

Forgiveness, Finitude, Apology and Acknowledgment

Mano Daniel
Douglas College, danielm@douglas.ca

Jim Gough
Athabasca University, jimg@athabascau.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/csspe>



Part of the [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#)

Daniel, Mano and Gough, Jim, "Forgiveness, Finitude, Apology and Acknowledgment" (2017). *The Canadian Society for Study of Practical Ethics / Société Canadienne Pour L'étude De L'éthique Appliquée — SCEEA*. 8.
<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/csspe/vol1/1/8>

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Philosophy at Scholarship at UWindsor. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Canadian Society for Study of Practical Ethics / Société Canadienne Pour L'étude De L'éthique Appliquée — SCEEA by an authorized administrator of Scholarship at UWindsor. For more information, please contact scholarship@uwindsor.ca.

Section 5: Paper 10

Forgiveness, Finitude, Apology and Acknowledgment

Mano Daniel

Douglas College

Jim Gough

Athabasca University

Introduction¹

To commit wrong and to feel the bitter injustice of wrong-doing is part of the human predicament. The natural impulse is to pay back the injury in kind. But such retaliation implicates us in a cycle of resentment, retaliation and revenge. This sort of retaliation precludes reconciliation. As Michael Ignatieff points out, vengeance implicates us in the “vicious downward spiral of violence” and in the reinforcement of a “culture of violence.” All this may be done in the name of honour and respect.² The law is one avenue to rectify such intrusions of wrong-doing. But procedural justice can often be inadequate. In part, this is because while the law can be broken, literally speaking, only persons (moral agents) can be wronged. As Hannah Arendt reminds us, “The majesty of the law demands that we be equal—that only our acts count, and not the person who committed them. The act of forgiving, on the contrary takes the person into account; no pardon pardons murder or theft but only the murderer or the thief. We always forgive *somebody*, never *something* . . . we forgive for the sake of the person.”³ The inadequacy of the law is that, while it can offer justice, it is an inadequate mechanism to deal with the breached failed relationship that occurs because of the wrong. Forgiveness

offers the promise of reconciliation, or at least, the mending of the relationship rendered by the wrong.

The ability to offer and receive forgiveness is a hallmark of our humanity. Yet, this valuable moral resource is both misunderstood and neglected. Forgiveness is a powerful third way between revenge and forgetting whereby we cope with an injury inflicted by one upon the other.

We argue for a particular conception of forgiveness with the following characteristics: forgiveness as transactional (primarily bi-lateral, rather than unilateral), elective (not obligatory) and conditional. Initiating the process requires forgiveness to be extended to the wrongdoer but not at the expense of forgetting, excusing, or condoning the wrong. The offer of the apology shifts the control or power from the wrongdoer to the victim who may initiate the conditional decision which may culminate in the repairing of the damaged relationship. A wrong may not be simply a perpetration of harm, but also a moral insult. It is the insult, this loss of respect for the dignity and integrity of the other, that needs to be addressed by the apology. The focus of this paper is on the role of apology; in particular, as it is offered by the perpetrator of the wrong and as it is received by victim who can, if she chooses, forgive.

II: Profile of the Wrongdoer and the Process of Forgiveness

A profound wrong is inflicted by one upon another. A victim (the sexually assaulted, the racially recriminated, the betrayed, the genocide survivor, etc.) is created. When a profound wrong has been perpetrated, the victim will invariably experience anger and resentment. This resentment may well be justified. Resentment in this sense can be thought of as moral outrage. Yet, retaliation implicates one in a spiral of revenge. It

repays injury with another injury.⁴ In genuine forgiveness, resentment is eliminated, or seriously ameliorated. The importance of forgiveness is that it can serve to undo the deeds of the past⁵, not literally but attitudinally. It enables people to make a new start in their relations with one another. Forgiveness is the forswearing of justified resentment engendered by a moral assault and the infliction of a moral insult.⁶

