

Truth and Forgiveness: both, either, neither?

Peter Geyer

The railman called: My baby done caught that train and gone

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It was all my fault

I must have did somebody wrong

Everything that happens, I know I am to blame

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I'm gonna find myself a doctor,

Perhaps my luck will change

Gregg Allman (1971)

The melancholy truth [is] that most people are mediocrities and fools...and that laws and institutions come into being precisely because most people cannot be counted upon to behave in the manner of heroes and saints.

Lewis H. Lapham (1994)

I was amused at uni to observe that it was always the ethics lecturers who were sleeping with their students

Chris Taylor (2003)

Did you love me forever just for those three days?

Lucinda Williams (2003)

Have you ever done anything wrong, for whatever reason? What happened? Did anyone find out and, if so, how did you respond? Was there some sort of resolution, forgiveness even, or does the taste of bitterness lurk nearby? Was the truth identified? What would you do if someone else had done wrong?

Amidst all those questions is something about life and living that's normal experience: the ebb and flow of life. Mistakes, inadvertent or otherwise, are part of everyday life: from relationships to workplace, professional presentations and so on. Sometimes the event gets overwhelmed by various responses that can trivialise or exaggerate the offence, and sometimes it relates to where various people are at in themselves at a particular point in time.

I like to think (and this may be delusory) that I can admit to my faults and failings, but only about the truth (events that happened) not fabrications. I expect that of others, as

well. And I also expect to receive forgiveness, which has got me into a bit of trouble over the years. I'll forgive as well, but of course that's also contingent and I'm well aware I don't meet my own standards all the time.

Truth's a funny thing, though, and sometimes you have to dig below the surface to find out what's going on. A glance at the reference for the Gregg Allman quote above might give you the idea that Morris Levy was involved in its creation. But Levy was one of the many unsavoury characters in 1950s American music, and his name was there because he owned the record label and music publishing, something fairly regular in those days (Miller 1999).

This is obviously exploitation and was much more the rule rather than the exception. On the other side of the coin, you have blues legend John Lee Hooker admitting to recording for several record companies under various pseudonyms at one stage, responding to large sums of money waved at him, which he decided to take (Gillett 1984; pp150-51)

Sometimes ideals and ambition get in the way of the truth. *Harper's* editor, the distinguished commentator Lewis Lapham, points out that life in general in many ways implies ordinariness, which is no bad thing, unless denied out of hand and impossible standards set or fantasies propounded. Achievement is a two-edged sword even before you get into the detail of what may be required. Richard Sennet suggests, in a book with many insights that often the "language of potential" is better replaced by "a language of small steps; of concrete limited victories" (2003; p35). Sensing is as valuable as intuition, and sometimes more so, if you want to put it another way.

In politics, this ordinariness can be exemplified in our representatives: as you might expect in a democracy, now you come to think of it. When I was examining the relationship between type and emotions, I was drawn to Graham Little's book *The Public Emotions* (1999) in which he bemoaned the lack of emotional leadership in Australian politics, and elsewhere.

I doubt that things have changed much, except for the emotional role the Prime Minister has played regarding the Bali bombings and its aftermath, where he has expressed the ordinary emotions of an SJ parent to those people, ordinary themselves, who have suffered, and has been accepted for that. This of course is in the midst of seemingly contrary behaviour on other issues regarding truth and emotion. Shaun Carney has summarised this approach recently in a broad discussion about accountability in business and politics as being "Never confess, never apologise. Never confirm or deny" (2003).

This may be a cultural problem of course. Jerry Harvey tells of the Japanese pilot, who completed a successful four-point landing of his aircraft on San Francisco Bay, rather than on the runway of the airport not far away. The enquiry into this event lasted as long as it took for the captain to admit responsibility (1988). You don't see that here very often, although there are some outbursts, and whistleblowers, to upset the applecart from time to time.

The Navajo, if the crime writings of Tony Hillerman are any guide (and he has respect from those people) have appropriate ceremonies for whatever transgression has been committed, so that the person concerned can be brought back into harmony with the tribe and its world (2003). Hillerman's books, which I recommend highly, offer a different landscape, which I was lucky to see a little of a few years ago and saw some of the people.

It's also an insight into a world where introverted feeling seems to guide, rather than the extraverted thinking of various US federal Government agencies. Proper use of a function also requires quality, of course. These organisations are portrayed rather negatively in the books (there are a dozen or so), and one can see why, in that listening to others is not a skill and a counterproductive overkill in terms of resources applied. You may find this all too familiar if you're a watcher or reader of international news in the last year or so.

This juxtaposition also means different rules for conversation and questioning, more patience essentially, and more space, and the notion of rehabilitation, rather than punishment, a rather vexed question in our society.

These issues of rehabilitation and punishment naturally cross over into the world of type. Recently, I was coaching someone on aspects of type, who said she'd been asked to do a type presentation for senior management of a company and that the presentation was to be one hour. She demurred on the request, suggesting that that was impossible, to which the response was that it had been done before. She said to the company she would wait to check with me during the coaching before responding, in that she was sure that the minimum requirement was much longer than that, but wanted it confirmed, and of course 3 hours is the minimum time for that sort of thing.

More recently, I received an email from a person responding to a random mailout of mine enquiring about accreditation and the prerequisites. It was explained to me that this company was currently employing an external psychologist to administer the MBTI and

other instruments. It turned out that the company used MBTI as part of a recruitment process, and that feedback was given to a relevant manager on the results, but not to the person concerned, unless they had actually got the job.

The situation described was clearly a breach of MBTI ethics (and psychologists' ethics, really). So I chose the words of my response as carefully as I could manage and suggested that the activity wasn't appropriate and why, and allowed for the possibility that the person using the MBTI may not be aware of the requirements for using the MBTI. Communication ceased from that point, so I don't know what happened at the other end. My current thought is that I said something unpalatable, but time will tell.

For those of you out in the business world, and elsewhere, really, these two stories won't be new, or unusual. I get regular anecdotal information from people in courses regarding inappropriate use of the MBTI. I don't get told the names of these organisations (people are afraid of dobbing, or getting into trouble), but I can work out some of them.

MBTI ethics is something emphasised when you become accredited, but not really checked thereafter, the function of a lifelong qualification, I suppose. To appropriate Lewis Lapham's comments in this context. I'd be happy to see MBTI use regulated more than it is at present: perhaps a time limit on initial accreditation and some specific refresher training after that time, but another part of me thinks that it won't make any difference. I don't have any power in these matters in any case.

Otto Kroeger said many years ago that the only person you could judge ethically was yourself, which I struggle with while conceding his point. Similarly, Isabel Myers stated you should use your perception on others and your judgement on yourself. At the same time, as in politics and elsewhere, I'd like to see accountability, truth, and forgiveness as well, however hard that might be.

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