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# Moral Accounting Metaphors in American Political Discourse

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## Abstract

Behind American English, there are some specific moral values, American worldviews, deeply embedded in their culture. Such values are reflected in the Moral Metaphors that people use when speaking of moral values, and such values greatly influence the ways people think and talk about politics. As rhetorical strategies, politicians and orators often use Moral Metaphors to justify their morality and criticize others' immorality. Linguistically, Moral Metaphor is the way in which one source domain (i.e. usually special values in one culture) is used to speak of the target domain (i.e. morality). For example, in his landmark speech, Martin Luther King Jr. effectively used the financial transaction term, "*cash a check*," to ask the government to return the human rights African Americans are entitled to. There are several types of such Moral Metaphors. One of them is Moral Accounting Metaphor that George Lakoff has proposed (Lakoff, 2002). Moral Accounting Metaphor is the way in which people describe the state of well-being by using financial words such as "owe" and "pay." In this paper, in the first place, it will be discussed how Moral Accounting Metaphor linguistically functions when talking about morality in American political discourse. In the second place, based on Moral Accounting Metaphor, it will be analyzed how some American politicians have actually justified their ideas. Learning Moral Metaphors specific to American political discourse can be clues to understanding the most common conceptual systems specific to one culture, or one country.

**Keywords:** Moral Metaphor, Moral Accounting Metaphor, American world view, political discourse, Family based moral systems

## INTRODUCTION

Behind the American English language, there are some specific moral values, or American world views, deeply embedded in their culture. Such values are reflected in the metaphors that even ordinary people use when discussing moral issues, and such values often influence, even unconsciously, the ways in which they think and speak about politics.

In this context, "moral metaphor" refers to the way in which one source domain – a

special set of values in one culture – is used to speak of another target domain – in this case, moral values – in the same culture. For example, when former U.S. president John F. Kennedy, in his inaugural speech, said, “*Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall **pay any price**, bear any burden, ...*” he was drawing upon the vocabulary of one source domain, the domain of financial transactions, by using such words as “pay” and “price,” to metaphorically make a point about U.S. “moral strength.” Other examples might be found in the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King’s famous public address, “***I have a dream.***” One line in particular illustrates this point: “... *In a sense, we have come to our nation’s capital to **cash a check.***” For non-native speakers of English, such expressions are quite puzzling, especially if taken literally. What, exactly, are these two famous Americans trying to say?

In order to answer that question, it is imperative for non-English speakers to learn to understand how moral metaphors may be used to elucidate specific political concepts, and to illustrate political discourse in the United States and other English-speaking countries. One such group of metaphors is the Moral Accounting Metaphors that George Lakoff has proposed (Lakoff, 2002). In this paper, the use of Moral Accounting Metaphors will be analyzed for the purpose of better understanding certain types of political discourse in American English.

## PART I: Moral Accounting Metaphors

### 1. The Conceptualized System

In this paper, we will see how Moral Accounting Metaphors can play a central role in the understanding of certain moral situations, as well as the expression of certain moral judgments. First of all, the use of Moral Accounting Metaphors can be one way in which people describe the state of their own moral well-being by drawing upon the vocabulary of financial transactions, using words such as “owe,” “pay,” “cost,” and so on. That is, the source domain (financial-transaction vocabulary) is used to describe the target domain (well-being). For example, by using the expression “I will pay you back.” to refer to a specific moral action or, in this case, an immoral action of visiting harm upon another person that action is being conceptualized in terms of a financial transaction. This conceptualization is based on a Retribution scheme (see Table 1, following), which means “paying back a debt for harm caused to me.” If I receive harm from another person, it may be said that I

have received something of negative value, and that I have been deprived of something of positive value, according to a scheme of “moral arithmetic.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, having received something of negative value, which is a debt for a harm another has caused me, I will “pay it back” in terms of harm to the other.

