. On the one hand, it may be not so much a denial of these commonplace self-restraints as it is a result of less rigorous restraints being employed; and sometimes not so much a Cartesian doubt coming to life as it is a persistent use of these restraints in the search for truth and understanding. On the other hand, it may be less a matter of knowing a great deal after rigorous inquiry as it is a result of selective understanding through sources "sympathetic" to favored beliefs; and sometimes not so much a matter of being in possession of a diversity of experiences and beliefs as it is a matter of having fewer experiences but with well-established beliefs based on those experiences. All this may be indicative of the disputes between the man and woman previously discussed.

Unfortunately, these epistemical difficulties are even more pervasive when it comes to persons "endorsing" as their dominant identity the membership in some group, par-

ticularly a group defined in terms of ethno-nationalism. The importance of being a member of a larger group cannot be underestimated and becomes particularly clear when ethno-national labels are at work in peoples' speaking and writing that reflect a "politics of difference." Moreover, group identities are defined in relation to members of other groups (Erkisen 2002, 10), so Bosniaks, Bosnian Croats, and Bosnian Serbs are defined counterposed with one another. Inasmuch as "a defining element of each group's identity is its relationship to the land and its history," this relationship can be exclusivist, with one group's claims legitimate while the others are illegitimate (Kelman 2004, 63). This can make conflict resolution exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, particularly when the group feels threatened as has been the case in the Balkans (Conces 2005).

Each individual does not have a simple identity but rather possesses a multitude of identities, each of which may be invoked privately and/or publicly as dominant in any given situation: no identity can be taken as the definitive one. Take, for instance, an ethnic Serb woman in her 30s who is studying in the Law Faculty at the University of Banja Luka. She may privilege one or more aspects of her identity (ethnicity, gender, and occupation) over others depending on the situation she faces. She can present herself as a "Serb" in one context, a "woman" in another, and a "law student" in a third. In each, she emphasizes or makes visible different aspects of her identity and thus names herself differently. Indeed, she may find it advantageous to privilege a combination of these such that she presents herself as a "Serb woman" or a "female Serb law student," some of the plurality of selves that she can manifest.[7]

However, once this woman reduces her plurality of selves so that her endorsed ethno-national identity becomes the dominant feature of her personal identity, she can best be described as a "Serb nationalist." As a nationalist, she exaggerates the value of her ethno-national belonging so that ethnicity becomes a principal thread of her identity (Miscevic 1992, 254). To identify with Serbhood means not only that she ascribes Serbhood to herself, i.e., believes that she is a member of that nation called Serbia, but that this endorsement is taken to be an effective force in her character. Indeed, the causal efficacy of the endorsed feature that she has identified with helps to explain why she does the sorts of things that she does (Miscevic 1992, 245). In addition to the cognitive component of this identification, there is a conative component. When ethno-nationality is seen as a positive force in one's life, a person develops deep emotional ties with the nationality and cares about its preservation. This caring for one's nationality comes into evidence when a person's nationality comes under attack from members of anoth-

---

[7] It is worth noting that people might engage in genuine self-deception when their ethnic identity is perceived to be threatened. Although a person deceiving herself about being a "Serb woman" is perhaps unrealistic unless certain pathologies were at work, a Bosnian Serb could deceive herself into believing that she is someone who holds no animosity towards Bosniaks. This could be explained, for example, by her failing to recognize her true motives for standing by as Muslims in her village were systematically harmed. For a discussion of the difference between self-deception and hypocrisy, see McKinnon 1999, 190-200.

er ethno-national community, and that attack is taken to be personal, because of the strength of this identification. In a multiethnic society such as Bosnia, these nationalist leanings may act as an impediment to the creation of a stable democracy.[8]

The ideology of ethno-nationalism arises when there is a collective shift of identity (Conces 2002, 285-86). Croatian, Serbian, and Bosniak nationalism are all obstructionist to the creation of genuine democracy and an open society. This occurs through the generation of xenophobia and ethnic chauvinism, which threatens a country's stability by "transforming those who are of the 'wrong' identity into second-class citizens, contrary to the notion of rights and liberties understood within a democratic framework" (Conces 2002, 286). Cultural markers are deployed to differentiate the dominant group from the other groups, which are taken to be culturally inferior. Certain differences become more pronounced, leading to marginalization, ostracism, and cultural absolutism (Conces 2002, 288).

