

The Coat of Many Colours

I

From the bible, we read that Joseph, who was seventeen years old:

“...was shepherding the flock with his brothers, with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah his father’s wives. Joseph informed their father of the evil spoken about them.

Israel loved Joseph more than all his other sons, for he was the son of his old age, and he had a coat with long sleeves made for him. But his brothers, seeing how his father loved him more than all his other sons, came to hate him so much that they could not say a civil word to him.

His brothers went to pasture their father’s flock at Shechem. Then Israel said to Joseph, ‘Are not your brothers with the flock at Shechem? Come, I am going to send you to them.’ ‘I am ready’ he replied. He said to him, ‘Go and see how your brothers and the flock are doing, and bring me word’...A man found him wandering in the countryside and the man asked him, ‘What are you looking for?’ ‘I am looking for my brothers.’”¹

The rest of the story is well known. Joseph’s brothers conspire to kill him, only to have Ruben intercede, saying that Joseph should be spared, but put into a well. It is done. Spying a group of Ishmaelites laden with goods, the brothers think to themselves: “Why kill him, he is, after all, our brother. Instead, let us sell him into slavery and gain profit from the bargain”. While the discussions goes on, another group of traders, the Midianites, spy Joseph, draw him up from the well, and sell him to the Ishmaelites. Horrified to find Joseph gone from the well, the brothers fear their father’s wrath and to deceive him, drench Joseph’s coat of many colours in the blood of a goat and bring it to their father, asking him to identify whether the coat is Joseph’s or not. The father identifies it as that of Joseph, lamenting that wild beasts must have devoured him. He puts on sack cloth and goes into mourning over the loss of his son.

Israel, the father of Joseph, will live a long time without knowing that his son is alive, a slave to Potiphar, a stranger in a strange land. Joseph, interpreter of dreams, master of prophesy, will find himself thrown in prison, because of his refusal of the overtures of Potiphar’s wife, who then accuses him of untoward advances. In prison, he interprets the dreams of the Pharaoh’s baker and butler, which then come true as Joseph tells. Called on to interpret the Pharaoh’s dreams, Joseph states that they are about seven good years, followed by seven lean years, and tells the Pharaoh to make provisions for the lean years to come by stocking up his granaries, so that his people will have bread and so that Egypt may make profit from those who have not secured their stocks for the times ahead.

Seven good years followed by seven lean years come as Joseph foretold, and among those who come to Egypt in search of grain are his brothers, sent by their father. Withholding recognition until the last moment, Joseph finally shows himself to his brothers, who are shocked and expect immediate retribution. Instead, Joseph embraces them, saying that they are still his blood and his loves. Inviting the whole family to leave its lands and come to Egypt, where they may live prosperously on the rich land of Goshen, his act of forgiveness has lead to the reuniting of himself with his family.

We shall leave Joseph with his family, a happy group, without following the story further into the book of Exodus, which goes on to tell of the enslavement of the Jews and their return to the promised land through the guidance of Moses. We shall leave that part of the story to the great land of cinema, whose retelling of it in cinemascope was where I first felt it to be larger than life.

In the elegantly corrupt Edward G. Robinson, one had the perfect Hollywood taskmaster—a man who would rather beg than beat and looked on his violent role with a certain comic discomfort. While in the coarsely muscled, profusely sweating Charlton Heston one had the Hollywood image of a youth destined to fulfill divine commandment. Later Heston will become equally potent as a Charioteer, Christian convert, Reaganite and activist for the American gun lobby, so that each and every American would be able to blow the Red Sea apart with their individually owned firepower to the tune of “Let My People Go”. Such music, originally sung by black people in the United States during their not-very-salad days of slavery and then after, when during the days of Jim Crow they had to suffer the indignities of standing at the back of buses, drinking from second class water fountains and worse, much worse, this music, sung today as the project of emancipation continues (or fails to do), tells us that the bible is still with us, emblazoned on the map of reality, even if in the case Hollywoodland, the songs which were spun from it had acquired the amplifications of a hundred and one strings, a gospel choir of thousands and a rainbow of cinematic colour into which they blended.

Joseph forgives; Moses returns; South Africa becomes a rainbow nation, a Coat of Many Colours. Moses returns with a people who are now a *people*, no longer a mere family defined by lines of shared belief and shared blood, by a history of quarrels and inseminations. This family returns as a *people* because, formed by shared oppression, solidified by forty years in the desert, ready to learn freedom, slowly, lead by a Mosaic figure, severely and from the mountain top: they are now a people with a Torah—the Five Books of Moses, the holy tablets—a people with a document, a revelation, a prescription, an historical archive before which no idols may stand. They are formed by betrayal and slavery, but also forgiveness and law. Later, in the book of Samuel, they will demand a king, to their own initial satisfaction and later, disastrous dissatisfaction, since the kings after Solomon will go, with certain exceptions, from bad to worse, from incompetent to corrupt. That history of venality is later; this is now. And this people will be wracked by quarrels, beset by enemies, and even though taught of the indignity of their ways by the prophets, and capable of great courage and decency, they will, with the destruction of their temple, two times, the first as tragedy and second certainly not as farce, be dispersed into the Diaspora, from which they will never recover, even when the state of Israel, father of Joseph, is established in 1947, ironically in the same year that the National Party was elected through a gerrymandering of the electoral process, and the rule of apartheid commenced its long trek through the desert, reaching past the borders of Angola, Mozambique and Namibia in a series of Wars not unrelated to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, reaching into the townships and Bantustans which apartheid had also created, and into the houses of those who dwelled within—again not unrelated to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Reaching as far as the cities of the north with its letter bombs.

My wife’s family had come to South Africa, from the Eastern European and Germanic Diaspora to the South African one in the 1840s, and my wife, having left South Africa for many years and lived abroad had wished to return when South Africa received its tablets, its constitution, when South Africa began to learn the art of freedom, slowly and by leaps and bounds, slowly and with fits and starts, inaugurations and endings. As so many others had wished to return from London, East Germany, America and other parts of Africa to live again in the new land. In my wife’s case, the point of embarkation was sunny Los Angeles, where we had lived for a number of years, and where, with South African-turned-American inventiveness the good South African madams of Beverly Hills had founded their own chapter of the African National Congress, the ANC, a chapter probably unknown to its executive, a kind of do-it-yourself type thing.

These are the days of miracle and wonder, Paul Simon sings with his South African backup group. They are now the days of forgiveness and reconciliation: although the mode of reconciliation is that of the finding and refinding of so many blood stained garments bespeaking evidence of death, betrayal, duplicity, denial of responsibility: a rainbow nation with every colour

soaked in blood. Perhaps later a King will be wanted, or will decide that he must be wanted, and he will be followed by another, as things go towards hell in the proverbial handbasket. One hopes not, and now is certainly not the time for prophesy, which is in South Africa mostly the expression of anxiety.

The bible is a story: The greatest story on earth and the biggest seller of all time. In every hotel room, except maybe the ones in Peking and Monte Carlo, it can be found. A telling of what was (supposedly or in fact); it is also (supposedly or in fact) a gift from God. Literal and allegorical, simple and opaque, “just the facts” (as they say on the television program *Dragnet*). A moral guide, it narrates a people and provides law, so that by this providence they might become and remain a people by reciting its script and fulfilling its commandments. From generation to generation many have done this: many peoples, not one, some of whom have wreaked a violence on the others worthy of inclusion in the bible itself. Even—especially—in South Africa, where the history of religion and the history of blood are in many respects the same. From the pulpits of the Afrikaans Preachers who charged their people, “the Afrikaans Volk”, or so they said and believed, to honour the day of the Vow, December the 16th, Dingaans’ Day, on which the Volk took a sacred vow to beat the Zulu, to the hands of Father Michael Lapsley, blown off, along with one of his eyes, by a letter bomb sent by the Security Police, a “postcard” which reached its destination. The blood of religion has reached the lion and the lamb, who now sit down, each with the other, and sometimes forgive. Father Lapsley asked for the names of those who perpetrated the act against him, because without their names, he would not know who to “endeavor to forgive”.² Earlier, almost a century earlier, in 1913, the Anglican Ministry in South Africa sat easy while the Land Act, instituted in that year, deprived black Africans of 90% of their land, thus sending them onto the roads and into the mines, a peoples dispossessed. On the other side, Father Huddleston, who worked in Sophiatown, outside of Johannesburg, in the 1950s, until being deported by the Apartheid regime, is remembered today for his many acts of generosity, as are many others. Dr. Andries Treurnicht is also remembered, by the man who held before me the Chair in philosophy at the University of Natal, Professor Koos Stofberg, whom he was instrumental in barring from teaching in Afrikaans Universities, on account of the fact that Stofberg, when a young student in Holland in the 1970s, wrote him a letter which burned his temples—but did not blow off his hands—because it contained a detailed and unassailable argument against biblical justification for the apartheid regime—upon which the National Party had relied for its mythologies of self.

Religion is, in South Africa, soaked in blood. Because of this, it is perhaps uniquely suited (if suited at all) to allegorize the moment of breakaway from the past, to turn memory into prophesy through the events of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to archive the past in the form of a moral code for the future. It is not for nothing that Bishop Desmond Tutu has served as the moral beacon and acting chairperson of this august assembly, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for his impeccable anti-apartheid credentials, his international reputation, his position as moral father, his position in a patriarchal society as a man of the cloth who resides close to God, a man of impeccable integrity, a man who also comes from humble origins and is black. Religion, once poison, is now cure. Perhaps signal among the vocabularies of the present in its capability of freeing the South African past from religion, of turning religion into moral infrastructure, of commuting the appeal of Christ into a capacity for forgiveness in civil and political society is religion itself. As happened in the history of the Enlightenment in Europe (and as the pages of history show, also did not happen). This cure of religion by religion can also produce a failure of cure, a re-opiation of the people, a mode of avoiding the hard facts of poverty, illiteracy, disease, unemployment, lack of housing, what Thabo Mbeki calls the problem of “two nations”, in the name of a good biblical story about Truth and Reconciliation, a story seductive in its moral impressiveness. That the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a national drug is a thought held by certain people—some of whom have impossibly huge

expectations about history—which shall haunt the biblical when it reappears on the scene of history.

There are certain moments in history which appear to call forth biblical allegory because those who inhabit such moments are trained in the ways of the bible and are liable to its recitations, and because their time is one in which fact and story, archive and revelation, memory and moral code, reality and allegory, past and present conspire into blending as a people gestates into a *people*. Or so we are told, so the story goes, so the events of the nation, some of them but not others, bespeak and intend. To what effect is unknown. At such moments, foundational in their biblicality, the lines between historiography and homily, archive and revelation, recitation and invention, converge in a fit of border crossing and voices take on an aura beyond their words. So it is with Bishop Tutu; so it is with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, one of the greatest shows on earth during the 1990s. What is the power of the biblical today, at a moment of what is called nation-building and what is called reconciliation? What is the power of truth when harnessed to religion and when not harnessed? When, given the way in which moral infrastructure developed out of religion in the history of Europe--a history which recurs in the language of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, hybridized as it is to the philosophy of Ubuntu--is truth *not* harnessed to religion? Needless to say, an analysis of power would be at stake in these questions, as well as of certain relations between science, liberalism and the Enlightenment, and given the fragmentary and complex systems through which power circulates in these interrelated forms, this would be an enormous, perhaps impossible, task. And yet it would be a task that would have everything to do with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which has been the greatest show on earth because it has been the only show around in which the secular moral codes of conduct which are its historical offspring appear within the larger biblical framework of homily, allegory, nationalism, and the history of religion without being fundamentalist in character but instead the opposite. A rare historical experience is required today for this to happen, and perhaps at any time for it to happen well (insofar as it happens well), a history which has everything to do with the project of reconciliation, an equally rare event today. The world watches because there are so few places today where a formative moment in the history of moral infrastructure is taking place in this seminal way: from the seminary to the Commission of inquiry.

The moral integrity of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, both in its conduct during the heady occasions of its interviewing, and in its findings published in the Report, is astonishing, to the point where it places the philosopher in a position of considerable trepidation. For philosophers are accustomed to writing about people who are smarter than them (e.g. Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche) as if they are full of holes (then what does that make the ones who write about them?), but unaccustomed to having anything to say about events which are morally superior to them. What words are adequate to such events? What words from the philosopher do events of such magnitude elicit, especially while they are happening, while their effects have just begun? The neo-natal position of which I wrote in the last essay both renders reality philosophical but also cause a huge problem for the philosophical voice, which does not quite know what to say—which does not know which of its words might be relevant and helpful in one way or another. Why not simply leave this monumental event as it is? What kinds of criticism are in order for it which do not seem, at the time—which is now—of writing, a mere academic diminishment, a mere allusion to theory for no particularly important reason, a mere desire to speak because one is at the scene at the time?

Now to ruminate on the relevance or irrelevance of philosophy to these weighty matters is not to come to the conclusion that philosophy is indeed irrelevant. It is to suggest that *not* to so ruminate, not to take such doubts seriously, is not to engage the event in a way crucial to what philosophy is about. If philosophy were proved irrelevant, that would in itself be a philosophical conclusion of interest. Anyway, even if philosophy were irrelevant, it probably would not prevent the likes of me from continuing to write. As the joke goes, attributed to Sidney Morgenbesser of

Columbia University: “Everyone knows that the first question of philosophy is, ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’ Heidegger even begins his Introduction to Metaphysics of 1936 (a text and a year not unrelated to the question of philosophy’s relation to truth commissions) by posing it. Morgenbesser’s answer is, “Even if there weren’t anything you bastards still wouldn’t be satisfied.” I am the kind of guy who stops only when he is dead, which has, to my knowledge, not yet happened.