The role that forgiveness can play in our moral lives is formidable. Yet, it has too often been diminished. It has been dismissed as a superogatory act that stands at the periphery of moral obligation, i.e., a favour or gift bestowed by the victim. It has been denigrated as a form of amateur therapy, misconceived as a kind of forgetting (“time heals all wounds”); or a type of excuse (“to understand all is to forgive all”). Forgiveness is best conceived as a transactional process offering the possibility of mending moral disruptions. It is an important that forgiveness is not a performative; saying is not the same as doing. The saying of the words “I forgive” does not make it come about. Forgiveness is not cheap since it requires overcoming, amending, and shifting attitudes, a process which is arduous and at times insurmountable. This overcoming is a form of second order existential commitment, a reassertion of sovereignty for one’s identity, and the reclamation of one’s personal narrative as a person of integrity and worth.

Wrongdoers are significantly affected by forgiveness or its lack. Yet, little attention has been directed to “what wrongdoers themselves must do in the aftermath of their wrongful acts.”⁷ Yet, if forgiveness is to occur, the wrongdoer has to offer a genuine act of contrition – a sincere avowal of the wrongdoer’s culpability. Two presumptions, while contestable, are warranted although not defended here: first, we adopt the position that forgiveness is a discretionary judgment; it is an elective, though not mandatory,

prerogative of the victim. Some accounts of forgiveness argue there are instances where offering forgiveness is obligatory.⁸ We think this account is mistaken since it misconstrues the sense of voluntary agency if one is required to forgive.⁹ Second, while forgiveness can be considered a uni-lateral decision by the victim to forgive, we adopt bi-lateral forgiveness as paradigmatic since it preserves and makes explicit two perspectives, of victim and wrongdoer. Forgiveness may be self-directed but it is usually other-directed. It is another person who is the target of this moral and affective relation. Conceived as a bi-lateral transactional process from the perspective of the perpetrator, forgiveness occurs when one person injures another, atones, begs forgiveness, and it is granted. Radzik claims that “to right a wrong is to restore the social imbalance, to bring the relationship or the community back into harmony.”¹⁰ This harmonization requires that both parties affected by the offence achieve parity. Put differently, the power differential which is knocked off kilter by the offence is restored, both at an interpersonal and communal level.¹¹

The process of forgiving has a dialectical structure with three moments: One, a wrong or injury is perpetrated by one person against another. Two, the onus is on the injurer to offer restitution or an apology which acknowledges responsibility for the moral insult, express (tacitly or explicitly) remorse, offer assurance about future conduct, and entreat the victim for forgiveness. Three, the victim forgives the perpetrator; the original act is neither cancelled nor nullified but repaired to facilitate a possible reconciliation.

In order for the forgiver to be in a position to carry through the act of forgiveness, she must undergo a number of cognitive and attitudinal shifts:

An emotional shift: the affective overcoming of negative feelings— be they anger, resentment, or even moral hate towards the perpetrator. In releasing these negative feelings, the victim need not renounce her belief that a wrong was perpetrated against her; she neither condones nor excuses the act.

A temporal shift: the temporal placing of the wrong in the past so that the future will not be preoccupied or remain burdened by it. Govier asserts that one must “let past wrongs remain in the past, freeing one’s present and future from a troubled preoccupation with the past.”¹²

A structural shift: a reframing of the situation in which the perpetrator is separated from the wrong; a prising apart of the sinner from the sin, so to speak. One way of doing this is to isolate the offending deed from the totality of the perpetrator’s biography.

A narrative shift: an act of self-renewal, in which the victim transcends the event by not letting the event stunt or define both victim and perpetrator. The victim regains control over her life. Since our biographies are both lived and told, the significance we ascribe to our actions is open to reinterpretation so we can reinvent our past to provide a transformative life-story or narrative.¹³

A cathartic shift: the releasing of a moral claim against the perpetrator; the moral debt is discharged; the resentment is purged.