When we say that a person is an ethno-nationalist, however, we are not simply saying that she has such a strong bond with a particular ethno-nationalism that she will tend to act and feel in certain ways; we are also saying that she will tend to think in certain ways. How will thinking occur for the ideologue of ethno-nationalism? Is the ideologue also a fanatic? Although being a fanatic takes on many connotations, it is reasonable to think that the fanatic stands at one end of a continuum of how strictly one holds to commonplace self-restraints on belief construction and maintenance. At one end is the ideologue of ethno-nationalism qua fanatic; at the other end is the critical thinker extraordinaire. As previously mentioned, the salient traits of the fanatic include being self-righteous, intolerant, overly certain, and zealous. The precursors of the ethno-national fanatic are set as she grows up in an environment that emphasizes ethno-nationalism as a dominating identifier. Although those who are ethno-nationalists may never become fanatics who are so convinced that their cause is a just one that they will pursue actions that are thought of as both unreasonable and immoral by many outsiders, they may engage in fanatical reasoning if they perceive that their favored beliefs and way of life are threatened. And this may well lead them on the road to terrorism.

---

[8] It should be pointed out that because one's group identity is defined in relation to other groups of the same category (e.g., a person's Bosniak identity in relation to Serb and Croat identities) and given the xenophobia and ethnic chauvinism that has been manifested inward against ethnic groups within a country like Bosnia, it would be worthwhile to find ways to shift the dominant identity from ethno-nationality to citizenship (shown by a change of labels from Serb Bosnian to Bosnian Serb, for example). This would have the benefit of having a dominant identity that cuts across ethno-national lines, thereby redirecting the xenophobia and chauvinism outwardly to other groups, such as citizens of other countries. However, the damaging effects of xenophobia and chauvinism would be better contained within the numerous interactions between democratic countries, interactions in areas that include the political, diplomatic, economic, and sports. Of course, someone might object and look to humanity as the ideal dominant trait. However, humanity does not carry the same cohesiveness as citizenship for the simple fact that group identities are juxtaposed to one another, and currently there is no group of the same or higher category to call the "other." This would be satisfied by first contact with an intelligent alien race from another planet.

An outside calamity, such as a group of political leaders attempting to use their militaries to carve up a neighbouring country in the hope of creating a greater this or a greater that, as was partly the case in the Balkans, could lead to a such a threatening situation for the inhabitants of the doomed country. In such a case, the threat extends to their beliefs, way of life, and narratives; in effect, it becomes an "existential threat" that challenges their identity as a people. It is a threat in which one's very existence is ultimately connected to the negation of the other (Kelman 2007). It is no surprise, then, that such threatening situations produce the kind of fear, rage, and anxiety that they do leading to the worst atrocities imaginable directed toward the threatening other. And it is no surprise that the commonplace self-restraints on reasoning become short circuited the way they do, thus contributing to the unspeakable.

The moral philosopher R.M. Hare contributed significantly to our understanding of the fanatic in two ways. First, Hare distinguishes the impure from the pure or true fanatic. In general, he counterposes the fanatic with the utilitarian, thus defining the fanatic as one who possesses moral opinions that are divergent from those of the utilitarian. What distinguishes the more numerous impure fanatic from its pure cousin is that the former's moral opinions stray from the utilitarian's because the fanatic is "unable or unwilling to engage in ... critical thinking," which is understood as a "refusal or inability to face facts or to think clearly, or for other reasons" (Hare 1981, 170). Clearly, this sort of fanatic is what I had in mind above. However, Hare seems to complicate matters by shuffling the aforementioned continuum by situating the pure fanatic in close proximity to the critical thinker extraordinaire. This he does by defining the pure fanatic as "someone who ... [is] able and willing to think critically, but somehow survived the ordeal still holding moral opinions different from those of the utilitarian" (Hare 1981, 171). This reshuffling is spurious, however. For if Hare's reference to the "critical thinking" of the pure fanatic is understood as a claim that such a fanatic has the capacity for argumentation, but lacks the commonplace self-restraints on reasoning, then the pure fanatic can be returned alongside her impure cousin just opposite the restrained critical thinker extraordinaire. Having said this, it seems only correct for Hare to view the pure fanatic with some trepidation. Hare is worried, for he writes:

> If there are people so wedded to some fanatical ideal that they are able to imagine, in their full vividness, the sufferings of the persecuted, and who can still prescribe universally that this persecution should go on in the service of their ideals, even if it were they themselves who had to suffer thus, then they will remain unshaken by any argument that I have been able to discover. (Hare 1963, 184)

Hare's second contribution comes in the form of countering that despair with hope. He makes it clear that all is not lost, and that the key to dealing with fanatics is to "separate from the true fanatics, whose ideals really are proof against the ordeal by imagination and the facts, those who support them merely because they are thoughtless and insen-

sitive [i.e., impure fanatics]" (Hare 1963, 184). So in his view, if the impure fanatics can be dealt with through the use of "powerful arguments," and pure fanatics only get their power over others (the impure fanatics) as a result of "confused thinking," i.e., "by concealing facts and spreading falsehoods; by arousing passions which will cloud the sympathetic imagination—in short by all the familiar methods of propaganda," then the fanatics will succumb to a divide and conqueror strategy (Hare 1963, 185). Hare thinks, then, that moral philosophy's ability to immunize the masses against the power of propaganda will also lead to them being immunized against the fanatic.

 It would be wonderful if the world were entirely composed of good epistemic agents, i.e., persons who take epistemic reasons seriously; then all those commonplace self-restraints that are nullified in fanatical reasoning would remain in place to guarantee that self-deception and other distortions of belief would not take hold in the first place. Unfortunately, ethno-nationalism does take hold the minds of individuals to the point when self-restraints are made ineffective. Yet, having said this, not all succumb to eth-no-nationalism or other ideologies in ways that drastically jeopardize self-restraints. Often enough, the presence of fanatical reasoning is found by many to be repulsive. As Jonathan Adler notes in his insightful article "Faith and Fanaticism,"

> The beliefs and values...that back your revolt at the fanatic's conclusion ...rest on a huge bedrock of learning, critical evaluation, and mutual support. No argument to a conclusion that would nullify these beliefs and values could be endorsed, except under the most far-out circumstances. Even if you went along with the initial part of the fanatic's argument, you would not allow your own reasoning to overrule this wealth of knowledge. Your modesty extends to not demanding that you first understand exactly where the fanatic's argument goes wrong, as a condition on its rejection. Your deference to this wealth of knowledge is not even a choice. The conclusion simply *cannot* be believed. Effectively, your well-founded beliefs and values are not merely reasons to object to the fanatic's argument, but controls or restraints on your own reasoning. (Adler 2007, 269-70)

Still, there is something unsettling about how this "revolt" takes place, for even those who are appalled by the fanatic and her reasoning develop their bedrock of learning, critical evaluation, and mutual support that generate their well-founded beliefs and values through cultural lenses of various sorts and some of those lenses have to do with nationalism of different types. Perhaps the questions that should concern us are three-fold: (a) What is the connection between those commonplace restraints and personal identity? (b) Under what conditions does a person's plurality of selves become reduced so that a particular identity, such as ethno-nationalism, becomes the dominant feature of her identity? and (c) What is the precise mechanism by which ethno-nationalism as a dominant identity reduces the commonplace self-restraints on reasoning? Once these are understood, a world with less fanaticism may become a reality. In the meantime,

persons whose plurality of selves has been reduced along ethno-nationalist lines will relax those self-restraints or selectively employ them for their own perceived good.