Similarly, almost all financial words (viz., “owe,” “debt,” “charge,” “loss,” and so on) can potentially be used in the context of describing moral situations. Below are some common Moral Accounting Metaphors, together with their basic schemes of application:

Table 1: Common Moral Accounting Metaphors and their Basic Schemes

Basic Schemes	Moral Accounting Metaphors
Reciprocation	I <b>owe</b> you a favor for that good deed. You <b>saved</b> my life! How could I ever <b>repay</b> you? Your generous acts have <b>earned</b> you my respect. You’ve been so kind; I’m deeply <b>indebted</b> to you.
Retribution	I will <b>pay</b> you <b>back</b> for what you did to me. You <b>owe</b> me one for that insult. I will <b>pay</b> you <b>back</b> with <b>interest</b> .
Restitution	I will <b>make up</b> any harm I’ve done. You <b>owe</b> me an apology for your rudeness.
Punishment	The <b>wage</b> of sin is death. You will get what you <b>deserve</b> for that.
Reward	He <b>profited</b> from experience. I was <b>well paid</b> for my efforts with their <b>gratitude</b> . They gave John <b>credit</b> for all the extra work he had done.

*Note:* The words shown in boldface are Moral Accounting Metaphors. Vocabulary from the source domain, the vocabulary of financial transactions, such as “debt,” “accounting,” and “balance,” is used to explicate the target domain, morality.

As shown above, Moral Accounting Metaphors are applied within certain basic schemes: Reciprocation, Retribution, Restitution, Punishment, and Reward; and these schemes are all expressed using the vocabulary of financial transactions.

We are perfectly justified in using this financial transaction vocabulary when describing moral situations for a number of reasons. First, we all conceptualize well-being as wealth.

According to Lakoff (2002, p. 44), we understand an increase of well-being as a “gain,” whereas a decrease of well-being is understood as a “loss” or a “cost.” For example, a decrease in general or public well-being might be a major natural disaster, such as an earthquake, or catastrophic damage to an entire community. When we speak of the “costs” of such a disaster, we do not mean just the cost in terms of money, but also the cost to overall human well-being—in terms of deaths, mental or physical injuries and suffering, physical destruction, and so on (Lakoff, p.45). Similarly, when it comes to “profit” or “gain,” we are not always talking exclusively about money. We can speak in terms of other kinds of well-being, such as the “gain” one might accrue, for example, from the benefits of winning a prestigious award. Such “acquisitions” typically provide social or mental or financial well-being, in the form of knowledge, or confidence, or job qualifications, or other benefits that serve to improve our lives.

Based on this “Well-Being as Wealth” metaphor, we typically judge whether an action is moral or immoral. We feel better-off if we are healthy rather than sick, rich rather than poor, strong rather than weak, free rather than imprisoned, and so on. It is better for us to stay in the light rather than in the dark, and to stand upright rather than to fall down (Lakoff, 2002, p.42). Moral action, in this sense, is understood as any action that guarantees our well-being and makes us better-off. On the other hand, immoral action is any action that results in the deprivation of one or more of these states of well-being: Good health, wealth, happiness, strength, freedom, safety, and so on. From this “Well-Being as Wealth” perspective, we judge whether a course of action or a sequence of events is moral or immoral. When we are better-off, we are usually happy. But, when we are deprived of our well-being, due to involvement in immoral events or actions, we look for ways to restore that well-being.

Another reason that we often use such vocabulary of financial transactions to express moral actions or situations stems from a desire to express abstract events in concrete terms. If we see such abstract events as taking revenge and compensating someone for loss in terms of money, the abstract becomes quantitative and concrete (Seto, 2005, Chaps.1-3). In a sense, the moral metaphor makes an abstract action or event manifest. It becomes possible to understand something vague or difficult to imagine when it is expressed in specific, concrete terms. In this sense, the use of Moral Accounting Metaphors makes it possible to make an invisible thing visible.

However, as shown in Table 1 above, each scheme of the Moral Accounting Metaphor has a totally different logical form. Consider, for example, the differences between Retribution

and Restitution. According to the Retribution scheme, if I do something to harm you, this means that I give you something of negative value and have stolen something of equal positive value, so you will do it (i.e., harm) back to me.

On the other hand, according to the Restitution scheme, “harm” (e.g., the loss of well-being) is seen differently. If I do something harmful to you, I have given you something of negative value and taken something of positive value from you. I, then, owe you something of equal positive value. Thus, I should make up for what I have done by paying you back with something of equal positive value. This becomes my debt until I have paid it off to you. That is to say, Retribution means that “I will take revenge,” while Restitution means “You will pay back a debt to me for harm you have caused me.” Clearly, people choose different forms of logic to balance their “moral books.” Consequently, the way people express their attitudes toward morality differ from person to person, and from culture to culture.