Now the Report of the Commission already ruminates extensively on its own limitations—moral, conceptual, historical, national, epistemic. In so doing, one might think it has short circuited philosophical critique already. Whether this is the case or not depends on what one takes to be enough rumination. The Commission bends over backwards as well to respect the diversity of positions which have the history of South Africa. Of what failure of humanity can one accuse a report that goes so far as to state that some of the young soldiers in the South African Defense Forces who went into Angola, Namibia and Mozambique to kill comrades from the struggle did so on the basis of genuinely held beliefs—beliefs which, while racist, just perhaps were held “with integrity”. The Report states this while being unequivocal in its position that apartheid was a crime against humanity (as were, it might be added, the Jim Crow laws which the United States managed to shed only through the struggles of the 1950s and 1960s in the South). I shall suggest later on that in many ways, the Report needs to be philosophically defended before the right critical questions can be put to it. I will suggest this by taking issue with criticisms directed at the Report by certain South African academics. But there are deeper reasons to doubt that philosophy has anything to say about the goings on of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which have to do with the issue of keeping silent. It is a question of what words by the philosopher should follow testimonies like these, spoken about children of violence by their loved ones:

“That morning I did something I had never done before. My husband was still at his desk busy with the accounts of our business. I went up to him and stood behind his chair. I put my hands under his arms and tickled him...he looked surprised and unexpectedly happy. ‘And now?’ he asked.

‘I am going to make tea,’ I said.

While I poured water on the tea bags, I heard this devastating noise. Six men stormed into our study and blew his head off. My five-year-old daughter was present...That Christmas I found a letter on his desk: ‘Dear Father Christmas, please bring me a soft teddy bear with friendly eyes...My daddy is dead. If he was here I would not have bothered you.’ I put her in a boarding school. The morning we drove there we had a flat tyre. ‘You see,’ she said, ‘Daddy does not want me to go there...He wants me to stay with you...I have watched him die, I must be there when you die...’ She is now a teenager and has tried twice to commit suicide.”³

Or these:

“When I came home, I saw there were many white men, they kicked my door...and they went in. I am sure I nearly died that day. They missed when they shot—they missed me on my forehead. Another soldier approached—the soldier was sitting on top of the car and he was pointed at me. He started shooting at me while I as trying to open the door. Now these bullets looked like pellets and they were black. Then I went in next door and I tried to wonder how did my children survive.

.....My fifteen-year-old son Bonisile ran away with his sisters. When they arrived they found out that their father was already dead. They cried. Some of the men who survived that day came to my house, now these men picked up my husband. He was—he was put on top of his own son...This child, who was also full of blood, kept on asking---‘Daddy, can you see me, can you see me?’ Now I heard when the got there at Condradie Hospital,

when they were in this passage on their way to Condradie, he died...My son Bonisile, who was smeared with his father's blood on him, was never well again after that, he was psychologically disturbed." (Krog: 79-80)

Silence would seem to be the appropriate response for me, although not for the Commission, to whom they were originally spoken. The kind of words the Commission did use when speaking after such testimony we shall come to just now, the point here being that I am writing after the event, not speaking during it, and whatever words the Commission ought to have spoken at the time do not carry over into what I should be writing now. When the Commissioners spoke, their words were spoken in a particular place at a particular time, to a set of individuals who made us the commissioners, also to a room filled with translators, and journalists, of whom Anjie Krog, poet and journalist, who witnessed them and recorded them in her powerful book, Country of My Skull, from which I reproduce them. To these words, the commissioners, and especially their Chairperson, Bishop Tutu, might have responded with thanks, and with encouragement, about the capacity for these words, perhaps, to help in the process of healing for the people who spoke them, perhaps also about the general importance of the Truth Commission for healing in South Africa. At this time. Such responses were typical to the commission, which also, occasionally, would be asked, again by its chairperson, to stand in silence, or to engage in prayer. A Commissioner might also have asked for more information, or pursued a "subjective" angle ("How did you feel when...", "What do you think today about..."). To the first of these two pieces of testimony Krog chooses not to "speak" directly in her book, for it occurs in a string of testimonies of a similar kind which is then in the book followed by a space and a new paragraph, as if to suggest that the reader pause and let these words ring in his or her ears before reading the words she will then supply. Her words therefore become indirectly connected to what has been read. As if in acknowledgement of the gap, she provides a "moment of silence" for herself and her readers, and this gap allows the force of the testimony to remain in the ears. It is crucial to the reception of testimony of this kind that one finds a moment in which its force rings in one's ears without one's saying anything at all. This moment of silence represents a brief acknowledgment of the enormity of what is heard, of its proximity to that which cannot be understood at all and to what is understood all too well, of its sublimity. Such a moment is also that of respect for what the other has gone through, a moment in which the difference between the other's experience and one's own is acknowledged. It is the kind of moment one must allow to happen upon hearing that someone has suffered a terrible loss (father, child). It is also the moment of the psychoanalyst, who must often, say nothing at all, so that the one on the couch does not feel "crowded in" by the psychoanalyst's words, so that the one who speaks is insured that her experience is given validation rather than rendered supplementary to the language of the one who is sitting behind her and "quietly taking notes". There are many times in life when such silence is called for as a part of the process of reception—by everybody, not simply the philosopher, whatever or whomever he or she is. Here the silence is double. First an act of respect, of acknowledgment of the gap between self and other. It is also an acknowledgment that the story told has proximity to that which, in the words of Theodor Adorno, "breaks the clocks of measurement" and is morally unfathomable. This is also a silence specifically directed to the philosopher.

With the Holocaust, Theodor Adorno famously remarked, "all the clocks of measurement were broken". Perhaps they have been reset by now, given that this terrible event was followed by Cambodia, Rwanda, Serbia, and preceded by the attempted extermination of the Armenians by the Turks, and now appears as the most signal in a series which must be understood as part of modernity and its systems of violence. And yet, although this series, each by itself and each in relation to the others, requires the project of explanation, in all cases, the attitude of silence is an obligation, given that the enormity of the horror is, from the human point of view incomprehensible, the modern fact of extermination being the point at which the human becomes permanently unrecognizable to itself.

The gross violation of human rights which have been the focus of the commission in South Africa are not events of extermination, and the series of examples (of racism, state terror) in which they line up as similar and different provides one with less reason, I think, to feel that all measurement is broken in their explanation. A field of psychology, historical studies, sociology, political science, economics, and much more may be activated in responding to the following excerpt from the commission's inquiries:

“Amongst those who questioned Captain [Jeffrey T.] Benzien at his amnesty hearing was Mr. Tony Yengeni, one of his victims, who asked him to demonstrate his torture methods:

Captain Benzien: It was a cloth bag that would be submerged in water to get it completely wet. And then the way I applied it was: I get the person to lie down on the ground, on his stomach normally on a mat or something similar with that person's hands handcuffed behind his back.

Then I would take up a position in the small of the person's back, put my feet through between his arms to maintain my balance and then pull the bag over the person's head and twist it closed around the neck in that way, cutting off the air supply to the person.....

Mr. Tony Yengeni: Would the person groan, moan, cry scream? What would the person do?

Captain Benzien: Yes, the person would moan, cry, although muffled; yes, it does happen.

Mr. Tony Yengeni: And you did this to each and every one of us?

Captain Benzien: To the majority of you, yes.....

Mr. Tony Yengeni: What kind of man uses a method like this—one of the wet bag, to people, to other human beings, repeatedly, and listening to those moans and cries and groans and taking each of those people very near to their deaths—what kind of man are you? What kind of man is that, that can do that kind of—what kind of human being is that Mr. Benzien?

I want to understand really why, what happened? I am not talking now about the politics or your family. I am talking about the man behind the wet bag. When you do those things, what happens to you as a human being? What goes through your head, your mind? You know, what effect does that torture activity done to you as a human being?

Captain Benzien: Mr. Yengeni, not only you have asked me that question. I—I Jeff Benzien, have asked myself that question to such and extent that I voluntarily—and it is not easy for me to say this in a full court with a lot of people who do not know me...approached psychiatrists to have myself evaluated, to find out what type of person I am.....If you ask me what type of persons is it that can do that, I ask myself the same question.” (Volume 5: pp. 368-70)

It is notable in this exchange that Mr. Tony Yengeni was tortured by this man, which makes his need to know who this man is profound. It is also notable that both speak, they refer to the torture both in the past and in the present tense, as if they are in their minds, in the intensity of the face to face exchange, still there, at the moment of torture, a moment which is a specter of non-resolution, a ghost which lives between the past and present, blurring the gap. Finally, it is notable that Mr. Benzien is both hiding and revealing himself: his hiding paradoxically being in his somewhat smug description of visiting a psychiatrist, as if he should score some points in the direction of amnesty on account of it (“I voluntarily---and it is not easy for me to say this in a full court with a lot of people who do not know me...approached psychiatrists to have myself evaluated, to find out what type of person I am”). This gesture was not one of therapy but of merely “finding something out”, as if about another. So that this other, never touched or

disturbed, can be presented to the truth and reconciliation commission as an other, a ghost from the past, whose presence as torturer is instead betrayed in his use of the present tense when speaking of himself.

Now philosophy is hardly the best discipline for speaking to the question of who Mr. Jeffrey Benzien is, given the extensive writings on torture by psychoanalysis, critical theory, political science, not to mention a host of Non-governmental organizations, victims, perpetrators, families related to the events, journalists, and the like. It would be presumptuous for philosophy to assume any special vocabulary for the answering of this question. It must be admitted that insofar as the commission takes itself to be in the business of explaining such matters, which in one voice it does, its explanations are of a most incomplete, superficial nature. Which the Commission also, in another voice, more or less concedes. More or less--depending on how you read the report. My point is that although the question of who Jeffrey Benzien is, and what that says about the human becoming unrecognizable to itself--or recognizable in another form, through the production of new and terrible knowledge--remains open, even in relation to Adorno's remarks about the resetting of clocks, philosophy does not immediately enter the scene in addressing it, at least until enough is said by other disciplines so as to allow philosophy to take up the thread of that question in a better way. What philosophy can say at the start is the obvious: that Benzien's character, evidenced in what he did and in the cool detachment of his describing and "demonstrating" it before the Commission, is sufficiently disturbing to force a moment of silence, of contemplation, of anxiety. But then, one hardly needed a philosopher to remind one of that.

After that brief pause in Krog's book which follows her presentation of the testimony I quoted earlier, the words that she follows the pause with are those of a poet:

"In the beginning it was seeing. Seeing for ages, filling the head with ash. No air. No tendril. Now to seeing, speaking is added and the eye plunges into the mouth. Present at the birth of this country's language itself." (Krog: p. 29)

Journalist and poet, journalism becomes poetry at the moment when witnessing is that of the "eye plunging into the mouth", which is the eye of the one who gives this description or report, the victim, the one whose seeing is now that of speaking. The eye is also her eye, the mouth her mouth, as she reports these words said earlier by another, as she reports her having witnessed the victim saying these words, that vision now again in her mouth, that ashen suffering and memory now hers and hers to share. What this poetry does is to place writer and victim in the same space of seeing, speaking, of transmission. The moment is haunted by the spreading of ashes, of the dead, of dying again through speaking of the dead. It calls for words that hang in the air, that sear without the analytical detachments of thought. It calls for reception. At some other moment, memorialization might be in order, for where there is ash that remains in the head, there is the presence of the dead who live on. But this moment is not that of memorialization, it is one of "birth": "the birth of this country's language itself", the birth of a capacity for speaking to take place in this country, this place, at this time.

Some may find her incantation of births out of place from the book of Genesis, the book where the story of Joseph may also be found. For it is *her own language* which is being born here, her own praise poetry of what is happening. By, a retreat into aestheticization which heals herself by commuting her experience into a kind of modernist Afrikaans poetry, the latest in a history of precious and biblicalized mythologizations. I do not find it thus. For me, the language performs a movement ash to birth, death to regeneration, which is curative. It is curative for the victim to be giving birth to language by speaking ash, but also of herself by changing ash into poetry. Her language speaks of witnessing, but also gives her a certain distance from the burden of witnessing. "Present at the country's birth of language": she was present then, when it happened, when the victim gave birth to language. She is present to the birth of language now, her language, the language she is making happen herself. The sentence ("Present at the birth of this country's

language”) is incomplete in that it lacks a subject and a verb. The subject alluded to is in the first instance herself (“I am present at this birth”, “I was present at this birth”), and by extension it is everyone who was there, in the room where these words were spoken by a victim, and everyone who is reading her book now, as the victim’s language, and hers, are happening again. By “language” is meant a transaction in which voice gifts itself the power of speech but through an institution (that of the Commission, that of literature) which occasions the reception of this speech by others. What is meant is communication, which in South Africa has not happened very often about real things, between persons of different colours in the many coloured coat of South African peoples. There is a kind of birth of communication here, she is not lying—although she is precisely making it up, turning into poetry, which is also its birth. Call it the birth of the varieties of language: of the capacity for a victim to report a set of events straightforwardly and the capacity of a journalist to then take this language and sear it into the reader’s brain by letting it speak (Krog reports the testimony), giving pause, and then performing certain poetic twists in relation to what has been reported.