This can be seen in the use of different kinds of stories in defense of how members of a person's own ethnic group behave towards members of other groups. In *Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War*, Peter Maass introduces Vera and Stana Milanović, a Serb mother and daughter who were forced out of their homes by fighting in central Bosnia in 1992. The dialogue between Maass and Vera is as follows:

> I asked, out of politeness, whether the fighting in the village was heavy.
> "Why, no, there was no fighting between Muslims and Serbs in the village," she said.
> "Then why were the Muslims arrested?"
> "Because they were planning to take over the village. They had already drawn up lists. The names of the Serb women had been split into harems for the Muslim men."
> "Harems?"
> "Yes, harems. Their Bible says men can have harems, and that's what they were planning to do once they had killed our men. Thank God they were arrested first." She wiped her brow.
> "How do you know they were planning to kill the Serb men and create harems for themselves?"
> "It was on the radio. Our military had uncovered their plans. It was announced on the radio."
> "How do you know the radio was telling the truth?" I asked.
> Stana and Vera stared at me as though I wore no clothes. God, these Americans are dumber than cows. Vera's kindness evaporated as she flashed the kind of scowl that, I imagine, was deployed against grandchildren who wore farm boots indoors.
> "Why," she demanded to know, "would the radio lie?"
> "Did any of the Muslims in your village harm you?" I asked, softly.
> "No."
> "Did any Muslim *ever* do anything bad to you?"
> "No."
> She seemed offended.
> "My relations with Muslims in the village were always very good. They were very nice people." (Maass 1997, 113-14)

Although Vera seems to be far from being a fanatic, her responses to Maass' questions are indicative of fanatical reasoning prompted by the circumstance of war. First, the arrest of the Muslims (Bosniaks) in her village was not justified on the grounds that they were fighting. Rather, they were arrested on the grounds of a perceived conspiracy to

murder Serb men and then to create harems. Apparently the motive for these murders was to continue the custom of polygamy as referred to in the Qur'an. Although the Qur'an does permit this practice, we must ask why Vera thought such a practice would begin when it had never been practiced by Muslims in Bosnia. The fact that polygamy was not a practice of Bosniaks was bracketed. Why would it start now? The answer is made clear: It was announced on the radio that the military had uncovered the plot. Vera does not believe the conspiracy simply because she wants to. She believes it because the announcement of it comes from what she takes to be credible sources, the radio station and the military. As she says, "Why would the radio lie?" No doubt she believes that the radio announcers and the military have nothing to gain from lying to the community. If anything, the radio station and the military high command are those institutions to be depended upon during times of crisis. Vera's favored beliefs and way of life were threatened by the war, and the media and the military made her aware that the threat was not a distant one, but one in her own small village in central Bosnia. This was the occasion that permitted her to indulge in self-deception.

Second, the veracity of the claims made by the authorities within the Serb controlled part of Bosnia is a part of the context of her lived history with the Bosniaks of her village. Not only did Bosniaks not practice polygamy, but her relations with Bosniaks in her village were "always very good" and they were "very nice people." Apparently, those facts carried much less weight than the claims made by the authorities. In her mind, even very nice people could commit murder. But in this case the acts of murder that were said to be planned were connected to a (a) particular ethnic group— Bosniaks; (b) marriage practice referred to in the Qur'an, the Holy text of Bosniaks; and (c) marriage custom that was never practiced by Bosniaks. Vera never questioned whether the authorities might have an agenda of their own against the Bosniaks. And so Vera watched as her neighbors, those same "very nice people," were rounded up and taken away. The epistemic landscape was primed for her easy assent to the arrest order delivered by the Serb authorities, an order that her moral conscience let stand without examination.

4. Concluding remarks

Some theorists make it clear that there are such deep dissimilarities between the interpersonal conflict and the ethno-national conflict that it is unwise to use insights from one to help understand the other. This point deserves some comment because it suggests that what I have done in this article is to have oversimplified the ethno-national by overextending the interpersonal. First, practically speaking, there are deep dissimilarities between the two kinds of conflict as can be inferred from the work of theorists and practitioners who subscribe to the diplomatic track of resolving the ethno-national variety. It is one thing to face a stubborn partner who persists in challenging your

perceptual claims about seeing a particular mountain or who requires of you a defense against the claim that you were being flirtatious towards another woman and quite another to deal with ethno-national communities at war. Although the former disputes may be significant to you personally, neither one of these is likely to have anything to do with life or death situations nor with the internal and external factors that cause countries to go to war and to bring an end to a war. This may suggest to some that interpersonal and ethno-national conflicts have very different mechanisms for their cause, as well as for their resolution.