Reconciliation—the rebuilding or repairing of the broken relationship – between victim and perpetrator is conspicuously absent from the above. While we agree with Roberts that the goal or “teleology of forgiveness is reconciliation,”¹⁴ it is a mistake to

hold that if reconciliation does not take place, then forgiveness has not occurred. The parents of a murdered child may come to forgive the murderer, release their anger and resentment for the arbitrary and abrupt removal of their child from their lives, but it makes no sense to say that their forgiveness is incomplete if they choose not to build and conduct a relationship with the murderer. To forgive is to mend what has been torn. While reconciliation is an aspiration, often a rewarding realisable possibility, it is not a necessary component for forgiveness.

Granting forgiveness, the offence is not forgotten or condoned. Rather it will be remembered in a way that is compatible with peaceful co-existence. It is a coming to terms with the past so the future can be lived unfettered by resentment. Forgiving is typically not a uni-lateral judgment. One must have good reasons to forgive, and, usually the wrongdoer has a critical part to play in the construction of these good reasons. The wrongdoer has to acknowledge atonement.

III: Apology, Atonement and the Role of Acknowledgement

Atonement on the part of the perpetrator is an important step in the process of forgiveness functioning both as an expression of sorrow for the wrongdoing and as an initiative towards reconciliation. Following Radzik, the process of atonement is “a matter of reconciling the parties to one another and to themselves as equally valuable moral persons”¹⁵ and is what “the wrongdoer must do in order to respond in a morally proper way to her wrongful act.”¹⁶ Atonement often involves both apology and acknowledgement. Acknowledgment opens the possibility of atonement for the wrong, giving voice in the apology. Failure to atone for one’s wrongdoing often compounds the original wrong and could negate the apology.

Atonement is making moral amends. As Radzik argues, through the infliction of the wrong, the perpetrator is denigrating the victim as a person of little or no moral worth. An apology leaves this message of moral worthlessness *unsaid*. It is considered an attempt to cancel this insulting, humiliating message that can end the anger and resentment of the victim. “To wrong another person is to insult and threaten him. To do nothing (or to fail to do enough) to correct that action is to allow the insult and threat to stand. It is to condone their continued influence. When one fails to atone, one suggests that one still views the victim as inferior and that one remains a threat to him.”¹⁷

An apology is not a soliloquy. It occurs when the offender acknowledges responsibility for an injury or grievance and expresses regret and remorse to the aggrieved.¹⁸ No apology is successful without communication between offender and victim. As Tavuchis notes, the apology “cannot be delegated, consigned, exacted, or assumed by the principals, no less outsiders, without totally altering its meaning and vitiating its moral force.”¹⁹ By recapitulating the wrong and seeking forgiveness, the apologiser voluntarily adopts a posture of vulnerability, openness, honesty and accedes to the victim(s) the power to accept, refuse or ignore the apology and in turn to forgive or refuse to forgive. In a sincere apology, the apologiser voluntarily declares he has no excuse (mitigating or exculpatory), justification, or explanation for his transgression and accepts full responsibility.

The authentic apology is a speech act seeking atonement by acknowledging responsibility and guilt. The wrongdoer acknowledges inflicting injury and harm, acknowledges the restoration of the moral dignity of the undeserving, ill-treated victim(s) that was unfairly and unjustly ignored, and acknowledges the legitimacy of resentment

harboured by the wronged.²⁰ When he has successfully atoned for his transgression, he gives his victim good reasons to stop harbouring resentment. The apology is directed at the victim, not solely to the *act*. One type of insincere apology occurs when what is apologized for is the wrong, but no apology is addressed to the victim of the wrong. For example, “I am sorry that that you were offended by my action, which I admit, was ill-advised.” Apologies are a powerful way to acknowledge responsibility and guilt, and to express other-oriented moral regret. Yet, as Govier and Verwoerd write, “Much more needs to be said about acknowledgement, which is a greatly underexplored concept. An account of why acknowledgement is important to human beings may be grounded in theories about the social construction of identities, roles, and values.”²¹