The more important aspect of the deletion of a verb in the incomplete sentence (“Present at the birth of this country’s language”) is that the tense of the sentence remains ambiguous. We do not know if the subject (call it “Antjie Krog”) was present at this birth or if she is present at it. The ambiguity, also one found in the time travels of Yengeni and Benzien between present and past tense, allows her to imply the haunting presence of the victim’s words in her own brain, haunting being a way in which the past recurs in the present. The ambiguity also allows her to gain a certain curative distance from this haunting by implying that she was there in the past, and is not now. Or not in the same way. She was present at the birth of this language, receptive to its power, passive in its transmission of ash, made anxious by its hint of death. But by saying that she was present, she is also putting it in the past. Not completely, but partly so. Finally, she is present at the birth of her language, her commutation of witnessing into a poetry of communication. As are we “present at” this invention through the receptivity of reading. We are also, naturally, not present; she is. Hence the evocative nature of the sentence fragment.

The burden of reception, of witnessing, of the silence in witnessing, requires a commutation by language, a commutation of the sentence by the sentence if you will. Memorialization will be another kind of act which will keep the ashes of the dead alive (in those who are alive) while also allowing the distance on death that comes from public ritual. About memorialization I will have other things to say in the next essay. What I am saying here is that what philosophy has to do with such matters is not obvious, other than to remind itself of how the need to be quiet and to speak is internal to the acknowledgment of such events.

Now Antjie Krog’s book is notable for its sincerity in voicing the experience of being present at most all of the events during which the commission heard the testimony of victims and perpetrators, of industrialists, religious leaders and political parties—with varying degrees of success. Her book also moves in and out of the present: from the speech of the victims, recorded in her book in sequential units as if on a record to the time of writing and rumination on the experience of having been through it and having heard those words then. The language typically used by Tutu to respond to the testimony he hears is equally peculiar: that of homily, the platitude, truism, reminder. The sweet sing-song character of his voice augments these ways of talking. For Wittgenstein, philosophy consists in nothing other than the assembling of reminders (including the work of *showing* why philosophy should consist in nothing but this, a work which itself is meant to consist solely in the assembling of reminders) and I shall have occasion in a later essay to go into the question of philosophy as the assembling of reminders in some depth. Note here that Tutu’s language—the homiletic, the truistic, the becalming, the platitudinous—is of this sort, that it is close in kind and character to a particular kind of philosophical talk, and that it is important to note that the occasion seems to call for it. Tutu is of course a man of the cloth, and not only is he, the Chairperson, such, but also the Vice-Chairman, Reverend Alex Borrairie and Reverend Bongani Finca. Typical kinds of response by the commission by its chairperson, Tutu,

to the terrible words of a victim's testimony, are these offered to Puleng Moloko and family after testimony offered about a relative called Maki:

“Puleng Moloko and the family, we would like you to note that the death of Maki was a national shame. South Africa was looked upon internationally, more especially those who were fighting against apartheid, as beasts, as carnivores and that the family managed to stand by Maki even at a time when everybody was saying, away with that family. We salute you,,,Maki and the family have emerged, after all these disclosures, as heroes. I would say this hearing and this hall have witnessed, who have witnessed this testimony, are witnesses of how noble Maki was, and I will, without shame, request this house to stand and observe a moment of silence. Can we all rise. Thank you.” (Volume 5: P. 365)

and again in another situation, this:

“Thank you, I just want to say, we are, I think, a fantastic country. We have some quite extraordinary people. Yesterday, I had spoken about how proud I was to be black in seeing the kind of spirit that people showed in adversity, and now we're seeing another example, and I think it just augers so wonderfully well for our country. We thank you for the spirit that you are showing and pray that those who hear you, who see you will say, ‘Hey, we do have an incredible country with quite extraordinary people of all races.’” (Volume 5: P. 374)

The latter is a response to the testimony of Ms Beth Savage who was severely hurt during a bomb blast by the PAC in 1992, a mother limbs. Six months after the attack she suffered a “nervous breakdown”. She has, in giving testimony before the commission, expressed a sense of “there but for the grace of God go I” (her words) when asked how she feels about the perpetrators. Thus eliciting Tutu's response. The former is a response to the story of Maki, a comrade who was falsely accused by others in who was forced to undergo open heart surgery, has extensive scarring, shrapnel in her body, and damaged the community of being a spy, and refused to run away, knowing herself to be innocent.

Now if Tutu's language bears a similarity to a certain kind of philosophical talk, it is not obvious that it is meant for a philosophical purpose. Nor is it even obvious what a “philosophical purpose” is. For Tutu's language is in the first instance biblical in resonance, the language of a sacred man of the cloth who speak the language of the bible in the name of the vast panoply of gradients of meaning which comprise the prism of references that he wants to build into the work of the Commission, in keeping with its mandate. In this prism of many colours, inquiry, truth for amnesty, forgiveness and the amazing character of human nature, resolution of a drama between history and God, reconciliation, nation-building all appear. It is often said that the homiletic, imagistic, allegorical opening and closure he attaches to a victim's words is totally over the top and out of sync with any real reality. Now to consider up front and personal how true such remarks are (whatever exactly they mean), consider what words you would use if you were a commissioner in this process? I do not say, “Consider what words you would use if you were he”, for if you were he, you would, it follows, use his words, and the thought experiment becomes trivial. Consider what words would be more appropriate to the occasion of Beth Savage's testimony, given the Commission, the Mandate, and moment in South African history? This consideration can be deferred until later if you like, when more information about the mandate, and its problems, is on the table. But let the question then return. Would you use any words at all? Should you? Other than, “Thank you for your testimony Ms. Savage.”

I take this question to be internal to the evaluation of *Tutu's* words, given the circumstance of their utterance. And by extension I take this question to be about the appropriateness of the homily in certain kinds of circumstances. For I find (you may not find yourself in agreement with

this) that whatever words I might have used, they would have had to have shared the homiletic character of Tutu's. Perhaps in my case with a less Christianized *joie de vivre* in the poetics of forgiveness, perhaps with less national hokiness, and yet, of the same kind, of the same level of ordinariness, of proverbiality. It is this kind of question one must ask oneself in thinking about the the rightness of these words here, the biblico-philosophical weight they carry, and the hokiness of their use. One would also have to think about who one was responding to, and what this nation is and ought to be. South Africa is still a religiously conservative country, where films like The Last Temptation of Christ have not yet been shown on circuit for fear of giving offense—indeed to those religious conservatives who have lived brave anti-apartheid lives under the moral banner of Christ. Whereas less than 10% of the Jewish population in the United States is Orthodox, in South Africa, this is the dominant Jewish affiliation (for whatever Jews remain). In a less conservative environment, a more secular environment, the proverbial and the homiletic would take on a different dimension, and yet remain, I believe, unavoidable. For what else does one say to words, in order to provide closure, when the words are about gross violations of a person's humanity and a person's deep relation to forgiveness? Religion, like psychoanalysis, remains permanently one inch away from total Kitsch, and both in virtue of the role of the homiletic, which sounds so much like absurd and embarrassing bunk when detached from their contexts of use. Hence the permanent liability of both men of the cloth and of the priesthood of the latter day Freud to become stock characters in Hollywood comedy. You could do worse, being instead that kind of person who cannot be made into comedy at all. Benzien is such a person.

In another *kind* of inquiry, one of the Nuremberg type, where punishment was the object, in the name of justice-as-retribution, words like Tutu's would be absurd. Instead, another set of words would be in place such as: "We shall now proceed to further investigate the case so as to bring those to justice who committed this heinous crime" or something of that nature"—words of retribution, judgement, decisions taken. Everything hangs in the rhetoric of the Commission on the issue of Amnesty granted under certain cases—we will come to this. What the truth commission surely, therefore, reminds the world of is that a national *project* of reconciliation may, for all of its vagueness and difficulties, for all of its incompleteness, happen again, in the "here and now" that was the last decade of the twentieth century. Late capitalism, transnational as it is, consumer oriented as it is, with the power of law and of lawyers behind it, has little use for the concept. American and European lives, increasingly homogeneous in their patterns of consumer orientation, lived in nations whose borders, social services and gross national products ("GNPs") are secure, worry about Y2K bugs, Microsoft monopolies, random acts of violence, global markets, new consumer products, disaffected youth with access to information on how-to-make-bombs from the internet. The American politics of recognition stress respect for multicultural difference in an increasingly homogenized world. While these politics may deep down be related to issues of reconciliation, they are overtly at least about the project of being and remaining *different* rather than getting back together again and so constructing a perfected nation. Meanwhile in other places where violence is endemic, reconciliation seems relatively unavailable, as in Bosnia, or Turkey, or Cambodia, or, until recently, Northern Ireland, a fact possibly belied by the recent statement by Martin McGuinness, formerly of Sinn Fein, that a truth for amnesty commission might be immensely helpful there as a way of publicly acknowledging the past, publicly affirming the desire to get past it, and forming better relations between people who mostly mistrust one another.

It is an irony that perhaps philosophy is irrelevant as a response to the Commission because the homiletic character of the Commission's language carries philosophy in its truisms. The very set up of the commission is an homage to the liberalism of the Enlightenment, of Kant and the secularization of the "Judeo-Christian tradition" into a kind of moral baggage of proverbs, laws, reminders, precepts, principles, homilies. Tutu's own philosophical inheritance is also that of Ubuntu, with its centredness on the community as a single living whole, for which, if you damage one part, the others will suffer. This image, again layered with thoughts about the blessed children

of God, is already a vision of human beings as the objects of homily. Perhaps in other occasions it is absurdly oversimplified. Perhaps not. But here it finds a place to be relevant. We shall see in a later essay that for Montaigne, the point of a dialogue with the ancients is to prove this or that article of philosophical wisdom relevant in this context or that, and here Tutu's language, a condensation of philosophical heritages into pearls of homily, whose point is to incant the holiness of the special occasion, is proved apt—at least for me. For the Commission is a place in which the occasion is special and perhaps even holy (if you are in the mood to see it that way). It is a place for the gestural, and the homiletic is an example of that. It is a place where such words are the right thing to say to the people who are saying what they are saying.

Then one way philosophy becomes relevant to the Truth Commission has to do with its being called on to explore how Tutu's language carries the traces of philosophy; another, related way is in its being called on to understand how in this circumstance the homiletic has relevance, appropriateness, gestural power. No doubt these solicitations are not unique to philosophy, history, politics and other disciplines are also called on, for the analysis of this gestural power. Later in this essay I will take to task some writers on the Truth Commission for failing to consider the Truth Commission to be a gesture requiring "historical analysis". Here I note that there are philosophical exemplars which take historico-political events and refer them to the inheritance of philosophical culture. Most notably for South Africa there is the writing on Nelson Mandela by Jacques Derrida (it will come up again in an essay on the African renaissance). Writing in praise of Nelson Mandela, in 1984, while Mandela languished in prison on Robben Island, Jacques Derrida made a similar point about the texts of Mandela. Derrida sought to understand the consistent imagery of light, mirroring and reflection in Mandela's speeches as a legacy of the Enlightenment (which would not be unreasonable, given Mandela's "missionary education"), but also as an occasion to revisit the discourses of the Enlightenment, in particular those of Kant, so as to grasp the kind of moment in history when the sublimity of these discourses becomes in play. A moment, particularly, *avant-le-lettre* of the institution of liberal democracy and law, when the terms of equality, existing as a burnished dream in a state of perfect abstraction, understood as *negativity*, in opposition to regimes of evident injustice, the regimes of the European third estate and in 1984, that of South Africa, carry undiluted philosophical force: the force of a political sword in the proverbial image of justice. Mandela becomes a reflection of this force of law, of a law not yet formed, except in the formal discourses of philosophy, and hence a law of divinity, of light, of abstraction. At such moments in history philosophical abstraction takes on a peculiar light, a sense of praise. South Africa, in 1984, therefore becomes an occasion to revisit the force of philosophical law, of the moral law abstractly articulated by the Enlightenment.

I do not want to go into the details of Derrida's discussion, which would take us too far afield; it is the principle that interests me, namely that his essay becomes one way in which a political moment is given a philosophical reading, however powerful or limited this reading may be. The moment has now changed, and it is, I have suggested, more biblical, in which the gifts of religion are given secular meaning in the project of reconciliation, and in which the words of the Truth Commission are given biblical wholeness, being words before which one can say nothing, and yet which, when placed in narrative form, become the stuff of biblical unification.

II

Everything in the appropriateness of the language used by Tutu depends on the issue of qualified Amnesty, and its connection to the larger project of reconciliation through truth. The South African Truth and Reconciliation invented the concept of qualified Amnesty, which had not been used before. In the past, either Truth Commissions had been of the Nuremberg type (delivering retribution), or of the Chilean type, where unqualified Amnesty was given to all in exchange for truthful participation. In a Nuremberg situation, I have already said that Tutu's language would be

out of place; this is also perhaps true for a situation of unqualified Amnesty, where his language of forgiveness and being close to God would be harder to take, given that all the bad guys and girls (mostly guys) had been “forgiven” already by being let off scott free.