My response to this criticism is that to dwell on the dissimilarities is to "depersonalize" ethno-national conflicts, to treat them as if there were no human participants, participants who must deal with a wide range of epistemical and ethical concerns at the most fundamental level of perception and judgment. And in doing so, it unknowingly invests in the diplomatic approach without taking seriously the interpersonal level, which is important for any approach to reconciliation and peacebuilding.

What makes the approach of this work so unique is that it recognizes that the world is not populated by Rawlsian "persons" created behind a veil of ignorance that denies them knowledge of their natural assets and social identities, as well as the myriad of ways that these can conflict. Instead, it portrays persons as they are in everyday life; as rational and emotive beings who are quite capable of sliding along the continuum of commonplace self-restraints that keep reasoning on an even keel. Becoming fanatics and/or engaging in fanatical reasoning are real possibilities for all of us. It also casually leads the reader from reflecting on important epistemical and ethical concerns that underlie the more inane situations that we find ourselves in to recognizing that those same concerns persist unknowingly in the lives of those immersed in ethno-national conflict.

The scenarios of the conversant couple were "designed" conversations, but designed with the purpose of showing that partners can engage in a serious epistemical free-for-all and still come up short with no clear ending or agreed-upon conclusion whose truth value is recognized by both (Walzer 2007, 22-25). It made no difference whether the object of the conversation was a dispute about perceiving a mountain in Sarajevo or flirtatious behaviour on board a train bound for Rijeka. The war time scenario involving the mother and the famed war correspondent was not constructed but part of an interview, yet the hope of each participant seemed to be to persuade the other that he or she had overlooked the obvious. To be sure, Vera was in a life or death situation that put her self-restraints to the ultimate test and that would likely delay any reconciliation until after the war. Yet the epistemical problems and the subsequent concerns with moral judgments that seem to underlie Vera's responses would no doubt plague those ethno-nationalists left to deal with one another long after the war ended.

Some would have us believe that the reconciliation desired in a post-conflict society is socio-emotional reconciliation meant to produce a "psychological revolution" in the personal psyche stemming from truth telling and the granting of forgiveness by the

victim (Nadler 2000, 132-36). This is true, but it cannot be overstated that the veracity of the truth claims upon which moral judgments are founded may come under such intense scrutiny that the act of forgiveness is jeopardized, thereby placing reconciliation in doubt. In the case of Vera and her compatriots, these concerns are at work whether or not they realize it:

> Truth-telling is likely to turn into a reciprocal cycle of accusations, reinforce stereotypes and deepen mistrust, rather than result in forgiveness. In this case, reconciliation is predicated not on discovering a single and ultimate truth, but on the realization that each of the parties has its own truth. Accepting the other's legitimate victimhood and admitting one's own wrong-doing is particularly difficult in this case where truth is multi-faceted and where angelic or satanic deeds are not neatly placed on either side of the fence. To accept the other's pains, and one's responsibility for causing them, requires empathy and trust that simply does not exist between the two former enemies who are preoccupied with their own pains and victimization as they close the door on the conflictual past. (Nadler 2000, 135-36)

Allowing these epistemical concerns to go unattended makes it possible for people like Vera to adopt questionable, if not unwarranted, empirical claims and moral judgments of others. Until Vera is reasonably able to question the credibility of the media and the military, she will make little progress elsewhere. Not having learned the lesson of why it is important and dutiful to conscientiously hold beliefs, Vera is bound to the sort of fanatical reasoning exhibited by ethno-nationalists. Furthermore, without the willingness or ability to examine events, moral forgetfulness as a means to restore social harmony is not possible, especially if what must be forgotten, even if for only a short while, are the atrocities that were perpetrated by each party (or, in Vera's case, the atrocities that were allegedly intended to be perpetrated).

Perhaps the only means to achieving harmony at this point is what some would call "instrumental reconciliation," suited to achieving the "goal of separate co-existence" (Nadler 2000, 132). This is essentially long-term peacebuilding in the form of "countless projects [such as projects dealing with access to fresh water and sanitation] in which the former adversaries learn to cooperate with each other as equals" (Nadler 2000, 136). Over time trust is built up between the parties to the point that they can begin to "address the thorny issues that socio-emotional reconciliation deals with: victimhood, blame, forgiveness and divergent versions of history. To arrive at this stage the two parties must first learn to coexist and respect the integrity of the other" (Nadler 2000, 136). Although this is neither reconciliation nor social harmony brought about by moral forgetfulness, it is nevertheless peacebuilding.