## **2. Moral Accounting Metaphoric Variations Based on Two Family Moral Models**

We will now consider the ways in which Moral Accounting Metaphors may be applied to political discourse. Since people prefer different strategies and priorities to balance their “moral accounts,” they naturally find themselves advocating different political positions on such emotionally- and morally-charged issues as the dispensation of public welfare, justifications for war, the moral rectitude of the death penalty, and so on. In fact, which scheme of Moral Accounting Metaphors individuals prefer depends largely on which of two models of family-based moral systems they endorse. These two family models serve as the basis from which they derive their moral standards -- the “Strict Father” Moral Model and the “Nurturing Parent” Moral Model.

### **a. The “Strict-Father” Moral Model**

According to George Lakoff (2002, pp.153-155), individuals in the U.S. commonly conceptualize their political roles, as citizens of a nation, as analogous to their roles as members of a family. If the nation is understood as “the family writ large,” then the government, as the principal legislative body, functions as “the parent writ large.” According to such a scheme, just as one’s personal moral standards are learned from one’s parents, so too one’s political moral standards are learned from one’s government. Similarly, just as one’s view of the family, and the role of the parents in the family, will influence the behavior of the individuals within the family, so too, according to the analogy, the assumptions about

what counts as a “model family” will greatly influence the behavior of the members of the family.

Generally speaking, individuals in the U.S. derive their personal moral standards from one of the two models of family-based moral systems: what may be termed a Strict Father moral model and what may be understood as a Nurturing Parent moral model. At the risk of over-simplification, we may further identify these two moral models with the two most common political ideologies in the U.S., viz., the ideologies of conservative and liberal politics (Lakoff, p.33). Thus, for the purpose of comparison, we will identify the Strict Father moral model with what might be called a “conservative political ideology,” and the Nurturing Parent moral model with what might be called a “liberal political ideology.”

According to this comparison, U.S. political conservatism can be seen to draw its moral basis from the Strict Father moral model, in which the “father” (i.e., the government) strictly controls its children (i.e., its citizens) (Lakoff, p.76). Just as a stern and authoritarian father has a duty to support and protect his family, so too the government, or anyone in a position of political authority and leadership, is responsible for controlling the behavior of individuals and for providing social benefits under that authority.

On the other hand, political liberalism can be understood as drawing its moral basis from the Nurturing Parent moral model, in which the “parent” (i.e., the government) is seen as caring for of its “children” (i.e., citizens) equally, including such minority groups as the disabled, gays, the unborn, illegal immigrants, and so on. According to this model, the government should love and care for all of its people equally. Thus, in the U.S., the two principal political ideologies, the conservative and the liberal, may be understood as supporting two different moral models as common stereotypes of what family life should be, and what life inside and outside the home, and the nation, should be.

More importantly, for the purpose of this paper, these two models of the family have quite different moral systems and different discourse forms, including different choices of Moral Accounting Metaphors and the reasoning behind those choices. According to Lakoff (p.71), the Strict Father moral model places a high priority on the metaphor of “moral strength.” That is, one (the individual; the nation) should increase one’s moral strength through self-discipline and self-denial. In other words, “no pain, no gain.” Supporters of this moral model tend to see the world in terms of a metaphysical (i.e., moral) struggle between forces of “good” and “evil.” Thus, it is imperative for the Strict Father model types to stand up to the forces of “evil” in defense of the forces of “good.”

A great deal of contemporary U.S. political discourse reflects this Strict Father moral model. Numerous examples of this point of view are to be found in the language former-president George W. Bush used in many of his public speeches, in particular those speeches that followed the horrific terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001. Speaking to the U.S. Congress, Bush announced:

*“Tonight we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our **enemies to justice**, or **bring justice to our enemies**, justice will be done...”*

*“...**This is the world’s fight**. This is civilization’s fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.... The civilized world is **rallying to America’s side**. They understand **if this terror goes unpunished, their own cities, their own citizens may be next**.”*

*“...The **enemy** of America is not our many Muslim **friends**; it is not our many Arab **friends**...Our **enemy** is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them. ...From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbour or support terrorism will be **regarded by the United States as a hostile regime**.”*

(Retrieved from The White House: Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People:  
<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>)

*Note:* The phrases in boldface signify the reflection of the Strict Father moral model.