The facts of the Truth Commission are these. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was mandated by the Interim Constitution, worked out by the power sharing government and a negotiating team, including other factions of South African political society. Its mandate was more formally stated in the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No. 34 of 1995, which set forth its terms. The issue of qualified amnesty was so problematic that it was resolved only at the last minute and included in a Postamble to the Interim constitution. Amnesty was the result of a stalemate in the war of the late 1980s. Neither side found itself capable of winning, which lead to the power sharing interim government. The African National Congress had had the idea of a Truth Commission for some time, but now found that, given the stalemate, it could not expect the National Party, with whom it was sharing power, to agree to a Truth Commission without the carrot of amnesty. In turn, the National Party’s desire (naturally) for unqualified amnesty was rejected by most of the other parties, including the ANC. Out of this stalemate came the idea for qualified amnesty, which in turn would produce the incentive on the part of perpetrators to tell “the whole truth” for the record and in the interests of justice.

Three committees were set up. The Truth and Reconciliation Committee (what is popularly called “The Commission” or the “Truth and Reconciliation Commission”, a form of words I am using in this essay) was charged with:

“establishing as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of the gross violations of human rights which were committed during the period from 1 March 1960 until the cut off day in 1994, including the antecedents, circumstances, factors and contexts of such violations, as well as the perspectives of the victims and the motives and perspectives of the persons responsible for the commission of the violations, by conducting investigations and holding hearings. (Volume 1: p. 55)

The Amnesty Committee was charged with the review of applications for Amnesty. Since full disclosure was among the criteria for the granting of amnesty, two persons from the Truth Commission were allowed onto this one, which is otherwise independent. Finally, a committee was established to consider the issue of reparations to victims, the Reparation and Rehabilitations Committee. It has, as of 1999 produced a set of recommendations which the government has done nothing to implement—with the exception of a special President’s Fund to aid those in immediate, dire need. An investigations unit was also set up.

In order to be granted amnesty, the perpetrator must have provided full disclosure of the truth, in addition to satisfying further criteria. These criteria were 1) their acts must have been politically motivated, and 2) their acts must have been “in proportion” to the political motivation. (More on that in a moment). As of the date of publication of the report, namely its presentation to the then President Nelson Mandela on 29 October 1998, amnesty had been granted to 150 persons out of between 7000 and 8000 applications, with 2000 still left to evaluate. So the numbers are relatively small, although the stakes are enormous.

Given the political stalemate between warring parties which lead to the establishment of both the Interim government and the Truth Commission, qualified Amnesty became as I said, the only negotiable possibility. But more was at stake and qualified Amnesty had the triple benefit of 1) fomenting political stability, 2) producing a massive contribution to the archive of violence, by providing “incentives” for perpetrators to offer full disclosure of the truth, and 3) allowing the rhetoric of reconciliation and the nation-building that would flow from reconciliation, to attain a central place in the proceedings. There are circumstances other than the South African ones in which any kind of Amnesty would have been unthinkable, Nuremberg being one of them. There, the stakes had been genocide and millions were still warm in their ashen graves. Moreover, since

every Jew who had not left the burning fires of Europe in time had been exterminated, there was little role for “national reconciliation and unity” between Jews and other Europeans. Things were different in South Africa on all counts and it is because of this that Tutu had the role that he did.

These facts explain the setting up of Qualified Amnesty. It is another thing to explain why so many victims and families of victims embraced the process. Some, for example the family of Steve Biko, refused to participate, arguing that an amnesty process for brutal killers was not acceptable to them, to the memory of Biko, or to the new nation predicated on justice. Most welcomed the Commission’s proceedings and tried to embrace the ideal of reconciliation. Forgiveness runs astonishingly deep in South African cultures and it is very hard to explain why. To call them Christianized is true enough but not enough, and the African roots (for most victims and families were black) demand study. No doubt the force of the Commission with its biblical emphasis on reconciliation and national unity figured centrally in predisposing families and victims towards these ideals, Tutu himself was maybe more important than anything else. And it also should not be forgotten that many of the families and victims had never had the opportunity to speak before any social institution and have their concerns taken utterly seriously. Their expectations of civil and political participation were very low, and they enthusiastically grasped what was offered, which was indeed very significant. Finally, it should not be forgotten that some kind of reparations have been promised as compensation for suffering, and to offset the amnesty which may be offered to perpetrators. To date, the little that has been organized is nothing short of a scandal.

Whatever problems there are with the criteria for amnesty come above all from the issue of defining what proportionality consists in. Proportionality is a mathematical measure transposed into a metaphorical realm where any attempt to regulate the concept is bound to be artificial. The Amnesty Commission cobbled together a series of protocols from the past which, for example, permanently exclude rape of women or children, the killing of children and the like as ever “in proportion to any political motive”. However, given that one is dealing with heinous crimes in every case, any attempt to decide which of these gross violations of human rights should be awarded Amnesty (given full disclosure of the truth) and which should not, must be ad hoc. Jeffrey Benzien’s torturing was in 1999 ruled in proportion to his political motivation, for he was granted amnesty. There is, moreover, no way to argue, based on the criterion, that this was a misjudgement. This is enough, I think, to show that the criterion is incoherent. No doubt Benzien gave a convincingly “honest and self-flagellating” performance which helped in the “Judeo-Christian” atmosphere of forgiveness, and no doubt his psychopathic personality made that self-representation easy for him. Dirk Coetzee, among the most powerful and vicious members of the “Third Force” was granted amnesty in 1997. And as an aside, may I say that among the names of those granted amnesty in 1998 is that of Mr. Shakespeare Buthelezi, so apparently for some people, it’s all well that ends well.

Father Michael Lapsley, who is deeply committed to the process of forgiving, nevertheless also gave testimony before the commission stated on South African television during a talk show on the Day of Reconciliation, December 16, 1999, formerly the Day of the Vow and now, a day off with a different religious character, to the effect that the commission has become too “perpetrator friendly”, with amnesty being generously, if also stringently, offered for perpetrators but, to date, no reparation for victims. This is so, and it points to the deepest flaw in the commission, namely the way the religiosity of the language carries a tenor of redemption when in fact little has happened other than the importance of these words, and their vague effects in a population of very different people, many of whom refused to follow the proceedings at all, or were unable to (no access to television, nor to the report, etc). One might then retreat to the position that the real work of the commission consists in its establishment of the archive, which is always for the future, and in setting a tone for reconciliation to come, by providing a beacon in the night. To which others, deeply exasperated with ongoing conditions of suffering in South Africa, respond with the thought that once again, religion has re-opiated the people, being drunk on its own

powers of forgiveness and its rosy complexion on life when nothing concrete has happened other than letting some perpetrators go free. Moreover, those at the top were never brought into the ambit of the commission in a proper way, and when P.W. Botha, under whose reign the security forces were vastly expanded and everyone knows it, is let free after a ridiculous stalemate, then it is the frogs and foot soldiers rather than the sharks with pretty teeth (or in Botha's case, the big crocodile, as he was often called) who are hooked—again unlike Nuremberg.

Now the Mandate of the three committees, taken together, was superhuman, which is part of what makes it biblical. In the words of Anjie Krog:

“It [the whole process] was supposed to finish its work in eighteen months. Broadly stated, the aims of the commission were to return to victims their civil rights; to restore the moral order of the society; to seek the truth, record it, and make it known to the public; to create a culture of human rights and respect for the rule of law; and to prevent the shameful events of the past from happening again.

The first hearings were held in April 1996. Over the following two years, South Africans were exposed almost daily to revelations about their traumatic past. In the cities and in many smaller towns, in improvised courtrooms fashioned out of town halls and community centres and churches, the drama of Apartheid and the struggle against it was played out. The Commission received 20000 statements from victims, 2000 in public hearings and [it has been stated earlier that] it received nearly 8000 applications for Amnesty.” (Krog: p. vii)

A complete description of the Commission's functions can be found in Volume 1 of the Report, which can be downloaded from the Internet.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission consisted of 17 commissioners: Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Chairperson, Dr. Alex Borrairie, Vice-Chairperson, Ms. Mary Burton, Mr. Chris de Jager, Reverend Bongani Finca, Ms. Sisi Khampepe, Mr. Richard Lyster, Mr. Wynard Malan, Dr. Khoza Mgojo, Ms. Hlengiwe Mkize, Mr. Dumisa Ntsebeza, Dr. Wendy Orr, Advocate Denzil Potgeiter, Dr. Mapule Ramashala, Dr. Fazel Randera, Ms. Yasmin Sooka, and Ms. Glenda Wildschut. These persons came from the church, from law, education, social work, and various other areas of life. Some were chosen to insure that certain political groups were equally represented, while others purely for their broad humanitarian credentials. They represented a coat of many colours, a rainbow nation, charged with investigating blood, slavery and the disappearance of sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, women and men.

The concept of a gross violation of human rights was given definition in the light of protocols set forth by the four Geneva Conventions of 1949. These protocols include:

- a) violence to the life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;
- b) taking of hostages;
- c) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment;
- d) the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgement pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the juridical guarantees which are recognized as indispensable by civilised peoples.” (Volume 1: p. 75)

Certain form of violence between warring armies, in accord with the protocols of war, were excluded (killing a soldier on the opposing side while in the midst of a battle).

There were amazingly few serious conceptual disputes between parties over whether this or that counted as a gross violation of human rights, and this was no doubt due both to the victim-centred sympathies of the commission which applied less stringent criteria for whether a victim had

suffered an abuse than it did in judging *who* had committed it, insofar as a distinction could be made between this pair of judgments. It is also because of the amnesty carrot which was offered as a condition of full disclosure, which predisposed perpetrators not to fight about the details of whether their crimes were “gross violations” but instead to argue for appropriate political motivation for them.

While the commission investigated gross human rights violations in all quarters of the South African past, concluding that the African National Congress, Winnie Mandela, the PAC and others had unequivocally committed such violations, it also found it crucial to draw a moral distinction between violations which happened in resistance to apartheid, and those which were committed in defense of that racist regime, given global consensus that apartheid represented a crime against humanity. The commission might have chosen to address at least in a single session what Mahmood Mamdani has called the “routine degradations of apartheid”, given its concurrence with the view that apartheid represented a crime against humanity, for there would have been good reason to take the view that such degradations were gross violations of *political* rights--political rights being among what is called human rights. I myself consider this a missed opportunity, given the broad and grandiose formulation of the mandate which included investigation into the background causes of gross violations of human rights, which surely included a climate of such “routine degradations”. Such a session or group of sessions would have made a strong and needed statement about that past.

As Krog implies by her terse and ironic tone, the mandate of the commission was clearly impossible to fulfill. Indeed its goals were utopian and impossible to fulfill by *any group of commissions or researchers* in the neo-natal beginning of a new regime out of the shards of the old. Deborah Posel, in a trenchant article on the Commission, speaks more strongly than Krog:

“The TRC’s mandate was simultaneously deeply moral: access to truth was to lay the foundation for a more humane, just, social order, passing resolute moral judgement on the past but in ways which reconciled a previously divided society to a common future rooted in a ‘respect for human rights’. The ‘reconciliation’ dimension was itself variegated, inspired by a cluster of meanings of the idea. The TRC was to initiate processes of individual, interpersonal and collective ‘healing’, through the catharsis of finally expunging the truth about gross human rights violations previously hidden. Here, reconciliation was to be an affirmation of ‘ubuntu’, a ‘recognition of the humanity of the other’. The idea of reconciliation was also explicitly tied to the project of nation-building, ‘imagining’ a new form of national community based on a ‘collective memory’, a ‘shared history’. Exposure to truth was to lay the basis for a national consensus about the past and how to overcome its legacy in the future---‘some essential lessons for the future of the people of this country’. Lastly, reconciliation was also understood as an act of compromise, borne of the country’s negotiated transition. As itself the product of a political compromise, the TRC was seen as a crucial vehicle in attempts to stabilize and reproduce the politics of transitional justice. Finally, all of this was to be undertaken ‘as expeditiously as possible’, within a period of two years.”⁴

A coat of many colours, an impossible mandate, a this-and-that about all things, utopian plan, a report then saturated in the ecstatic rhetoric of the Christian service, the Commission and its Report have been the object of sophisticated historiographic and epistemological critique within South African academic circles. Usually by persons who fail to address the Commission’s often considerable remarks about its own inadequacy, and other self-criticisms. These remarks do not invalidate such criticisms from the academy, but they cast them in a different light.

The historiographic critique is developed by Posel and then taken further by Colin Bundy, both of the University of Witwatersrand.⁵ Posel asserts that the Report exhibits:

“[an] inability to grapple with the complexities of social causation [which] is compounded by the TRC’s having to tie its account of apartheid to the story of gross human rights violations. Having to focus a narration of the past around the clash between ‘victims’ and ‘perpetrators’ provides very blunt tools for the craft of history writing...”⁶

“The TRC’s ‘truth’ about the past”, she states, “is neither ‘complex’ nor particularly ‘extensive’:

“...With little explanatory and analytical power, the report reads less as a history, more as a moral narrative about the fact of moral wrongdoing across the political spectrum, spawned by the overriding evil of the apartheid system. In so doing, the TRC report achieves some notable successes that go a long way towards fulfilling some parts of the Commission’s mandate—but to the exclusion of others.”⁷

Bundy concurs, arguing that it represses historical complexity by deleting competing positions and by focusing on apartheid as a narrative of individual deaths rather than a *political system with an historical genealogy of a specific kind*, thus reducing apartheid to a “series of myths”, or what we may call a biblical narrative (of betrayal, going too far, death, rupture, individual conscience, the warring of tribes). This emphasis on individual volition and victimization is compounded by the time line chosen by the Commission, which restricts its investigation of crimes to the period 1960-1994, thus foreclosing on the larger political genealogy.