It might also be argued that becoming a morally conscientious agent, as someone who *absolutely* cares about true belief and the other epistemic goods, including common-

place self-restraints, is simply an unattainable ideal. This is correct; we are not moral saints and cannot attain sainthood. Yet it is essential that we have a clear vision of mankind before our mind's eye in order to keep our house in order. The 19[th-] century English mathematician and philosopher W.K. Clifford made clear what that vision should be:

> [I]f I let myself believe anything on insufficient evidence, there may be no great harm done by the mere belief; it may be true after all, or I may never have occasion to exhibit it in outward acts. But I cannot help doing this great wrong toward Man, that I make myself credulous. The danger to society is not merely that it should believe wrong things, though that is great enough; but that it should become credulous, and lose the habit of testing things and inquiring into them; for then it must sink back into savagery. (Clifford 1879)

Although some might take Clifford's evidentialist principle of only believing what we can prove to be too stringent, its principal lesson is to caution us against believing without evidence of some kind. Given the seriousness of this lesson, I think it is important to place Clifford's main concern on its head by being more worried about the wrongs done to individual men, women, and children by the thousands if not millions due to those whose epistemic self-restraints and moral conscientiousness have been compromised than to humanity. The real savagery lies with the tearing apart of living and breathing human beings, and this is something that we must guard against at the epistemical level before it hinders our capacity to make humane normative judgments and prefaces our long journey towards forgiveness and reconciliation, or moral forgetfulness and social harmony.

Acknowledgements

REFERENCES

Adler, J.E. 2007. Faith and fanaticism. In *Philosophers without God*, ed. L.M. Antony, 266-85. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Auerbach, Y. 2004. The role of forgiveness in reconciliation. In *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, ed. Y. Bar-Siman-Tov, 149-75. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bar-Tal, D. and Bennink, G.H. 2004. The nature of reconciliation as an outcome and as a process. In *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, ed. Y. Bar-Siman-Tov, 11-38. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Botcharova, O. 2001. Implementation of track two diplomacy. In *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation*, ed. R.G. Helmick and R.L. Petersen, 269-94. Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.

Chisholm, R.M. 1957. *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Clifford, W.K. 1879. *Lecture and Essays*. London: Macmillan & Co.

Cloke, K. 2001. *Mediating Dangerously: The Frontiers of Conflict Resolution*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Cloke, K. and Goldsmith, J. 2000. *Resolving Personal and Organizational Conflict: Stories of Transformation and Forgiveness*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Conces, R.J. 2002. Unified Pluralism: Fostering Reconciliation and the Demise of Ethnic Nationalism. *Studies in East European Thought* 54 : 285-302.

Conces, R.J. 2005. A Sisyphean Tale: The Pathology of Ethnic Nationalism and the Pedagogy of Forging Humane Democracies in the Balkans. *Studies in East European Thought* 57: 139-84.

DeLaet, D.L. 2006. *The Global Struggle for Human Rights*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Deutsch, M. 2008. Reconciliation after destructive intergroup conflict. In *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Reconciliation*, ed. A. Nadler, T.E. Malloy, and J.D. Fisher, 471-85. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dwyer, S. 1999. Reconciliation for Realists. *Ethics and International Affairs* 13: 81-98.

Enright, R.D., Freedman, S., and Rique, J. 1998. The psychology of interpersonal forgiveness. In *Exploring Forgiveness*, ed. R.D. Enright and J. North, 46-62. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Eriksen, T.H. 2002. *Ethnicity and Nationalism*. 2d ed. Sterling, VA: Pluto Press.

Goodin, R.E. 2003. *Reflective Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gopin, M. 2000. *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence, and Peacemaking*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Griswold, C.L. 2007. *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exloration*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Gutmann, A. and Thompson, D. 1996. *Democracy and Disagreement*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Hare, R.M. 1963. *Freedom and Reason*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hare, R.M. 1981. *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Method, and Point*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hewstone, M., Kenworthy, J.B., Cairns, E., Tausch, N., Hughes, J., Tam, T., Voci, A., von Hecker, U., and Pinder, C. 2008. Stepping stones to reconciliation in Northern Ireland: intergroup contact, forgiveness, and trust. In *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Reconciliation*, ed. A. Nadler, T.E. Malloy, and J.D. Fisher, 199-226. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hicks, D. 2001. The role of identity reconstruction in promoting reconciliation. In *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation*, ed. R.G. Helmick and R.L.Petersen, 129-49. Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.