Much like Ronald Reagan, one of his Republican presidential predecessors, George W. Bush often saw the world as divided into warring factions between the forces of moral “good” and “evil.” This is obvious in his references to U.S. sides, “friends” and “enemies,” and the like.

In addition to the need for moral strength, the Strict Father model also emphasizes the need for self-interest and self-reliance. According to this model, moral goodness obtains if one can be self-disciplined in the pursuit of one’s own well-being (i.e., self-interest) (Lakoff, pp.71-76). Just like Adam Smith’s theory of a free-market economy, each individual - and, by extension, each government - should endeavor to maximize his - and its - own well-being/self-interest. This point of view is clearly reflected in the following two political speeches: The first, the inaugural speech of former-president John F. Kennedy; the second, another speech by former president George W. Bush at the White House:



*“Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty.”* (John F. Kennedy, 1961)

(Retrieved from John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum: Inaugural Address, 20 January 1961, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/BqXIEM9F4024ntF17SVAjA.aspx>)

*“Encouraging responsibility is not a search for scapegoats. It is a call to conscience. And though it requires sacrifice, it brings a deeper fulfillment. ---I will live and lead by these principles: to advance my convictions with civility; to pursue the public interest with courage; to speak for greater justice and compassion; to call for responsibility...”* (George W. Bush, 2001, p.4)

(Retrieved from White House website:

[http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected\\_Speeches\\_George\\_W\\_Bush.pdf](http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf))

## **b. The Nurturing Parent Model**

While the Strict Father moral model may serve the interests of a conservative political ideology, the Nurturing Parent model, as the basis for a more liberal political ideology, supports completely different priorities. Most important for the Nurturing Parent model is the sense that the world must be as caring and supporting as possible; therefore, individuals must be as caring as possible to one another. In a sense, while the Strict Father moral model considers self-development and self-reliance most important, the Nurturing Parent model places a higher value on the community's happiness. According to the Nurturing Parent model, each member in a community has a responsibility to care for those who are in need of help. If the world becomes more nurturing and supportive, it is believed that people, even the disabled and any other vulnerable social minorities, can develop their full potential, and eventually assume their responsibility to help themselves. Consequently, they would become strong enough to sustain others, and the world would be filled with bonds of affection, respect, and interdependence. In short, according to the Nurturing Parent model, it is believed that caring for others with love should sustain the world. But, for the Strict Father model, caring for yourself, with an eye toward reward and punishment, can better sustain the world.

These two world views, and the assumptions behind them, are so contradictory that every aspect of public policy looks radically different when viewed through either of these

two lenses (Lakoff, 2002, p.167). If non-native speakers of English were more aware of this, we would have easy access to the understanding of the following political news, which reveals the two distinctive family models together with their respective world views:

*The biggest components of the immigration debate is how many legal immigrants to allow, and how to prevent illegal immigration. Liberals and libertarians generally oppose restricting immigration. Look for buzzwords like “promote diversity” to define the libertarian attitude, or “we’re a nation of immigrants” to define the libertarian attitude. Any reference to providing illegal immigrants with services beyond emergency medical treatment, or any reference to “clemency” for illegal immigration, implies a strong pro-immigrant stance.---*

*Conservatives and populists generally favor restricting immigration. Look for buzzwords like “protect our borders” or “strengthen the INS<sup>3</sup>”. A call for “Official English” is a strongly anti-immigration stance, because most immigrants are from non-English speaking countries. That’s the same attitude as “End bilingual education,” which focuses primarily on Spanish-speaking immigrants.*

(Retrieved from On the Issues Every Political Leader on Every Issue, Immigration Buzzwords  
[http://www.ontheissues.org/Background\\_Immigration.htm](http://www.ontheissues.org/Background_Immigration.htm))

Analyzing the two models of the family, and the family-based moral systems, we might come to realize why “conservatives” and “liberals” have such different ideological understandings of certain political issues, such as opposition to, or support for: Extending social welfare programs; pursuing environmental issues; championing women’s rights, such as abortion; harsher penalties for criminals; gun control; and so on. This is because different moral systems shape different thoughts and expressions.