Finally, he argues that the report is hopelessly ambiguous in its conceptualization of apartheid. On the one hand it takes the unconditional Kantian stance (also that of Amnesty International) that any gross violation is equally unacceptable to the moral imagination, and that for a culture of reconciliation, all must be investigated equally. It doesn’t matter on whose side the violation happened, the pro-apartheid side or the anti-apartheid side. On the other hand, the commission’s Report (five volumes, 1998), wants to find a way of stating that crimes committed against the racist regime of apartheid cannot be viewed in the same light as those crimes which were committed in its name. For apartheid was itself a crime against humanity and this, one wants to say, doubles the stakes of gross human rights violations committed on its side. It is my own view, in Bundy’s spirit, that were the Report to have really carried the logic of calling apartheid a crime against humanity to its conclusions, then it would have had to rethink the amnesty apportioned to each side, since one side would have been “doubly guilty”, to speak in a metaphor of measurement. (The measure of proportionality would have been affected.) The down side is that such a rethinking of the conditions of “measurement” would have affected the larger prospects for “the culture of reconciliation”—perhaps. Hence the Commission had to have it both ways—perhaps, had to take a morally inconsistent theoretical position, perhaps. On moral grounds—perhaps.

Now the report says this about its own mandate:

“One of the reasons for this [the Commission’s own] failure of emphasis is the fact that the greater part of the Commission’s focus has been on what could be regarded as the ‘exceptional’—on gross violations of human rights rather than the more mundane but nonetheless traumatizing dimensions of apartheid life that affected every single black South African...” (Vol. 1: pp. 132-3)

So it is hardly unaware of the limitations in its mode of procedure. Moreover, it does not stop at merely stating this self-critical truth, it elsewhere tries to bring home that a culture of routine degradations was part of the violence of the past. As in the long description it quotes from Justice Pius Langa:

“My first real encounter with the legal system [of apartheid] was as a young workseeker in Durban...in 1956. It was during that period that I experienced the frustration, indignity and humiliation of being subject to certain of the provisions of the Population Registration Act, no. 25 of 1950, the Natives (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act, no. 25 of 1945 [which predates the rule of apartheid, an important point not picked up by the Commission] as well as other discriminatory legislation of that time...The immediate impact on me was severe disillusionment at the unfairness and injustice of it all. I could never understand why race should have been the determinant of where I should live and where I could work. I was never able to understand why, whilst still a teenager, I was expected to live at a men’s hostel and needed a permit to stay with my parents in the township...My dreams came up against the harsh apartheid realities. The insensitive, demeaning and often hostile environment it had created around me proved to have been crafted too well; it was designed to discourage those who, like me, sought to improve their circumstances and those of their community.

I was merely one of tens of thousands who peopled those seemingly interminable queues at the end of which, in general, bad tempered clerks and officials might reward on with some endorsement or other in the ‘dompas’. The whole process of influx control offices was painful and degrading and particular aspects of it inflicted deep humiliation on the tens of thousands who were on the receiving end of these regulations. As a 17 year old I remember having to avert my eyes from the nakedness of grown men in a futile attempt to salvage some dignity for them in those queues where we had to expose ourselves to facilitate the degrading examination” (Volume 1: pp. 62-3)

I note the repetition of the work “degrading”, which, were I to have quoted more of this very long description, would have been twinned with words like “ugliness”, “culture of hostility and intimidation”. Pius Langa is describing a “routine degradation” of apartheid, the registration of the black African and the restriction on his movements. The process of degradation is not merely political, it is also social, involving the:

“crude, cruel and unfeeling way in which many of the officials, black and white, put them into operation. There was a culture of hostility and intimidation against those who came to be processed or for assistance. The fact presented by authority, in general, was of a war against people who were unenfranchised and human dignity was the main casualty.” (Volume 1: P. 63)

Langa is describing a well known system in which bureaucratic degradation licenses the view that the subjects who undergo this process are less than human and the clerks, managers and officials who deploy it are unlimited in power and immune to control. The system gives rise to an excess of cruelty. In this story systemic power and individual degradation (by this clerk or that) are understood each *in the light of the other*, and there is no sense whatever that apartheid is merely a series of individual crimes of the biblical “father killing the son, brother betraying the brother” sort. The “culture of hostility”, the bureaucracy of control, and the “crude, cruel and unfeeling” behavior of so many clerks “both white and black”, are part of an historico-cultural whole. Langa, standing in line, averts his eyes so as to cause those men who must strip in public, in line, like prisoners of a system, no added shame, as if it is his eyes which also, in this system, carry the power to hurt and cannot help but do. This transmutation of victim into perpetrator produces a double degradation: that of standing in this line to get one’s pass, and that of having to avert one’s eyes so as not to cause his neighbors further *perpetration of insult* (hurt).

They, the men, older than he, a mere 17 year old, should not have to suffer the humiliation of being looked at by a younger man like he. It is his own culture of respect which is also the object of violation: respect by the younger for the older. We find this often in bureaucratic systems of

corporate violence, of violence directed towards the integrity of a culture. As when the Rabbi in the Nazi Ghetto is forced to crawl on the ground or spit on the Torah, and this in front of the eyes of the community, so that both this holy man and the sacred *role* he occupies may be humiliated in front of his people. In this way both Jews and the culture of Judaism are degraded.

While the phenomenology of ordinary degradation makes some appearance in the report, the question of how far the Commission goes in explaining gross human rights violations in terms of the background of apartheid is more unclear, given that it restricts its form of explanation almost entirely to those specific sectors in the apartheid system which were responsible for the carrying out of violations: the security forces, the training of policemen, etc... Nevertheless, the Report, as Posel puts it, leaves out “large chunks”⁸ of the apartheid system from its terms of reference and explanation. While there is no time to go into this here, she is partly right. What I do want to go into is that Posel believes that the “large chunks of the apartheid system” left out of the Report are part of a larger epistemic flaw in the way the Report chooses to construct its terms for digging out and setting forth in South African society, *the truth*. When a philosopher hears the word “truth”, their ears bulge, and the construction of an idea of truth is central to the Commission’s report, as it is to its proceedings. I want to preoccupy myself with this idea of truth here, rather in the manner of a philosophical journalist, for it reveals the underlying narrative of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the depth, as well as “improvisation”, in its speech acts.

No doubt hoky in its ad hoc ideas about the “four kinds of truth” which are in its purview, the speaks of Factual truth, Social Truth, Dialogue Truth and Restorative Truth and tries to distinguish them. Its arguments are improvisational, and are certainly impossible to sustain. I want to restrict myself to those aspects of the Report’s declaration and argument which I think are most interesting.

1) *Factual truth* is described in two ways:

- a) truth about individual events (what happened, who was killed, by whom, etc.), more specifically “accurate information through reliable (impartial, objective, procedures);
- b) “findings on the contexts, causes, and patterns of violations. (Volume 1: p. 111)

In describing the second part of factual truth the report takes a most interesting position on itself:

“In this respect, the commission was required to report on the broader patterns underlying gross human violations of human rights and to explore the causes of such violations. To do this, it had to analyse, interpret and draw inferences from the information it received. In this regard, it became necessary for the Commission to adopt a social scientist’s approach---making use of the information contained in its database and form a range of secondary sources.” (Volume 1: P. 111)

Now in spite of the fact that the next sentence reads: “However, all truth commissions have their limitations.” (Volume 1: p. 111), Posel and Bundy are right to feel a certain pique, given that a single day in the University of Witwatersrand library (in part reading their works) would have vastly improved its capacity to produce systemic and structural explanations.

The larger point is that Posel believes this kind of language, including this parsing of truth into categories or kinds, allows the report to indulge in an illusion of positivism: thinking its findings are empirically established, built from simple building blocks according to transparent forms of construction, clear as to where one kind of truth meets the next, clear as to where fact and explanation meet, ready for the archive as an epistemically indubitable body of truth. This reading has its merits, but I also find vastly oversimplified as a view of how the Report regards its results, and more importantly, why it has organized “categories of truth” in the way that it has.

If one reads the next few sentences which continue the remarks just quoted about “adopting a social scientist’s attitude”, one finds Michael Ignatieff quoted, approvingly, as saying this: “All that a truth commission can achieve is to reduce the number of lies that can be circulated unchallenged in public discourse.” (Volume 1: P. 111) A few lines later, the report then says:

“Applying Ignatieff’s notion of reducing the number of lies, one can say that the information in the hands of the Commission made it impossible to claim, for example, that: the practice of torture by state security forces was not systematic and widespread; the state was not directly and indirectly involved in ‘black-on-black violence...[etc.]’ (Volume 1: pp. 111-12)

Now this is hardly the stuff of positivism, if by positivism one means a conception of scientific practice which believes that fact, appropriately established by verifiable procedures, can be arranged in a transparent form of organization, from simple to complex, such that larger conclusions follow transparently from each and every simple fact, and do so, independently of all but logical inference. It is not even the positivist twist of Karl Popper, who substituted the criterion of falsifiability for that of verifiability as the criterion of propositional meaning. For Popper’s falsifiability criterion requires a clear formulation of what would count as the falsification of 1) a statement of fact and 2) more generally, a theory, and there can be no such criterion offered here. What the commission is saying is that the best it can do by way of reliable truth is to collect enough evidence, with enough overall reliability, so that, put together as a whole, it can be convincing *enough* as to overrule, once and for all, the big lie so crucial in the twentieth century. No longer can ordinary misinformation or illusion be believed, and many South Africans have said to me that they had no idea of the extent of Human Rights Violations, an exclamation also publically articulated by members of the Commission’s research team. Something important, something morally crucial, has been found out and disseminated—but not in a way that would satisfy the requirements of positivism: rather in a way that would satisfy the “moral certainty” of Ignatieff. This does not ring of positivism but rather of skeptical modesty combined with moral urgency. We think of Jean Marie Le Pen in France who still refuses to believe that the Holocaust happened, because “he has not made a study of it and was not there”. What Truth Commission’s do is to raise the stakes of the lie, so that those who refuse to believe will have to try harder to be convincing to the public, and it is public truth, the truth of the archive and the mode of circulation in civil society that matters. For there is no limit to what people can do to one another apart from the restraints of truth, and these restraints are in turn a matter of what they can be brought to *believe*. Voltaire said it: Get someone to believe an absurdity and you can get them to commit an atrocity. There is always the possibility of willful skepticism, given the failure of evidence to mount up in a way that is more reliable than it is, given, that is, the fallibility attaching to each and every procedure. The question is how far one must now go in making the skeptical position believable, convincing, anything other than the product of willful fabrication. We think of the Europe of Serbian justice and Austrian desserts.

Not that these stakes of truth are themselves indubitable in some further philosophical sense. Jacques Verges, the lawyer who defended Claus Barbie, when Barbie, “butcher of Lyon”, was on trial for crimes against humanity (specifically the deportation of the Jewish children of the village of Isieu to their deaths in the Final Solution--*Entlosung*) was at a certain point presented by the documentary film maker Marcel Ophuls with evidence from the prosecution that Barbie had had in his hands a message from Danneker, sent to all Gestapo Agents, about how to herd Jews into Gas Chambers, a document with Barbie’s name typed below. And that therefore Barbie could not *but* have known about the *Entlosung*. Verges counters that, if the prosecution presents proof that Barbie ordered the deportation of the Jewish children to the camps, with the following words (I translate into English): “I am forced to state that the document is a forgery”....”It’s a fake”. Later, the claim is made by Verges, not unknown as a kind of claim made by the *Far Right* in Europe, that the document was fabricated by Jewish groups after the war in order to satisfy their crazed desire for blood. It is with the “I am forced to state” that I am concerned here, for were the archive not as detailed as it was, with a document from Danneker with Barbie’s name typed below available to Ophuls (and to the French Proscution), Verges would not have had to retreat to

his claim that the document is a fake. Now nothing in logic denies to Verges the possibility of taking a fall back position, and taking it with paranoid coherence and calm. Nothing in logic prevents an endless fall back to a retreat position. However, the more evidence can be mounted, the harder it is to find a coherent position to fall back to, or the harder it is to make that position believable. There will be for the foreseeable future a free-floating capacity for the European imagination to call up images of Jewish plots and witch hunts, a fantasy position born of centuries of racist anti-Semitism with its capacity to reverse all charges back onto the victim, whose fault it always is, which is why the irradiation of this fantasy by the archive is crucial to the moral future of Europe. As in South Africa. We recall Jean-Marie Le Pen's claim, also made in this documentary film, that "whether 6 million died and how they died" is precisely the question, which is to say, *still in question*. Le Pen, whose party has most recently celebrated the election of Jorge Haider's party to the Austrian government, prefaces his remarks about the Holocaust (its extent, its purpose, those responsible) still being essentially in question, by this (again I translate): "Of course, I haven't made a study of it". As if to say that in all probability the study would leave him just as uncertain as he is now. This degradation of the archive by its avoidance is again a classic strategy for denying the facts.