Acknowledgment is to bear witness, to attest. An apology contains within itself a two-tiered structure of acknowledgement. One sense of the term “acknowledgment” is descriptive. I accept that I was the material cause for the harm and I now feel remorse for harming you. Moreover, I appreciate the meaning of my role in the context of the harm. But there is a second sort of acknowledgement, a second order, existential aspect that involves the vocabulary of such terms as responsibility, ownership, and commitment. It is only with the accomplishment of this second order directive that one can be said to be taking charge of one’s life and of one’s self transformation. Here is the insight to the transformation that is necessary to atonement. The descriptive response requires an acceptance of the act, a deeper understanding of one’s role and behaviour. The existential response is to take personal and moral responsibility for oneself as a member of a moral community by an act of attestation. This commitment is a will to will oneself fully responsible through the existential act of personal acknowledgement. Acts of

acknowledgement infuse moral significance; they situate the victim, perpetrator and wrong within a moral horizon.

There are, of course, reasons why someone might fail to forgive despite the offer of an apology. For example, the act of forgiving might make the victim feel enfeebled rather than empowered. In such a situation, forgiveness would simply exacerbate victim humiliation since it would admit that the perpetrator continues to hold undeserved power, authority, or strength. But one may also refuse to forgive if the offence is of such a nature as to be completely and absolutely unforgivable.

There are indeed some acts that are unforgivable, like the atrocities committed on the serial killer Robert Pickton's farm--acts so horrendous "that they transcend the realm of human affairs and the potentialities of human power, both of which they radically destroy wherever they make their appearance."²² Nevertheless since the perpetrators are autonomous moral agents with the capacity for reflection and transformation, no person is absolutely unforgivable. By distinguishing between agent and deed and between absolute and conditional forgiveness, "[we] may rightly regard a perpetrator as *conditionally unforgivable* if that perpetrator has not acknowledged, and does not morally regret, the wrongdoing."²³ If the perpetrator remains wedded to the unforgivability of the act and has not convincingly separated himself from the deed, then there may be good reasons to hold him conditionally unforgivable.²⁴ The lack, or inadequacy, of the apology is sufficient to deem him an unworthy recipient of forgiveness.

The apology can meet certain needs of the victim. It can contribute to the restoration of her self-worth and dignity, re-establish her self-respect, provide assurance to the victim that fault does not lie with her, provide assurance that both parties have

shared values and can co-exist in the moral community as co-equals, confirm that the insult has been “unsaid” but is now recognized and given voice, and establish that the sense of threat is replaced by that of safety. Through the apology, the perpetrator allows for the possibility of a meaningful dialogue that may repair the damaged relationship between victim and wrongdoer and the relationship between the wrongdoer and community.

IV: A Consideration of Two Apologies

What then must the perpetrator do if he is to be a recipient of forgiveness? A precondition is a sufficient period of time for self-reflection and self-appraisal. If atonement is to be achieved, the following are steps to be taken to render continued resentment and anger inappropriate:

- A. There is, initially, a cognitive acknowledgement of responsibility for having perpetrated the wrong. The perpetrator who does not own up to the wrong would feel no need to be forgiven. If he did not do anything wrong, then he would not feel guilty and any attempt to forgive would be felt to be misplaced. By accepting his guilt, he may wish to unburden himself of it. The example of Speer and Spitzer’s apologies will be considered below in response to this condition.
- B. There is an authentic emotional feeling of remorse. This involves recognition of guilt that will saddle the perpetrator with negative feelings such as shame and remorse. This feeling of remorse can find expression through the sense of moral regret which is the acknowledgment of responsibility. This guilt is not self-negating, all consuming, but the *trigger* for a positive change in the perpetrator.

- C. There is repudiation in deed and word of oneself as the wrongdoer, a commitment to become the sort of person that will refrain from such deeds. Repentance alone, however, is insufficient since it is often a unilateral act. To vow not to act in such a way again does nothing to repair the social rupture that the wrong has wrought unless it is followed by a sincere commitment to change.²⁵
- D. There is a genuine narrative accounting for how one came to do the wrong, how the wrong-doing does not express the totality of one's biography, and how one has changed for the better. The Eric Lomax case will be employed later to track this consideration.
- E. The expression or reaffirmation that both the wrongdoer and the victim are members of the moral community with the attendant dignity and moral worthiness that such membership entails. The apology is a testament by the wrongdoer of the salience of moral norms since it is an admission of a violation of these norms. As Deigh maintains, "social cohesion in a community depends on its members sharing an understanding of what each owes the others, both individually and collectively, in the way of forbearances and positive services."²⁶

When a comprehensive apology is wholeheartedly delivered, and received as such by the wronged person, the initiative to forgive is placed on the shoulders of the victim. However, the apology can also be inadequate. A necessary component of any apology is that it must restore the sense of worth, dignity, personal power or authority of the offended party. There are disavowals that fail to be apologies. Here are three types of diversions.