## PART II: The Use of Moral Accounting Metaphors in Politicized Religious Discourse

We will now apply our understanding of the use of Moral Accounting Metaphors, and our appreciation of the two family-based moral systems, to an analysis of the historic address, “*I have a dream*,” by the late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

On August 28, 1963, more than 250,000 people – a fifth of them white – gathered near the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. In a rally demanding jobs and freedom, African-

Americans demonstrated how they had been suffering from a tradition of institutionalized racial discrimination in the United States. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a young Baptist minister, gave an historic address that dramatized the sufferings of African Americans, and led to a series of landmark legislative proposals that transformed civil rights in America. It was through Dr. King's actions, and the efforts of many other members of the civil rights movement, that freedom and democracy for all races in the U.S. were greatly improved.

Most of the expressions used by Dr. King in his address were not intended to be taken literally, but rather were meant metaphorically. Compared to some other, more strictly-political speeches, it might sound rather figurative, or imaginative, or poetic because it is so filled with moral metaphors. However, we need to realize that Dr. King's address is not an example of imaginative poetry; nor is it like most conventional political speeches. It is, instead, something quite extraordinary. It is a politically-motivated expression of religious discourse, highly charged with moral and emotional energy. As a religious sermon, reflective of his Southern Baptist training and up-bringing, it is a tremendously powerful – and persuasive – rhetorical device. Because of the rhetorical strategies this mode of address employs, it effectively dramatized what was real for African Americans in their demands for equality and human rights. It even changed the history of the United States. Thus, I would like here to analyze the most powerful of his rhetorical strategies, the use of Moral Accounting Metaphors, which so distinguishes this address.

## 1. Dr. King's Use of Moral Accounting Metaphors

In Dr. King's address, he used many Moral Accounting Metaphors such as “cash a check,” which had a great impact on American people's hearts. The followings are some parts of the “*I have a dream*” speech in which he used such financial metaphors:

*“In a sense we have come to our nation's capital **to cash a check**. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the declaration of Independence, they were signing **a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.**”*

*It is obvious today that **America has defaulted on this promissory note** insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America*

*has given the Negro people a bad check, which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check -- a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. ..."* (King, 1998, pp.102-103)

*Note:* The moral metaphors with financial transaction expressions are in boldface.

Each of the "Moral Metaphors" used in this sermon as cited above, can be interpreted based on the Moral Accounting Metaphor scheme. Here are the lists:

Table 2

King's Moral Accounting Metaphors	Interpretation
<i>In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to <b>cash a check</b>.</i>	In a sense we have come to Washington D.C. to <b>gain real human rights we, African American People, naturally deserve</b> . The government has given us something of negative value (i.e. segregation) and taken something of positive value (i.e. happy life with equal opportunity). It is now time that the U.S. government should pay back happy life with equal opportunity the whites have).
<i>The architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the declaration of Independence, they were signing <b>a promissory note</b> to which every American was to fall heir. <b>This note</b> was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.</i>	The founders of the U.S.A. <b>officially promised</b> that they would give every American the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Thus, Every American, including the colors, has an equal right to receive them. This is what the government swore to make come true, at the Declaration of Independence.
<i>It is obvious today that America has <b>defaulted on this promissory note</b> insofar as her citizens of color are concerned.</i>	But the government has <b>broken its promise to guarantee human rights to African American People and other colors</b> . You haven't paid us something of positive value (i.e. human rights) yet.
<i>America has given the Negro people <b>a bad check, which has come back marked "insufficient funds</b>.</i>	Instead, America has given African American People <b>all the disadvantages of life which has no human rights</b> .
<i>But we refuse to believe that <b>the bank of justice is bankrupt</b>.</i>	But, we don't want to believe that <b>the government has no sense of justice as to such injustice</b> .
<i>We refuse to believe that there are <b>insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity</b> of this nation.</i>	We don't want to believe that there are <b>no equal opportunities the government guarantees</b> for African American People in this country.
<i>So we have come to <b>cash this check... a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice</b>.</i>	So, we have come to <b>gain human rights that gives us a lot of freedom and the security of justice</b> as we wish.

