

## Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela's Legacy

In the Old Testament, in Exodus and in Deuteronomy, we find reference to the Abrahamic Ethic: *liberty, equality* and *fraternity*, in addition to a strong stress on monotheism. These three precepts have recurred throughout history, especially during the French Revolution and in the writings and speeches of Abraham Lincoln \*. They are also adopted by Islam in the Quran and by the Bahai faith.

In an earlier essay [\*Biological Imperatives for Humanity\*](#) (BIH) I have placed such concepts within a framework involving *competition* versus *cooperation*. I quote from that source:

“The social nature of hominids engenders *cooperation*. Groups of hunters working together are able to bring down large dangerous prey animals and are able to defend them from other powerful predators and scavengers. Communication, the transfer of information, is a key capability that strengthens cooperation. It is not a uniquely human trait. For example, elephants communicate and even exhibit cultural memory, as do Japanese macaques. Humans have taken this trait to extraordinary levels. Nevertheless, cooperation is only half of the story. The other half is *competition*. As cooperation advanced into larger and larger groups, from families to clans and then tribes, competition developed between these groupings. Competition for prey, for territory and for status creates an outlet for that innate ferocity and leads to strife, even armed combat. The history of modern humans is so rife with strife that if it weren’t for a very strong desire for cooperativity the record would be one of endless war. Humans go to battle over race, religion, kinship, political affiliation, nationality and gender. Some of the same persons who balk at capital punishment are quite willing to support the military and kill their enemies in war.”

It is not easy or even natural for *liberty, equality* and *fraternity* to emerge from these biological imperatives.

Moreover, inclusion of *retributive punishment* (vengeance) in the Law of Moses, i.e. life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot (found in both Exodus and Deuteronomy) makes it difficult for harmony between clans or tribes to be maintained. Retribution can lead to endless cycles of perceived unequal justice and, therefore, further retribution.

Even after the advent of Christianity there have been strong proponents of retributive punishment. Emmanuel Kant expressed this view in the assertion that a murderer should be punished by death.

Christianity grew out of the teachings of Jesus and his apostles. Chief among these teachings is Christian mercy or *forgiveness*. This idea takes the form of *turn the other cheek*, a *non-violent response* to aggression found in the New Testament in Matthew and in Luke.

The modern manifestations of non-violent protests are found in the actions of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Cesar Chavez, to name a few. Albert Einstein came around to this view late in life as has been carefully analyzed by [David Krieger](#) and stressed in BIH.

Both forgiveness and nonviolent protest are asymmetric, one party taking a higher ground (this is not equality). The forgiver feels good about himself and the forgiven feels relieved, or maybe like having gotten away with something.

An elevated state of human grace is *reconciliation*. This has symmetry and leads to truly enhanced cooperation, which by nature must be symmetric, i.e. involving equal partners. After reconciliation the parties can join in common efforts for the common good (this is *fraternity*).

It is the principle and practice of reconciliation that has put Nelson Mandela in a hallowed place in the history of humans. To be able to reconcile with his oppressors as he did after years of apartheid, was remarkable. Only the most enlightened being could have done so.

(\* Lincoln frequently used the words *liberty* and *equality*, but instead of *fraternity* he used its equivalent, *brotherhood*.)

Ronald F. Fox  
Smyrna, Georgia  
December 14, 2013