First, an apology is *not an explanation*. An explanation helps us to understand how something occurred--the cause and effect relationship between the antecedents to the act and the act itself. But this does not tell us morally *why* something was done or what values are involved in the process of intention to act or of the consequences, intended or otherwise, that subsequently occur. For example, the police may explain why they failed to apprehend the serial murderer before he committed his last murder, given all the evidence that was available to them, but this account is not a justification and not the basis for an apology.

Second, an apology is *not an excuse*. An excuse is an attempt to provide an account of what happened as happening beyond the agent's control; it is the attempt to exculpate the agent responsibility while recognising the action as wrong. While in a mitigating excuse the responsibility is partially lifted, in an exculpatory excuse the agent's responsibility is fully eliminated. But if the agent is not responsible, it is hard to see what she is being forgiven for. For example, when a mining company executive is caught bribing a corrupt industry minister in a foreign country, the claim that such practices are accepted in "their country" is an *excuse* in a failed attempt to justify a wrong. In this case, an excuse masquerades as a justification but fails to provide adequate ethical grounds to accept the account. It is an attempt to gain ethically unjustified--perhaps expediency-based--acceptance for a wrong. Third, an apology is not *a statement of regret* since it does not link remorse with contrition. One can regret errors of omission or mistakes of understanding without acknowledging that one should have done things differently. This is to regret that the world could have been otherwise and the conditions for the wrongful choice might not have occurred, but such personal remorse is not an

apology. Instead it focuses on the self-serving feelings of the perpetrator and not the victim. Unlike an excuse, an explanation, or a statement of regret, an apology minimally involves recognizing, acknowledging, and taking personal responsibility for the act and trying to repair the damage done by it. Here are some initial criteria for detecting a genuine apology:

1. It is sincere, authentic or self-authored by the person giving the apology. The mother apologizing for the actions of her grown son, without the express permission of the son, may be an example of an insincere apology by proxy.
2. There is an adequate acknowledge of wrongdoing in which the offender accounts for his actions with an appropriate degree of specificity. Someone making the sweeping claim to apologize to anyone he may have offended in the past in his role as administrator, may be woefully inadequate. Not only is such a sweeping claim vague but it is also inadequate because its generalization fails to identify specifics.
3. There is an acceptance of blame. Specifically he makes clear why his actions were wrong and identifies the principles he violated. Often someone will apologize but still not accept blame for what he has done. For example, the individual may apologize for participating in the process of the mistreatment of others but shift the blame to what is called “situational control”, i.e., one’s prescribed role in that situation and duties attendant in the context. The community exerts such social control that it is deemed impossible to escape it and so one is not responsible for the subsequent actions that conform to this control. This is a form of relativism that seems to obscure the individual’s responsibility for his part in a situation. Many of the defendants at the Nuremberg trial

took this stance. Their plea was “not guilty” on the basis of the fact that they were just doing what they were told – what the law at the time promoted – in a kind of transference to the other away from the individual’s responsibility to the individual’s situation.