Now were there not a distinction between little uncertainties and big ones, between uncertainties of detail and of overall shape and scope, between fact and explanation at the broad level, the capacity for humanity to look itself in the mirror and know what it has done would evaporate, hence the importance of the archive in raising the stakes for those who would deny these distinctions. And by the archive is also meant here a series of stories which relate the facts to a picture of things. Such stories may be inadequate in many ways, as pictures invariably also conceal, exaggerate and distort. And yet, without an archive that also tells and pictures, there could be no argument against the far right and no intellectual way of preventing its radiation of vile fantasy.

Positivism is also a fantasy, and indeed one which invites the counterclaim of radical uncertainty by denying the certainty that must always attend to any archival project: project of witnessing and collecting. It therefore seems to me very important to note that Posel's reading attributes positivism too quickly, and to note that it is the reasonableness of the Report regarding its own evidential base is where its moral power resides.

Let us pursue this question of the reasonableness of the Report's evidence more specifically. Posel argues that:

"In line with the genre of an official state commission, the TRC report presents itself as the work of a team of 'observers' on the past, who collated and assembled a series of facts about gross human rights violations, to produce the objective, authorized, version of the country's recent past. But a closer reading reveals a different process of knowledge production. The report contains a version of the past which has been actively crafted according to particular strategies of inclusion and exclusion..."⁹

I will suggest that she is right, but at a more abstract level than she imagines. I will suggest that the strategies of exclusion and inclusion do not fundamentally pertain to the assembling of "the facts", but to a larger narrative which relates the facts to the project of reconciliation. It is there that the Foucauldian epistemic regime kicks in if you will, the construction of a system of truth-predicates and operations which empowers the Commission and those associated with its proceedings with "the route to reconciliation", and which as a form of empowerment is a construction of an epistemic regime, that of truth, that deals power.

We must consider first the assembling of versions of the truth, and what is or is not there regulated by strategies of inclusion and exclusion. Consider an example, that of three versions of the killing of Policeman Mutase (Mutasi) and his wife in 1987 reported by Anjie Krog and then

the Commission's version. We first hear from three members of the Security Forces about what happened. Krog says:¹⁰

“I transcribe Captain Jacques Hechter's version:

‘We got out a distance from the house. We were wearing dark clothes and balaclavas. Mamasela's wasn't over his face, just rolled down low. He knocked on the Mitases' door and asked if he [Richard] was in. We were standing around the corner and listening. When Mamasela told us that Richard's wife was expecting him, we decided to wait for him inside. Mamasela knocked on the door again. When the woman opened the door, Mamasela pushed her with a gun to a back room, where he had to keep her from seeing us. We switched off the lights, but left the television on so that it seemed that someone was there. We then hid behind the couch. Then a vehicle arrived: His Mazda. He came to the door and found it locked. He was struggling with the lock when we jerked him inside. He immediately realized there was trouble. He struggled violently—he fought like a tiger and he shouted wildly. To bring him under control I started to strangle him...and Van Vuren smothered him with a pillow over his face. He then fired four shots with his AK-47—the pillow was a silencer. Loost was also present and he accidentally hit me with the stock of his AK-47 against the arm. Then we called Mamasela: ‘Come on! We're finished.’ Just as we were walking out we heard a shot from inside the house. When Mamasela joined us we asked what the shooting was about. He told us that he killed the woman because she saw his face. It was also only afterwards that we learned that there was a child in the house.’” (Krog: P. 82)

“This is Paul Van Vuren's version:

‘There was a big noise, he was screaming terribly. And...me and Captain Hechter...(sighs) worked together without talking. Each knew what he had to do.... I can just explain to you that at this stage in the operation...time is a factor and one only acts without thinking....On that specific night we were not discussing whether the woman would see Mamasela. We did not take it into consideration, which was a mistake on our part, we should have considered it. But I knew that Captain Hechter's wife was divorcing him at the time and we did not put pressure on each other. After we fought with Richard Mutase and Captain Hechter put the pillow over his head, and I fired four shots with an AK-47, Captain Loots and Captain Hechter put the pillow over his head, and I fired four shots with an AK-47, Captain Loots and Captain Hechter went out the door...and I can't remember correctly, the woman's head was under the blanket, or the sheet, but her head was covered. I told Mamasela: ‘You must come, we are finished’—and then I turned around and ran out. Heard shots. When I got outside, Mamasela was next to me. I said, ‘What did you do?’ He told me that he shot the woman also because she saw his face. I just want to mention that at the time it was not strange that people would recognize Mamasela. Because Mamasela and I were reasonably big friends and he told me that he was going to get plastic surgery at the state's expense. He often spoke to me about his personal stuff. So as far as I'm concerned Mamasela's face was to be changed later.’” (Krog: pp. 85-6)

“...Joe Mamasela gave his version of the Mutase murders in an unbroken stream of words:

‘I was talking to her [Irene Mutase—in the back room of her home] to lie to her that her husband was involved in robberies and stuff like that and I asked, didn't he bring in any money, and generally she was quite concerned that no, the man did not bring any money, at the back of my mind you know I felt pity...I did not know what I can do to help her...and then all of a sudden Hechter came in, and when they were fighting with her

husband she got concerned, she was calm all the time because I tried as much as possible to keep her calm, but during the struggle, myself I was disturbed, I was perturbed, and she was uncontrollably agitated, and Hechter came in and said:...'you're standing there gaping, why don't you kill the woman' [spoken by Mamasela to the Commission in Afrikaans] Then he took my revolver and HE ordered her to get into the bed and he shot her about four times in the direction of her head, I could see the body, the blood...the child was in the other room. He was sleeping. THEN he gave me the gun and said: [Again reported in Afrikaans] 'Now go and kill...go and shoot that child.' So I took the gun and I opened the door where he was sleeping and I saw this innocent little thing, and his face mirrored the face of my own child..I just couldn't do it...I then fired two shots in the direction of the bedroom, where the wife lay, then I closed the door. Then Hechter said to me, 'You did not shoot, I did not hear any shots.' I said, 'No I shot.' He said, 'Bring the weapon here.' And he took the gun and opened it and I was glad that I managed to shoot at random, otherwise I would be killed for defying an order. So in a way I believe I'm happy that I didn't kill the child whilst that thing was going to haunt me for the rest of my life. I don't think I would have retained my sanity the way I've retained it" (Krog: p. 87)

Now the differences are obvious. As Krog says: "It's worth noting where these stories differ---on the question of accountability. No one will admit to killing Irene Mutase, because no political reason could possibly exist why an ordinary nurse had to be killed." (Krog: p. 88) The question of Amnesty received, as opposed to a life behind bars can hang on whose version is correct. But there is also the issue of the perpetrator's need to preserve his own integrity, as he sees it, by highlighting what he refused to do. Hence Mamasela: "I saw this innocent little thing, and his face mirrored the face of my own child...I just couldn't do it..". It is the oldest strategy in the book to stress, as a perpetrator, the danger one put oneself in, on account of disobeying an order, so as to identify with the victims and remove the stain of one's guilt. Hence Mamasela: "I was glad that I managed to shoot at random, otherwise I would be killed for defying an order." Mamasela achieves, so he feels, a double gain through these words: to preserve his sense of his own moral high ground by stressing what he would *not* do as opposed to what he routinely did, and he betters his case before the Commission by denying responsibility for the killing of the wife. Now on psychological grounds alone I would suppose that Mamasela's rhetoric is in effect a confession of guilt. No one else of the three feels the need to indulge in the gesture of stressing their own moral bottom line. Which to me suggests that he is the one who is hiding something. Needless to say this kind of assumption is hardly evidentially sound and may well be pure amateur sleuthism by a longstanding fan of British mystery TV shows.

Now consider how the event is reported in the Truth Commission's Report:

"Sergeant Mothasi was based at the Police College at Hammanskraal. He had laid a charge against a Colonel Van Zyl who had assaulted him, leaving him with a burst eardrum. Unsuccessful efforts were made to put pressure on him to withdraw charges.

On 30 November 1987, Hechter, Mamasela and Van Vuuren went to the Mothasi house. After ascertaining that Mothasi was not at home, Mamasela reported back to Hechter and Van Vuuren, who instructed him to return and to take Ms. Irene Busi Mothasi into one of the back rooms. Hechter and Van Vuuren then entered the house and sat in darkness until Mothasi had returned, when they tackled him. Van Vuuren put a pillow over his head to act as a silencer and then shot him. Mamasela claims that he was also instructed to kill Ms. Mothasi, but left the child. This is disputed by Hechter and Van Vuuren who claim that they were unaware of the child and that Mamasela killed Ms. Mothasi of his own accord. Neighbors subsequently reported hearing the child crying through the night.

...Captain Jacques Hetchter...and Paul van Vuuren have applied for amnesty for the killing, but claim that they were told that Mothasi was passing information on to the ANC.” (Volume 2: p. 271)¹¹

Now other than a spelling difference in the name (which Krog has gotten wrong), and a certain deletion of personal voice, there is no fundamental loss in the conflictual character of the testimony here, since the dispute over responsibility for the killing of the wife remains in the Report. Again, it is wrong to generalize from a single example, but in the interests of space and time I am doing this, suggesting that such disputes over factual truth are not atypical to the Report, which cannot rightly be accused of the systematic deletion of contestatory views.

The Commission acknowledges uncertainty in this case. This is important. But it is not the only thing that is important. What also matters the powerful level of *agreement* that exists between the three versions, and which is acknowledged in the Report. Each version admits to the fact of the killing of Mutase, each admits that the wife was rubbed out by someone, each admits that the child was spared. None of *this* is in doubt, which is to say, the doubt concerns the issue of perpetrator guilt rather than whether a gross violation of human rights occurred or not. Now I want to hazard the remark, and hazard it in the absence of further presentation of cases here, that such levels of disagreement and agreement about “factual truth” and related, issues of guilt and innocence, are typical to the body of evidence which the Commission received and processed.

At the next level, as it were, of “factual truth” (the Commission’s term) things are far less certain. That level concerns issues of perpetrator responsibility and each fabricates in various respects—we are unsure who more than the others. These men saw themselves as foot soldiers in a “dirty war”. Their self-descriptions, no doubt half believed and half produced for the purposes of truth telling and amnesty getting, are highly debatable and uncertain with respect to believability (is this how they really saw themselves or not, to what degree were they also motivated by raw undiluted racist rage, even Mamasela, etc. etc.). In terms of explaining the background which produced the likes of them, the broader explanatory models which must be relied on to describe their formation are also powerfully debatable. Even the *range* of explanation, involving reference to the importance of apartheid structures, state technologies of power crucial to modernity in general, racist formations which are also those of white tribalism (Afrikaaner nationalism), while up to a point evident, is hardly indubitable, as the many competing theories of modernity, colonialism, power and state terror will attest.

At the first level of factual truth, there is no disagreement about that the killings took place. There were gross violations, according to the terms of the definition of that. Which are themselves the product of a partially debatable but also highly convincing framework of definition. At the first level, questions of perpetrator guilt are uncertain, and precisely uncertain where questions of retribution for the perpetrators arise in pointed form (who killed the nurse for what cannot be, to the commission, a “convincing” political reason). At the second level of truth, that of broader explanatory and causal frameworks, things are far less certain, and indeed, the line, it must be said, between fact and explanation is itself quite unclear. One might say that causal reference to the security forces is a fact, while to the political system, a structural explanation. But the apartheid system is also, in certain contexts, an evident *fact*. Here Nietzsche’s dictum that “there are no facts, only interpretations” takes on special aptness, since the line between fact and interpretation these is itself a matter at debate (interpretation) rather than of fact. Where fact ends and reasoning about fact begins is, contra positivism, a matter of interpretation.

Posel is thus right in one respect: by assuming that factual truth is “the same” both at the first and the second levels, the commission indulges in an epistemic mistake, which points itself in the direction of an unthinking positivism, reducing explanation to the status of first level fact. This even while retreating to the Ignatieff position.

We continue down the path of truth to the concepts of Social and Dialogue Truth. Why, we shall see in a moment. Social truth is truth about social relations, as in a community's view of its prospects for cooperation. Added to social truth is "dialogue truth", a concept thought up by Albie Sachs, an important member of the ANC and currently a Constitutional Judge in South Africa. "Dialogue truth" is "the truth of experience that is established through interaction, discussion and debate" (Volume 1: p. 113), and for the philosophical reader it rather approximates Jurgen Habermas' notion of reflective truth which is intersubjectively produced through the open dialogue of free, equal and informed persons, and which leads to consensus. How such truth is represented, much less measured, in the Report is totally unclear. There is something to Posel's view that by naming these kinds of truth, the Report engenders for itself the illusion that it has covered all the bases of truth in its domain and range, although I think it more likely that if one reads the progression of kinds of "truth" that the commission articulates, beginning with factual truth, proceeding into social and dialogic truth, and culminating in restorative truth, it is meant to read like a Pilgrim's Progress.