Hill, Jr., T.E. 1991. Servility and self-respect. In *Autonomy and Self-Respect*, ed. T.E. Hill, Jr., 4-24. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jankélévitch, V. 2005. *Forgiveness*. Trans. A. Kelley. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Kant, I. 1785, 1948. *The Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*. Trans. H.J. Paton. London: Hutchinson University Library.

Kelman, H.C. 2004. National identity and the role of the 'other' in existential conflicts: the Israeli-Palestinian case. In *Islam, Judaism, and the Political Role of Religions in the Middle East*, ed. J. Bunzl, 61-74. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Kelman, H.C. 2007. Social psychological dimensions of international conflict. In *Peacemaking in International Conflict*, ed. W.I. Zartman, 61-107. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press.

Kolnai, A. 1973-74. Forgiveness. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 74: 91-106.

Kriesberg, L. 2001. Changing forms of coexistence. In *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*, ed. M. Abu-Nimer, 47-64. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Lederach, J.P. 1997. *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press.

Little, D. 1999. A Different Kind of Justice: Dealing with Human Rights Violations in Transitional Societies. *Ethics and International Affairs* 13: 65-80.

Louden, R.B. 1992. *Morality and Moral Theory: A Reappraisal and Reaffirmation*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Martin, M.W. 1995. *Everyday Morality: An Introduction to Applied Ethics*. 2d ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Maass, P. 1997. *Love They Neighbour: A Story of War*. New York: Vintage Books.

McKinnon, C. 1999. *Character, Virtue Theories, and the Vices*. Peterborough, Canada: Broadview Press.

Miscevic, N. 1992. Is national identity essential for personal identity? In *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*, ed. N. Miscevic, 239-57. Chicago, IL: Open Court.

Nadler, A. 2000. From Tel Aviv to Ulcinj: can we learn from each other about reconciliation and peace-building? In *Truths, Responsibilities, Reconciliations: The Example of Serbia*, ed. D. Ilić and V. Matić, 125-47. Belgrade: Samizdat Free B92.

North, J. 1998. The 'ideal' of forgiveness: a philosopher's exploration. In *Exploring Forgiveness*, ed. R.D. Enright and J. North, 15-34. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Paterson, D. 2008. Three stories from the trenches. *TDR: The Drama Review* 52: 110-117.

Saunders, H.H. 1999. *A Public Peace Process: Sustained Dialogue to Transform Racial and Ethnic Conflicts*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Senehi, J. 2000. Constructive storytelling in intercommunal conflicts: building community, building peace. In *Reconcilable Differences: Turning Points in Ethnopolitical,* ed. S. Byrne and C.L. Irvin, 96-114. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press.

Shonholtz, R. 1998. Conflict resolution moves east: how the emerging democracies of Central and Eastern Europe are facing interethnic conflict. In *The Handbook of Interethnic Coexistence*, ed. E. Weiner, 359-68. New York: Continuum.

Staub, E. and Pearlman, L.A. 2001. Healing, reconciliation, and forgiving after genocide and other collective violence. In *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation*, ed. R.G. Helmick and R.L. Petersen, 195-217. Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.

Tutu, D.M. 1999. *No Future Without Forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday.

Volf, M. 2001. Forgiveness, reconciliation, & justice. In *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation*, ed. R.G. Helmick and R.L. Petersen, 27-49. Philadephia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.

Walzer, M. 2007. *Thinking Politically: Essays in Political Theory*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Wilmer, F. 1998. The Social Construction of Conflict Reconciliation in the Former Yugoslavia. *Social Justice: A Journal of Crime, Conflict and World Order* 25 (4): 90-113.

Zagzebski, L. 2009. *On Epistemology*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Department of Philosophy and Religion
University of Nebraska at Omaha
Omaha, NE 68182-0265
USA
rconces@mail.unomaha.edu