

RUNNING HEADER: Moral Time

Moral Time and the Inevitability of Conflict

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Human conflict occurs in both simple affairs and complex discrepancies. According to Donald Black, the very idea of conflict is the clash between right and wrong. The dispute between the concepts of right and wrong have been created by humans throughout time. The issues encompassed by this phenomenon occur when one individual, or group, defines another individual's, or groups behavior as wrong. In an attempt to explain the very nature of conflict and the reason it continues to exist throughout time, Black details his understanding of moral time. Black defines moral time as the movement of social space that leads to moral conflicts, actions that are considered right or wrong. Social space is a phenomenon that consists of relational intimacy, vertical stratification, and cultural diversity. When the degrees of distance changes in each of these areas, conflict occurs. Black details his theory in his book *Moral Time*. Throughout the book, Black's detailed explanation of these nuances allow his reader to gain a deeper understanding about how and why conflict occurs.

In explaining each of these concepts, Black iterates three common themes. First, social time is dynamic. It causes conflict because it can change. Second, the movement of social time is a zero-sum game, meaning one individual's, or group's, gain is another individual's, or group's loss. And finally, the greater and faster the degree of distance changes, the greater the chance a conflict will occur, and the greater the conflict will be. The compilation of Black's general theory has a practical value that allows readers to understand the implications of change, and the cause of conflict.

In part 1 of *Moral Time* Black discusses the link between relational distance and conflict. Relational distance refers to the amount of participation two individuals, or groups, have in each other's lives. As this degree of intimacy between individuals, or groups increases, or decreases, conflicts arise. An increase in intimacy is understood as *overintimacy*. Overintimacy occurs when relational distance decreases. Black considers the conflict of rape to exemplify an issue that arises when an unwanted dramatic increase in intimacy takes place. Just as overintimacy presents conflicts, so does *underintimacy*. Underintimacy is explained as the issues that take place when the relational distance between individual's, or groups increase. Black shows this type of conflict by detailing the Hehe Tribe in

Tanzania. In this tribe “...a failure to greet a neighbor might lead to the slighted individual to try to harm or even kill the offender” (Black, 2011, 50). Here the conflict is clear. The neighbors lack of engagement with their fellow neighbor disrupts the distance of social time and creates underintimacy. This increase in relational distance leads to the creation of an issue.

In part 2 of *Moral Time* Black explains the correlation between the movement of vertical time and the creation of conflict. Vertical distance includes the variation in an individual’s or groups social status, reputation and performance. Vertical time produces conflict when the level of inequality changes between individual’s, or groups. As vertical distance increases *overstratification* occurs. This distance can increase when one individual, or group rises above another, or falls even further below another. One example of overstratification that caused a conflict in my life developed when I was the only freshman to make the varsity soccer team. As a result, the fellow freshman athletes that tried out distanced themselves from me. It’s simple, my position on the varsity team increased the vertical distance between myself and the other freshman, and as a result, a conflict was created. Conflict also arises when the distance decreases between individual’s, or groups, this is known as *understratification*. History provides a great example of a time when understratification created a conflict. In America, after the Civil Rights Movement the distance between African Americans and whites began to decrease. As African Americans began competing with whites for jobs, earning higher wages, and living in previously predominantly white areas conflict increased. It’s simple, the vertical distance between African Americans and whites decreased, leading to some whites feeling increasingly threatened. As Black has clearly portrayed, the social time moved and conflict directly followed.

The final aspect of social time that Black considers in *Moral Time* is referred to as cultural time. Conflicts of cultural time occur when there is a change in cultural diversity. *Overdiversity* occurs when the amount of diversity an individual, or group experiences increases. Diversity increases when multiple traditions are introduced to each other, when a new idea emerges, or when an opinion that differs from the mainstream is proposed. In class we discussed the conflict that occurred as a result of the appearance of the phrase “All lives matter” on the free speech wall. This caused conflict on DU’s campus, because the

predominant beliefs of students and faculty at this school are liberal. Therefore, many people at DU felt that their beliefs were attacked. This phrase introduced a different cultural thought to this school's climate. This belief contradicted the accepted cultural framework and conflict was created as a result. Just as overdiversity causes conflict, so does *underdiversity*. Underdiversity is the result when cultural sameness increases. In class we discussed the response to the above conflict when a camera was introduced to monitor the free speech wall. This camera was added after the overdiversity mentioned above led to a conflict. In adding the camera, another conflict was created. The camera symbolizes underdiversity because it limits the diversity of thought that is "allowed" to be shared freely. This camera clearly appropriates the mainstream beliefs and threatens to punish those who wish to introduce a different cultural view point.