This is the point I wanted to build up to: that the four truths are the product of a religious imagination more than anything else, as in the case of "the fourfold way" of Bhuddism, or "the seven stages of enlightenment" which the young European hippie so admires when he reads his mystical literature on the airplane to an ashram in Poona. There are philosophical legacies of this in European history as well, from Aristotelianism to neo-Platonism. To bring out the point, consider the idea of Restorative truth, the "final and highest stage of truth", which is defined in this way: "There is also 'healing' truth, the kind of truth that places facts and what they mean within the context of [actual] human relationships—both among citizens and between the state and its citizens." (Volume 1: p. 114) This healing involves in the first instance:

"Acknowledgement...acknowledgement refers to placing information that is (or becomes) known on public, national record. It is not mere the factual information about past human rights violations that counts; often the basic facts about what happened are already known, at least by those who were affected. What is critical is that these facts be fully and publicly acknowledged. Acknowledgement is an affirmation that a person's pain is real and worthy of attention. It is thus central to the restoration of dignity of victims." (Volume 1: p. 114)

Restorative truth is the *placing* of truth in the human context where it effects, or may point in the direction of, reconciliation. This involves placing "the facts" in the public archive, but goes beyond that to the dynamic power of truth *set to work*, as Heidegger might have put it, in human relations. It is the appropriate recognition of truth, the appropriate inscription of it, the appropriate interpolation of it, the appropriate communalization of it, which restores—in a way that is "truthful to" human nature and perfectibility if you will. The concept is literally about "truth telling", "truth remembering" and "truth instituting", both in the institution of the archive and in the fabric of human life. This leads to reconciliation between persons and with the state. Restorative truth, the "restoration of dignity", is already reconciliation in gel.

The inner logic of this bricolage of truth categories, articulated in the impromptu way it has been, is less about positivism and more about a logic of movement from truth to reconciliation. It is about the formulation and formalization of a mode of progression; about a way forward according to an allegorical formula which is literalized through these analytics of truth. This allegory of the stages of truth, this way forward from truth to reconciliation, which includes the concept of the archive, of the archive as place and as site of script at work, is a recasting of the great Protestant ethic of perfectibility under a different title but with the same metaphysico-religious basis. It is this idea of truth as constituting a *path*, of fact as hardly inert but instead energized by the larger picture of Aristotelian *energia* which Christianity took as the divine inscription of God in the world. I say these things because, to repeat, the history of philosophy

has been about the articulation of concepts of truth in the light of larger metaphysical pictures which embrace the coat of many colours that is the world, in its various aspects, brought together in a single master story which includes science, ethics and the divine principle. Here the establishment of a Leibnitzian order brings together everything from the gathering of evidence to to question of amnesty into a scheme of truths which leads to a similar perfectibility. To understand this scheme in terms of positivism is both half incorrect (given the fallibilist mood of the Commission) and too small (from the metaphysical point of view). For the Report is the heir to an entire tradition of philosophico-religious conceptualization, which it cobbles together in the manner of a momentary *coup de grace* but which has the scope of centuries of intellectual preparation. Such concepts are the daily bread, the wine and wafer of those versed in the verses, of the cloth, of those who wear the coat of many colours, of those who know in their bones what Kant called “the Judeo-Christian tradition”. The Report, in articulating this arrangement of concepts, from truth to reconciliation, in literalizing allegory (Pilgrim’s Process as the progression of truths) makes the work of truth-giving a gift of the biblical (in Derrida’s sense of the gift), as if from Mt. Sinai, from the Sermon on the Mount, or from the pages of Protestant literature.

This grand narrative relating evidence, testimony, interpretation, assignation, archive, to communalization, respect, working through, and finally, reconciliation, is illustrated by the banner which appeared above the commission every day it did its work: *Truth: The Road to Reconciliation*. They meant it literally, given the system of concepts which can be found in the Report. That this narrative of truth as a road is overriding in the Commission’s self-ideal is what makes its work biblical, a Coat of Many Colours, which brings together archival narration, moral storytelling, human perfectibility, and law so that a nation may endlessly recite and remember its good news for modern men and women and become itself. It is in the light of this overriding self-image that the true criticisms of the Commission must, I think, be placed. Is this narrative a gift of history, or an illusion and re-opiation by other means? That it is a fabrication cannot discount it, given the role of fabrication in all nation building. The question becomes the Nietzschean one: In what respects is this history lesson an abuse, and in what a use? The interlocking between abuse and use is what counts—one way or the other, one way and the other. One thing to say would be that whatever good the Commission accomplished—and no one, neither Posel, Bundy nor anyone else other than the likes of P.W. Botha, denies this—has been accomplished in spite of the grand narrative, not because of it. I find this thesis too simple for the reason that in all kinds of ways, the religiosity of the proceedings are what impelled the giving of evidence, the sense of victim closure, and so on.

What we have here is a theory of truth if you will, but more than that a speech act, a way of producing a gesture towards reconciliation, of pointing the procedure in a certain direction, by designing its terms of truth. As J.L. Austin taught, the utterance of words, or their writing, is a way of making something happen in the world and not simply a way of describing the world. Put another way, describing the world can be a rhetorical act, a way of constructing the world for a certain purpose, and the narrative of truth is here exactly that: a way of parsing so as to make something happen in it. Were reconciliation to eventuate, the theory of truth might in one sense be “proven true”, which is to say the act of inventing these truth categories would be successful. But even if reconciliation does not eventuate, the creation of these truth categories is a gesture, part of the performance of the commission, and must be evaluated (pragmatically) as such. The Commission is what has happened at a specific historical moment, a moment of impossible needs but also a moment in which a coat of many colours could be mandated and worn in the rhetorical gesture of Tutu’s robes. The impossibility of the mandate, ranging from the taking of testimony and the setting up of an archive, to the explanation of the past and the setting forth of a path towards reconciliation, is part of this performative, gestural character. I call this its biblical character, but it could also be called its ritualistic character. Would the Commission have done better, given its place and time, to have refused to wear this mantle and instead confined itself to

smaller, more monochromatic tasks? Or did the Commission take up the mandate, wear the coat in a way worthy of the way its place and time appeared to it as a gift, a blessing? What would have been a better response to the exigencies of this history?

As a speech act, the construction of the way of truth has a double purpose. First, it is a gesture invoking the biblical presence of reconciliation, occasioning attitudes, thoughts, ideals, along such lines. Second, it is a way of excluding alternative constructions of the truth game that that Commission is engaged in. Thus, given the road from fact to reconciliation, it would prove contrary to “the truth” that persons should at the end of the day disagree about matters of society, justice, and the like. The “third level of truth” would be violated, meaning the expectation that given social communication, a deeper set of agreements will emerge. Well, they have—up to a point. And up to a point not. But the construction pressures thinking in the direction of the formula: fact, complex fact, social conversation, deeper social agreement, reconciliation. This formula is of course a national ideal, a national imaginary. Another way of putting the point is that in it, thought and history are articulated according to a certain pattern, which is what Foucault means by an epistemic regime, a set of rules producing the generation of true statements, true thoughts, true ideals. Here the rules are the rules for the production of truth.

There are many ways to think about truth, some more abstract than others. Speech acts inventing pictures of truth, narratives of movement from one truth to another, are contextual, and must be understood as such. They are never free of power, which means both the power to constrain and the power to empower. The invention of a truth regime by the Commission, however ad hoc, is an articulation of a structure of power and knowledge which empowers reconciliation (between individuals, between South Africa and its past) but also constrains the domain of acceptable judgments (pertaining, for example, to violence, reparation, disagreement). It is at this level that both Posel and Bundy are deeply right. Merely to say that a strategy of inclusion and exclusion is therefore not yet to impugn it, any more than it is to applaud it. No doubt both sides of the equation are solicited in the end.

It was Nietzsche who argued in The Use and Abuse of History that all history veers between fact and fabrication, facts being themselves interpretations and their assembling a matter of procedure, formula, narration. Within this broad space for historical archives and historical stories, lying may have its historical use, while dedication to truth may represent an abuse, depending on the circumstances. The Nietzschean sentiment resides behind Foucault.

A gesture by its very nature invites a blurring of the line between fact and fiction, truth and lying, the literal and the allegorical, and it invites above all an analysis of its context of expression, its domain of reception, its ongoing revisitations by the future. For a gesture is by its very nature incomplete, “gestural”, it points in a direction that it cannot presume to reach, and which it might not even be coherent for one to assume it could ever reach. It seems to me that what is lacking from so many analyses of the Truth Commission by a country in many ways rightly obsessed with concrete fact and concrete progress is the historicity of this gesture: its truth and lying, its use and abuse. The Commission accomplished many things, which few deny, but its accomplishment, or failure thereof, is also in the domain of the gestural. If my analysis of its construction of truth is correct, it is within this range of question that the Commission stakes its own success, and we must therefore ask: what are its gestures, how have they been taken, how will they be taken, how should they be taken.

No doubt we are in the neo-natal position: it is too early to know the answers to this range of questions. And this is made clear by the very neologism in the phrase, “giving an historical analysis of the present”. I am sure that there will be, even later, no simple answers to these questions, if only because a gesture changes as people return to it and, in the course of time, give it ongoing reconsideration.

III

The way of truth is not the only fiction in this proceeding. The very idea of reconciliation in South Africa, of reconciliation as process and as goal or ideal, that it is, strictly speaking, a fiction as well. Reconciliation implies that beings formerly at one have become dirempted, been torn apart, as Christ was from the Holy Trinity. And that the task is to restore them to their former state of adonement. But South Africans were never at one, not even before the time of the white man from the far north and his big horse and his big gun. Indeed they were not even *South Africans*, just peoples of the south (we shall revisit a newer version of peoples of the south in a future essay). Reconciliation is for South Africa a way of creating an origin for peoples who have never had it. For Bishop Tutu this origin resides in a metaphysical picture of human ethics: people are, according to ethical principle, one. They are one through the lens of the Judeo-Christian enlightenment and one through the lens of Ubuntu, which says that people are people only through other people. But through *which* other people in particular are they one?? It was in the old, “pre-colonial days” that the various peoples were one, but not often through each other. Tutu extends this to: “People are people through all other people”, which is a Christianization of it, a Kantianization of it, but which is also empirically correct within the modern history of South Africa (the past of concern to the Truth Commission), where people have been the people they are through the system which assigns them a mode of relation to other people. Tutu is quite clever about this. One of its implications concerns the issue “collective white guilt”. Even if you were dead against apartheid, you benefited as a white person in “the old South Africa” in so far as you allowed yourself to live a normal life (which most did), because in virtue of living that normal life you lived off of the labour of others (improperly paid), off the diversion of resources from others, off a society drained of competition, and so forth. Just as Pius Langa was placed in the position of victimizing the older men in line with him, something he had to avoid by actively doing something (lowering his eyes), so white people, in a society which so defined them, became placed in the position of collective victimization, a position which some or many no doubt enjoyed and found conceptually attractive. The tenet of Ubuntu, so Judeo-Christianized, prescribes truth-telling and then, reconciliation and reparation (which, to repeat, has not happened as yet).

Now the metaphysical fiction in terms of which people are thought of as originally at one, and hence in need of reconciliation, is in Tutu’s case not merely a matter of the application of an abstract ethical principle to South African humanity, which sees them as ethically at one—from always. Nor is it merely an empirical analysis of the systemic interminglings which have constituted modern South African life. Beyond that is the Christian ideal of a people (the South African one) which has fallen out of relationship with God. This Christian drama of a Trinity in which Christ is called on to reconcile man and God is the textual unconscious of the fiction. It is in terms of this drama that the script of reconciliation can be written as a script of *re*-conciliation. We shall find that another kind of script is required to write the African renaissance, another example of the mysterious *re*: the mysterious thing, the *big other* for those with a penchant for the work of Jacques Lacan. In the case of the African renaissance it will be the history of pan-African racialism, itself related (in part) to a reading of the bible. Here it is of a more directly biblical nature.

According to the terms of reconciliation, a nation can be asked to imagine that a past beyond the actual past is being restored to it through the events of the present. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission becomes of national importance by being of mythic importance. Its work causes this originary ethical state to recur. The *re* in renaissance and the *re* in reconciliation both share this myth of a return to origins which recur through the return, this sense of unification of past and present. And they are more closely connected that that, for

reconciliation is a form of return that will be part of the larger process of renaissance, of reflowering: in this case of a metaphysical state of ethical oneness mythologized as historically “actual”. Through this process of actualization, actual history is forgotten or overridden by the imagination, and the fiction is that pre-colonial times and modern times converged in a Rousseauesque moment in which white and black, coloured and non-coloured, man and woman, were all at one. It is therefore understandable that the debate about how to picture the relations between reconciliation and renaissance is a debate about what the proper fiction is and what its real, material implications might be. Thabo Mbeki believes that cultural renaissance is a prelude to reconciliation, while Tutu seems to believe that reconciliation is a prelude to renaissance. More than pedantry hangs on this distinction, for insofar as Mbeki’s view of the African renaissance is that it is a reinscription of pan-Africanism in a liberal context, and insofar as that view is coherent, then reconciliation is a fundamental change in the balance of power between white and black—culturally and also, materially. For Mbeki this is what reconciliation requires. We can see that an essay on the African renaissance must follow from one on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, or in the case of this book of essays, from two such essays, the second of which being about a matter somewhat more distantly related to the Tutu-Mbeki debate.