4. There is adequate evidence that a transformative process has already begun--that there is evidence of a commitment to change ethical *character and disposition*. Such evidence, Deigh suggests, may be evinced by the development of a “conscience, which both works to restrain him from yielding to those narrow interests, emotions, and impulses that, if acted on, would harm others, and moves him to reparative action when he has violated one of its strictures and consequently damaged or risked damaging harmonious relations he has with others.”²⁷

The Lomax Case: A Successful Apology

A prisoner of war during World War II, Eric Lomax, in his memoir²⁸, writes of being consumed by hatred and vengeance until he received an apology nearly fifty years later and was able to forgive his torturer tormenter. His account is that of a man trying to make sense of his experiences. He was suspected of spying and subjected to brutal interrogation and torture, caged in a cell, and left exposed in the sun for extended periods of time. His torturer and interpreter was a brutal man who became the focus of his hatred. Though constantly threatened with death, he was eventually sent to a Singapore prison. Upon his return to Scotland, his life had been dramatically altered by his experiences in Burma as he suffered emotional withdrawal and was prone to icy rages and silent hostility. He frequently fantasized about the revenge he would exact from the interpreter. He read about a Japanese translator wracked with forty years of guilt for inflicting cruelty on POWs. The translator mentioned his inability to forget a victim tortured for drawing

and hiding a map. Lomax recognised Nagase Takashi, his torturer. The article described Takashi's repentance and his attempts at atonement which included setting up a charitable foundation for survivors of the Asian labourers, the laying of wreaths at the Allied cemetery, and his frequent trips to Thailand to build a temple at the bridge over the River Kwai. Later Lomax read about the shame that Takashi felt while watching Lomax being beaten. Takashi, now a Buddhist, wrote of being forgiven after praying at a cemetery for Allied soldiers. Lomax met Takashi, noting that Takashi's remorse was acute. Takashi said his life had been profoundly altered because of the War and he was now opposed to militarism. The two met and Lomax gave Takashi a letter of forgiveness.

Since we are interested in the phenomenon of apology from the perspective of the perpetrator, our interest is more on the torturer Takashi than Lomax the prisoner. With this focus, the following significant steps were taken by Takashi to demonstrate an attempted atonement:

- He wrote a short book reflecting upon his experiences ((A): a cognitive acknowledgement)
- He felt guilt and remorse (B)
- He worked with the War Graves Commission and revisited the graves (C)
- He built a religious shrine at one end of the bridge over the River Kwai (E)
- He adopted an anti-militarist position (C)
- When contacted by Lomax's wife and informed of her husband's anguish, he acknowledged who he was and responded with a thoughtful, sincere letter (E)
- When the two met, Takashi kept repeating "I am very, very sorry." (B)

Takashi gave Lomax enough good reasons to demonstrate that he had atoned for his transgressions and that it was time to mend the rupture. Takashi's response to the wrongs that he had committed is significantly different from that provided by other offenders, like Governor Eliot Spitzer so it will be useful to contrast these two examples.

The Spitzer Case: A Failed Apology

In March 2008, Elliot Spitzer, the Governor of New York, stepped down from his office because he had been implicated for patronising high priced prostitutes. He offered what was supposed to be an apology. It was painfully inadequate but instructive.

First, he did not come clean. No details of his wrongdoings were revealed; he *evaded* rather than *acknowledged* responsibility (A). He began his public address with an account of his accomplishments as State Governor General and Attorney General which, in fallacious *Red Herring* fashion, diverted attention away from the wrong and his part in it.

Second, his framing of his resignation as a private, personal failing or private matter seemed calculated to remove it from public scrutiny. He spun the prostitution-related offence as *an affair and not a crime*; hence he focused on the hurt to his family, not his failed relationship with the society that elected him. It seemed contrived, an attempt to negotiate himself into a position to avoid criminal charges. There was no evidence of contrition, no semblance of emotional feeling or remorse. He stood steadfast

and resolute. While Spitzer used emotional modifiers in his brief televised statement, such as he felt “deeply sorry” and “sincerely apologized,” both his body language of detachment and his wife’s body language of disbelief seemed to open these statements to serious doubt.

Third, his statements contained no repudiation of himself as the wrongdoer (C). His avowal that he had “disappointed himself” did nothing to inform his audience as to what moral values he had violated. This was a *statement of regret for the consequences he would suffer, not a genuine apology* intended to change relationships.

Fourth, he provided no narrative accounting, in which he situated himself as the main actor, for how he came to do the wrong (D) or how he intended to change because of it. There was little attempt to provide a cogent self-narrative explaining motive or context; the audience was afforded no insight into his character or the nature of his offences.