## 2. Dr. King's Use of the Restitution Scheme

As shown in the chart above, Dr. King's metaphorical expressions of Moral Accounting Metaphors correspond to one of the basic schemes for Moral Accounting Metaphors, viz., the Restitution scheme. "You owe me well-being for your unfair treatment" or "You have to make up for any harm you've done to me." Here again, this scheme signifies that "If you do something harmful to me, you have given me something of negative value, and have taken something of equal positive value. And, this becomes your debt until you have paid it in full." According to Dr. King's address, the United States was in debt to African-Americans; they had accrued a moral credit since they had been deprived by the U.S. government of something of positive value (i.e., a happy life), and received instead something of negative value (i.e., institutionalized discrimination). Dr. King was demanding that the United States pay off that debt, and return to African-Americans the fundamental human rights to which they were entitled, as citizens of the United States, and as human beings. Also, as he implied, until these moral credits were paid in full, justice would never be realized.

Therefore, by employing the Moral Accounting Metaphors according to the Restitution scheme, as a rhetorical strategy, Dr. King successfully justified his position. His address sounded not only morally correct and forceful, but politically persuasive as well, so much so that it impressed not only the largest group of protesters that had ever gathered in the nation's capital, but also the entire United States, and the world. As a result, it changed U.S. history.

## 3. Dr. King's Example of the "Nurturing Parent" Model

Dr. King's use of the Restitution scheme is a typical example of the "Nurturing Parent" model. As we have shown, the Restitution scheme supports the idea of the "Nurturing Parent" model with respect to fundamental human rights, and the right of access to social opportunities in general. While the Strict Father moral model declares the individual's right to whatever one has earned by oneself, the Nurturing Parent moral model emphasizes equal rights for the displaced and disadvantaged members of society. Just as parents are supposed to treat all children in the family equally and fairly, the government should accept responsibility for the guaranteed fair treatment of all its citizens. Thus, it is incumbent on all of us to care for those victims of social discrimination—women, non-whites, ethnic minorities, and so on. Similarly, Dr. King's address placed special emphasis on the need for fairness to individuals, and the protection of individuals' rights.

Also, unlike the Strict Father moral model, the Nurturing Parent moral model refuses to simplistically divide the world into forces of “good” and “evil,” or “friends” and “foes.” The Strict Father types would prefer the action and the language of the Retribution scheme. If they receive any harm from others, they want to pay back their foes in kind. As far as language usage is concerned, it has been shown that former presidents Bush and Kennedy represent typical examples of the Strict Father model type.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, the Nurturing Parent model types, such as Dr. King, are more likely to choose the Restitution scheme when they have been the victims of social harm. In that case, they simply return well-being. Likewise, Dr. King asked the U.S. government to provide social well-being to African-Americans in return for racial discrimination. Therefore, in this sense, what Dr. King expressed with his Moral Accounting Metaphors fits perfectly into the Nurturing Parent moral model.

#### 4. The Effectiveness of Dr. King’s Address

Dr. King’s address shows that there are several advantages to using Moral Accounting Metaphors in politically motivated discourse. Dr. King’s rhetorical strategy of using one domain (i.e. financial transaction terms) to speak of another domain (i.e. moral action – in terms of happiness, liberty, fair distribution, and other human rights) is extremely effective. And the reasons for this are clear.

First of all, if we use the Moral Accounting Metaphors, it becomes possible for us to conceptualize the less clearly delineated terms through the more clearly delineated terms. In other words, abstract events become concrete. In Dr. King’s address, the less clearly-delineated terms are lack of one’s well-being—viz., racial segregation. It would have been difficult for some members of his audience that day, especially some whites and other, more privileged members of the society, to imagine what misery segregation had caused African-Americans for so long. However, when such humiliating social experiences were clarified in terms of the checking account metaphor, which was familiar to every American at that time, the terms were more clearly defined.

Second, when non-physical terms (i.e. human rights and racial segregation) are described in terms of physical terms (i.e. checks, money, and wealth), these can be understood as substantial entities. Then, the abstract target domain, human rights, become quantitative and concrete. Such clarity will help restore logical reasoning. We metaphorically perceive a right to one’s well-being (i.e. happiness, liberty, job opportunities, and other indispensable human

rights) as a right to wealth (i.e. property and money). This “well-being as wealth” perspective allows us to realize that our social well-being is as important as our wealth. Also, it allows us to judge more accurately whether or not we have received a sufficient amount of social well-being. As a result, we become acutely aware of the moral wrong that is imposed whenever we are denied a sufficient amount of social well-being.

