

“We were wrong”
Acknowledging “moral catastrophe”
within a truth commission

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'What did we do wrong?'



Who is morally responsible?

- 1. Level of connection between agent and act
- 2. Gravity of outcome
- 3. Intention
- 4. Knowledge

The Moral Impact of Violent Conflict

- The “erosion of moral identity” (Glover, 2001)
- Routinisation and dehumanisation (Kelman, 1973)
- “Moral repair” – Walker (2006)

Deontological Position

- Immanuel Kant, John Rawls
- *Deon* – duty. A duty to one another, an obligation.
- “A means of working out what ought to exist” (Pettit, 1980).

A truth commission as a vehicle for moral rebalance

- Reinstating the victim/survivor as someone worthy of moral recognition
- Telling one's story – “an essential component of justice” (Phelps, 2003).
- “Moral debt” and making “moral amends” – Govier and Verwoerd (2002).

Truth Commissions...

- Creating an 'ethical space' where the victim becomes "someone to whom an explanation is owed" (Christodoulidis, 2000)
- A 'new moral foundation' – Dimitrijevic
- Narrowing "the range of permissible lies" (Ignatieff, 2002)

Acknowledgement – what does it look like?

- Narrative, disavowal, and commitment (MacLachlan, 2010).
- Shared recognition of wrongdoing, recognition of responsibility, commitment not to repeat the act (Gill, 2000)

Acknowledgement

- Identify the moral principles underlying the harm done (who was hurt and how)
- Endorse the moral principles underlying each harm
- Recognise the victim as a moral interlocutor

(Smith, 2008)

Collective Acknowledgement

- Cohesion within the acknowledging group
- What is said is important – justification cannot be part of it
- Naming the victims/the wronged and what was done to them – not forgetting the individual responsibility involved.

David Cameron's Bloody Sunday Apology – a moral acknowledgment?

Yes

- Clear statement that wrongs were committed**
- The victims friends and family recognised as moral interlocutors**
- Cohesive response from British govt.**
- Clear recognition of the individual responsibility at play.**

David Cameron's Bloody Sunday Apology – a moral acknowledgement?

No

- Framed in a narrative of praise for the perpetrator group
- Veiled attempt to justify the violence
- (No naming of individual crimes and why this was wrong)