Now the concept of reconciliation entered into the stream of philosophical thinking from its Christian origins in the work of G.W.F. Hegel, who thought of history as a process of diremption and return, of breakup and restoration. Hegel believed that the very process of thinking had this metaphysical shape. Thought first finds itself at one with its object, then in a state of conflict, diremption or alienation, and through this conflict, thought finds better terms for the return to a state of harmony if you will with its object. In the course of the dialectic through which cognition takes place, both thought and its object change and their relationship is sublated, perfected, developed, the Hegelian term being *Aufgehoben*. In the course of human history, which is also for Hegel, the history of conceptual development, since for Hegel history is about humanity coming to realize itself though knowing itself, the entire struggle for recognition takes place between humans who apportion themselves unequal relations: those of master and slave. The master/slave dialectic I shall discuss in a later essay, the point being here that the struggle for recognition resolves the shape of the world defined by the master and the slave into a nation predicated on equality in law, citizenship and a public sphere with forms of religion, philosophy, and art—call it culture. This resolution is in essence a development of the human capacity to think, an achievement of truth about who human beings are, what their relations should consist in, and how they are interpolated into societies and political structures. For Hegel, optimist and eurocentric thinker that he was, the European nation state of the early 19th century represented the final truth, and therefore, the prospect of reconciliation. For reconciliation can come only at the end of history, according to Hegel.

Hegel’s idea of reconciliation is a secularization of the Protestant concept, an inheritance from the reformation and the Baroque, but one which, at least in The Philosophy of Right where it is given the most elaboration, presumes the end of history as its starting point. Reconciliation is inaugurated at the end of history. This is why: Reconciliation is about coming to a more truthful and better relation to the world as it is, in a way that will both make the individual subject more contented and better citizen, and will make the world itself better. It is about the perfection of modernity through the bringing of individuals into oneness with their social reality. As Michael Hardimon puts it, we may well hold expectations, say, utopian expectations, about what the end of history ought to be like that are unreasonable, and the function of reconciliation will be to:

“[free] oneself of expectations that one has justifiably come to regard as unreasonable. People who seek consolation [as opposed to reconciliation] regard the non-satisfaction of

their expectations as a genuine loss for which some kind of replacement or compensation is due. People who attain reconciliation come to see that the fact that their unreasonable expectations were not fulfilled does not constitute a real loss at all. It should be pointed out, however, that this form of reconciliation is not simply the result of recognizing the irrationality of one's original expectations alone. It is not a form of adaptive preference formation, or adaptive preference change. Rather we are supposing that the situation one becomes reconciled to is genuinely good. The role that recognizing the irrationality of one's original expectations plays in this form of reconciliation is that of making it possible to grasp the goodness of one's situation, which in turn brings about a state of reconciliation.

Reconciliation is not a matter of thinking that everything is wonderful. Hegel's celebrated rich and suggestive claim that reconciliation consists in recognizing "reason as the rose in the cross of the present" ...illustrates this point."¹²

Reconciliation is a way of accepting the limits of what is as limits on the rational expression of humanity per se, and therefore as no real loss. Everything therefore hangs on what would or does count as a real loss, a loss one cannot abide, a loss one cannot rationalize in the best sense of this term, a loss which would and should prevent one, on rational grounds, from believing that the world one inhabits is a home:

"'Reconciliation' in Hegel's technical sense of the term refers to both a *process*...and a *state*. The process is that of *overcoming alienation* from the social world, and the state, that of *being at home in the social world*, which is its result. Hegel says, for example, that reconciliation is "the movement that makes estrangement...disappear".....and he characterizes the final stage of *Geist's* reconciliation as that in which it "is reconciled with itself in the object"...Being at home in the social world...then, is the lunchpin of Hegel's theory. It is the concept out of which the concepts of both reconciliation and alienation are constructed."¹³

In turn the crucial idea of being at home, and following upon that, coming to recognize that one is at home in the world, has the following components, according to Hardimon's very clear reconstruction of Hegel:

"According to Hegel, people—modern people, anyway—are fully at home in the social world if and only if

- (i) the social world is a home,
- (ii) they grasp that the social world is a home,
- (iii) they feel at home in the social world, and
- (iv) they accept and affirm the social world."¹⁴

Each of these components of reconciliation is given great elaboration by Hegel, and again in Hardimon's clear reconstruction, but it is not with the details that I am here concerned. Naturally, for the social world to be a home, it must, on the Hegelian view, be capable of fostering human autonomy and social connectedness, a complex condition of self in which the self is free to follow its own course, while also understanding its essential interconnection in social life. This is not unlike the concept of Ubuntu, although that concept contains at present little emphasis on the Hegelian dialectic of autonomy and independence through communalism and dependency, and in the past, the concept contained very little about autonomy, which, as Hegel made clear, is a concept achieved only in modernity. In South African cultures, although not all of them, the modernist problem of individual alienation is not central. At least not quite and not yet, although this is rapidly happening in postmodern, post-apartheid South Africa, where a new

entrepreneurial class of black Africans, and more generally, of a coat of many colours, is taking on the neo-liberal stance, and with amazing naturalness. More about that in a moment.

Now South African reconciliation is happening at the beginning of a new constitutional history and is about *making the new society and nation a home*, rather than being about reconciliation by modern subjects to the fact (the truth) that it is one. Reconciliation inaugurations change rather than ending it. Hence the debate between Tutu and Mbeki about whether reconciliation can only happen after so much else has happened and South Africa becomes a home for the majority of people in it, or whether instead, reconciliation will lead to these other things happening which will make South Africa a home. Evidently both.

It is interesting to note that the language the Commission is Hegel's, either by reception or more likely, by reinvention:

“A principle task of the Commission was ‘restoring the dignity of victims’. The work of the Commission as a whole, together with the specific contributions of its three committees, underlined the need to restore the dignity of all South Africans. In the process, the sons and daughters of South Africa would begin to feel truly ‘at home’.” (Volume 1: p. 125)

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission makes clear that reconciliation is an ongoing process, not easy to achieve, that it may not always involve forgiveness, which may, sometimes be otiose, even if in its heart of hearts the TRC wants a culture of complete forgiveness, and hence of complete blessedness. The TRC makes clear that reconciliation involves the work of memory, of feeling the pain of the other, of recognition (recognizing who the other is and what she has been through). It makes clear that reconciliation carries with it a promissory note, it is a speech act containing a promise: that one shall work to change the structure of things (see Volume 5: pp 420-35). These are appropriate truisms, important to say at this time. My point is that for philosophy what the TRC has done is to reanimate the entire philosophical history which converts Christian concepts of reconciliation into secular ones, by taking both routes: reconciliation understood in terms of being at home and reconciliation as understood in terms of the subtext of a Christian reunification of Man and God.

When Hegel wrote so blithely about the end of history having been deposited as a gift in his lap, he could not have known about the urbanized, Weberian world of technology, bureaucracy, about the panoptic demonstration of power which the 19th century would develop and reveal, about the suspicions of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud that in modernity, truth is the crystallization of illusion and violence, about the long haul of modernity into state terror, about the animation of racism and hatred in the guise of science, and later, after that, in more recent times, about the innumerable talk shows, individual therapies, CNN reports, Diasporic losses of family and community, matrices of lives spent surfing the net and playing video games while engaging in telephonic sex with persons they hardly ever meet. He could not have known about these events any more than he could have predicted that pasta would be now available in a rainbow of colours, so that in the restaurants of New York, Rome, Oshkosh Wisconsin, also in the cities of the rainbow nation--Johannesberg, Durban, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Bloemfontein, Pretoria--persons wearing coats in a multitude of astonishing colours could taste and sample with white wine, while the Truth Commission was busy on the job listening and learning, speaking and writing. These neo-liberal people, in South African of colour, while presupposing a culture of reconciliation through constitutional law and economic empowerment, are the new breed of South African entrepreneur, living newly rich multinational, globalized lives with little place for the concept of reconciliation. They are matched by a new culture of urbanized youth who claim the great concrete walls of the city park as their cultural origins rather than anything in the culture of Ubuntu and who have little time and interest in the past, hence in the idea of reconciliation. It is not unpredictable that among the entrepreneurs, it is the neo-liberal terms of the African Renaissance which appeal more than

those of Truth: the Road to Reconciliation. Nor is it unpredictable that among these urbanized youth what counts is the buzz of the city, the present, the new identity to be taken on and worn with aplomb. More on that in another essay, and more on the end of history and its relation to such conditions in yet another. Post-authoritarian societies are often societies of forgetting, and this in the interest of growth, life, spirit and normalization. I found this in Brazil when there in the early 1990s, where those who had been young in the terror of fascism and had worried about their parents just wanted to normalize, create and enjoy. One should not assume that the only route to a better future is through the path of remembering, the path of truth, however poignant the idea is to one's own neo-religious, liberal conscience. Human life has preceded through the biological necessity for pain amnesia, even if forgetting is also the disease of which it can, at times, also be the cure. That is also with which to reconcile, consoling oneself in the process that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is doing its good work anyway.

IV

Recall that Father Michael Lapsley, who lost both arms and an eye in a near fatal security police parcel bomb attack in Harare in 1990, told the Commission that he needs to know who to endeavor to forgive. He knows that his gesture of trying may fail, or meet at best with partial success. Meanwhile one listens to the voices of the children:

“...[A] facilitator at the special hearing on children and youth in Durban gave this feedback from children’s testimonies and drawings: She quoted from the testimony of a thirteen-year-old girl about the killing of her father six years earlier on the South Coast of KwaZulu Natal:

‘Another picture...I have here from an eight year old girl. She drew her father as a small or young man, and the mother being short, and when I asked the child why she is drawing the father short she said that [the] reason she drew her father short it’s because the father was helpless, and they surrounded her father and they poured petrol on him and burnt him. What is very sad about this is that these children, most of them they know the people who did this, and those people are still alive and they see them every day. And another child who is eight years old said, ‘I am just waiting for my revenge’.” (Volume 5: pp. 417-8)

We might say that Father Lapsley wishes, like Joseph, to go in search of his brothers, so that he might make them again, for the first time, brothers. But so does this girl want to find her “brothers”, although not to the same purpose. How far can one go in search of one’s brothers, or sisters and with what attitude? Whom can you make your brother, or sister, or sage, or friend, or partner or King? Either in reality or in the imagination?:

“Many victims justifiably insisted that there were not prepared to forgive if this meant that they must ‘close the book on the past,’ let bygones be bygones’...forgiveness is not about forgetting. It is about seeking to forgo bitterness, renouncing resentment, moving past old hurt, and becoming a survivor rather than a passive victim.” (Volume 1: P. 116)

In 1992 my wife and I visited an artist’s colony outside of the town of Paarl, in the Western Cape. Paarl had been one of the centres of Afrikaner nationalism. The artist’s colony was located in a small village in God’s own country. It was called Dal Josefata, the place of Joseph, the other Joseph, father of Jesus. Perhaps it was the place of both Josephs. Dal Josefata had been designated a “coloured town” during the apartheid days and many “coloured” farm workers still lived there. The colony, set on soft rolling hills, consisted of a manor house in the Cape Dutch style, a barn, and a few small houses in which farm workers had lived, and whose simple white walls, wooden doors, concrete floors and green sloping roofs now opened to visitors like ourselves. In the distance, through the haze of brilliant yellowish-blue light, could be seen the dry, cropped mountains of the Cape. Each morning sheep from a neighboring farm were brought to graze—gently, in the manner of a Bach cantata. The artists, lively and raucous, slept late, painted moderately, smoked, and consumed a great deal of red wine, usually sitting on the back steps of the old manor house, whose stately wooden floors and formerly elegant dining room lead out to the sloping hill behind which bent down to the river.

It was by that river that one evening, a few years later, the young woman who with her artist husband ran the place, was walking her baby in its carriage when she was brutally attacked by a local. Beaten to a pulp, within an inch of her life, she suffered permanent facial disfigurement and numerous other injuries. When questioned about the assault, the man who did it said that he just

wanted to lash out at someone. A “coloured man,” no doubt he had his own history. The baby, a silent and uncomprehending witness, could say nothing. Will that baby too want its revenge? The colony suffered other human tragedies and, in spite of assistance from the University of Stellenbosch, gradually fell into moral atrophy and financial ruin. I mention this story because the woman who was attacked is a daughter of one of the persons who sat on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I do not say the story is relevant.

¹ The New Jerusalem Bible, ed. A. Jones (Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 1968), pp. 42-3.

² Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, Volume 1 (CTP Book Printers and Juta and Co: Cape Town), 1998, p. 107. Hereafter all references to the five volumes of the report will follow the quotes with volume number and page numbers.

³ Krog, Antjie, Country of My Skull (Jonathan Cape: London, 1998), P 29--hereafter referred to at the end of the relevant quote as: Krog and page number.

⁴ Posel, Deborah “The TRC Report: What Kind of History? What Kind of Truth?”, delivered at University of Witwatersrand conference, 1998, pp. 4-5.

⁵ Bundy, “The Beast of the Past: History and the TRC”, delivered at University of Witwatersrand Conference, 1998.

⁶ Posel, Ibid, p. 27.

⁷ Posel, Ibid, p. 3.

⁸ Posel, Ibid, p. 23

⁹ Posel, Ibid, p.3.

¹⁰ She presents five but there is no conceptual loss, I believe, in reducing them to three. Because the other two consist of a fictional account, and a very brief notice in the newspaper, The Sowetan.

¹¹ I thank Patrick Lenta for his internet skill in tracking through the report for the Mothasi case it is well known that the report suffers from a lack of an index, making it a gargantuan task to find anything.)

¹² Hardimon, Michael; Hegel’s Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation (Cambridge Press: Cambridge and London, 1994), p. 89.

¹³ Ibid, p. 95.

¹⁴ Ibid.