Blacks theory of social time is put to the test in the movie, *The Giver*. This movie depicts a society where The Elders in control have attempted to eliminate human conflict by stopping the movement of social time that creates to conflict. According to Blacks theory, "If social space were frozen forever, conflict would never occur" (Black, 2011, 5). In order to freeze social time, citizens' rights and access to knowledge are limited, and their lives are structured uniformly. By eliminating variation of ideas and creating a very structured lifestyle, this society has limited the potential for conflicts and controlled the behavior of citizens' actions through highly detailed rules and traditions. By removing the capacity for relationships, stratification, and diversity to fluctuate, this society was seemingly relieved of conflict.

As mentioned in *Moral Time*, changes in relational distance between parties leads to conflict. These changes in relational distance include all the detailed aspects that accompany over intimacy and under intimacy. In *The Giver*, The Elders sought to control the distance that exists in relationships. This relational distance is regulated through explicit rules. As detailed in the film, there are very specific guidelines for the amount of allowed contact with people. For example, no contact between citizens is allowed in public. Physical contact in households is also controlled, as is shown when Jonas and Lily are questioned for dancing. It was too much intimacy. This society also limits the concept of strong emotions,

as they would introduce the potential for an increase or decrease in relational distance. This society further regulates the distance of relational time by creating a structuring the allotted time for various relationships. This time remains constant to ensure the degree of each individual relationship remains the same.

The society depicted in *The Giver* also establishes roles and traditions to limit the movement of vertical distance. To limit inequality in this society, every one of the same age group makes the same advances, at the same time, every year at the “Ceremony.” These advances include all 18 year olds receiving job positions at the same time, and all elders advance to elsewhere on the same day. Conducting these monuments at the same time for each age group controls the vertical inequality in performance between citizens in the same age group. This society also controls the vertical distance of wealth by supplying all families with the same exact living conditions. All citizens live in the same size nuclear family, the same type of house, the same food, and the same resources. Finally, The Elders attempt to control the vertical distance of reputation and power by highly structuring the citizens’ roles in the society. Although citizens may have a preference towards a particular occupation, they are not viewed as a hierarchy. Everyone’s positions are viewed as equal.

In a final attempt to freeze the movement of social time, The Elders in this society made the decision to limit cultural time by limiting the diversity of ideas. They control this by limiting the scope of ideas people can attain. This regulation is done by removing all memories that have the potential to produce different beliefs. This society accompanies this action by restricting citizens’ abilities to consider diverse thought by requiring daily injections. The injections limit the emotions a person can feel, and control the stream of consciousness that the citizens can access. To further ensure ideas remain confined, The Elders limited citizens access to language. “Precision of language” is a phrase that is used to stop the introduction of diversity of thought in conversations. This tool restricts the variety of conversation citizens can have and requires individuals to only present ideas that fit the accepted cultural structure. This was shown when Jonas asked his father if he *loved* him. As love is an idea that introduces an opinion

that challenges the cultural understanding of relationships, Jonas' farther responds by detailing emotions that are within the confines of their society, "I appreciate you."

Regardless of all these limits on the movement of social time in this society, the attempts by The Elders ultimately fail. In hopes to maintain the static state of social time, The Elders created the positions of Giver and Receiver. The Elders created these positions in the hope that those who contained all the memories would act virtuously. They believed that the knowledge of the evils that once existed, and the conflicts that accompanied them, were necessary if the importance of preserving social time were to remain a priority. Conflict still arose in this society, despite the efforts to control relational, vertical, and cultural distances, because the increased understanding the Giver and Receiver had did not lead them to understand the limits. Instead, it led them to see the injustice in the rights that had been taken from their fellow citizens. When Jonas receives the memories regarding, love, hierarchies, and diversity of traditions, among many other phenomena, his very position in society is altered. As his understanding of the world expands between the structured limits within his society, his relational, vertical, and culture distance to everyone and everything in his life is altered. In learning about all these memories that have been stripped from the citizens, Jonas feels over superiority, as his understanding of the world rises beyond the citizens in the society in which he was formerly an equal. It is made clear in Blacks book *Moral Time*, any movement in social time has the potential to create conflict. *The Giver* displays this truth as Jonas distance in and with his society changes. These differences are brought to fruition the creation of conflict was inevitable.

Works Cited

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