In all likelihood, Dr. King followed this same reasoning. He treated the U.S. Constitution and the U.S. Declaration of Independence as “promissory notes” according to which every American should have been paid equally by the government. He pointed out that African-Americans had not yet been paid, while only whites had. In other words, most African-Americans had insufficient wealth, while most whites had been sufficiently rewarded. Thus, it was morally right for African-Americans to march on Washington D.C. (i.e., the Bank of Justice) where their human rights (i.e., the currency in their checking accounts) had long been entrusted by the power of the government (i.e., in the vault). So, it was time to “cash a check” to withdraw their money - the indispensable human rights they naturally deserved. Additionally, in this sense, the money would likely refer to the inalienable human rights gifted by God to every human being.

Finally, and most importantly, the source domain is the key to successful use of Moral Accounting Metaphors. It seems absolutely necessary that the source domain has to be a social experience familiar to everyone within the same culture. This is why Dr. King chose the “checking account system” as the source domain. The system of using checking accounts has been a major payment method in the U.S. for generations. Unlike in Japan, most people in America commonly use their checking accounts, rather than cash, as methods of payment. So, in their perception, checks are equivalent to money, symbolizing one’s wealth and well-being. As described above, people tend to judge an action or behavior as moral or immoral based on the “well-being as wealth” metaphor. That is, with the checking system, people would have been able to see the lack of human rights in the form of a lack of money. This allows all Americans, as well as the government, to understand what was fundamentally real for African Americans, viz., the miserable life caused by racial segregation. Therefore, the checking system was appropriate for the source domain. This is probably why Dr. King chose this system as the source domain of his Moral Metaphors. Racial segregation had been a social experience that only African Americans, and other minority groups in U.S., had experienced. It was not an experience shared by everyone. To dramatize the point, Dr. King effectively expressed the concept of a shared social experience with which everyone in the

same culture was familiar. When we need to explain something not shared by everyone, it is more effective if we use a shared experience to send the message.

### PART III: Conclusion

Throughout this paper, it has been shown that Moral Accounting Metaphors, the language of financial transactions, play a significant role in our judgments about moral action and our choices of language, especially in the political discourse. Since morality and money are high priorities, financial morality is carried over to morality in general. Linguistically, it has been revealed that one source domain (e.g., the vocabulary of financial transactions) can be transferred into a different target domain (e.g., moral action), and that the source domain should be something concrete in order to explicate the abstract target domain. This is typical of the ways in which the language of morality, especially the schemes of reciprocation, retribution, restitution, punishment, and reward, are produced and understood in American English. In particular, we saw how Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. used this approach as part of his rhetorical strategy in his landmark speech, "*I have a dream.*" He, using the vocabulary of financial transactions, reasoned out his moral scheme according to the Nurturing Parent ideology. These terms often remain ambiguous to people in other cultures. Because people choose different source domains, what are special values in one culture, and what makes sense to that culture, often does not make sense to another. Overall, studying moral metaphors specific to political discourse in general can be a clue to understanding the most common conceptual systems of one culture, or one country. Therefore, for non-native speakers of English who have little knowledge of the cultural background of the U.S., it is essential to learn about moral metaphors in order to better understand the meaning of much political discourse.



## Notes

1. Anyone familiar with the philosophy of Utilitarianism will immediately recognize the similarities between this reference to “moral arithmetic” and Jeremy Bentham’s famous “formula of moral calculus.”
2. In 1960 at the Acceptance of New York Liberal Party Nomination, Senator John F. Kennedy explained what kind of liberal he is, and presented his vision as a candidate. As a Senator from Massachusetts, a liberal state, Kennedy is typically understood as a “liberal,” and he even described himself as such. However, as President, Kennedy was obliged to take a more centrist position on many positions. Thus, if the usage of moral accounting metaphors in his political discourse is analyzed based on Lakoff’s two family-based moral systems, Kennedy is sometimes identified with the Strict Father moral model, namely a conservative.  
(Retrieved from American Experience: TV’s most-watched history series,  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/jfk-nyliberal/>)
3. Immigration and Naturalization Service in the United States.

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