Fifth, there was little attempt to reaffirm his membership in and relational commitment to the moral community (E). He did affirm that he would attempt “to regain the trust of his family and friends” but the offences were clearly more egregious and he said nothing about the damage to the moral community or how he would address or rectify them.

V: Conclusion

When a wrong occurs, there is a need for a moral transaction to be negotiated, a damaged relationship to be repaired and a resolution made to rectify the wrong. Human beings are finite and incomplete and so is the public realm in which we act. Relationships that are fractured by a wrong cannot await a judicial decision or the expectation of a

correction of the fault in another world. Both the victim and the perpetrator need to have good reasons to work toward a resolution of a wrong. The acknowledgement of one's culpability in a wrong reveals an important insight about forgiveness – that we are fallible, limited beings. As Berel Lang claims, “the acknowledgement of a wrong committed and the assurance he [the wrongdoer] offers against its recurrence also represent a confession of limitation: he has not only suffered finitude, he has also asserted it, an acknowledgement that represents a stronger form of self-knowledge.”²⁹

Forgiveness by the victim opens the door to acknowledgement, to atonement for the wrong by the perpetrator, often in the form of an apology, and, finally, in the completion of the process, to the possibility of reconciliation. This transformation of the perpetrator and the victim in their relationship to each other is essential to achieving the recognition that can benefit both the perpetrator and the victim, abandoning recrimination, resentment, and hatred, and thereby freeing both parties.

Endnotes

¹ Another version of this paper was presented at an earlier conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Practical Ethics. We are grateful for helpful comments provided by the members of the audience.

² Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honour: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1998), 189.

³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), 254.

⁴ Retaliation implicates the victim in a cycle of revenge moving from one wrong (to the victim) to another wrong (to the perpetrator) to a third wrong (the victim retaliates against the victim) in a fallacious and mistaken attempt to rectify, balance, pay back, compensate, redress or justify the first wrong. This is misguided since the calculations do not work which maintain that one wrong will be corrected and balanced by a second

wrong. Instead, the ledger sheet will simply show that one wrong was followed by another and another and so on with no balancing, redress or justification accruing at the end of the process. The second wrong is not justified based on the first wrong. Indeed, the victim is likely to be further victimized by the commission of the second wrong against the perpetrator and likely to feel re-victimized.

⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 243.

⁶ Hieronymi argues that wrongful acts are not only a form of insult, but a kind of threat. Murphy and Hampton point out that wrongs possess an expressive power; a symbolic meaning. To wrong a person is to insult them, to demean them. "All wrongs seem to be insults, but some forms of insult are much more harmful than others" (Pamela Hieronymi, "Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 62.3 (May 2001): 142).

⁷ Linda Radzik, "Making Amends," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 41 (2004): 141.

⁸ J. Wilson, "Why Forgiveness Requires Repentance," *Philosophy* 63 (1988): 534-535.

⁹ William A. Meninger, *The Process of Forgiveness* (New York: Continuum International Pub., 1997)

¹⁰ Linda Radzik, *Making Amends*, 145.

¹¹ John Deigh, "Empathy and Universalizability," *Ethics* 105.4 (1995): 11. "For social cohesion in a community depends on its members sharing an understanding of what each owes the others, both individually and collectively in the way of forbearances and positive services."

¹² Trudy Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 100.

¹³ Cf. Brian Fay's distinction between a lived life and a told life: "Stories are lived because human activity is inherently narratival in character and form; in acting we knit the past and the future together" (*Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science* (London: Wiley-Blackwells, 1996), 206).

¹⁴ Robert C. Roberts, "Forgiveness," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1995): 290.

¹⁵ Radzik, *Making Amends*, 148.

¹⁶ Radzik, *Making Amends*, 141

¹⁷ Radzik, *Making Amends*, 142.

¹⁸ Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge*, 125.

¹⁹ Nicholas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

²⁰ The apology may include some of the following: an explanation of the offence, an expression of shame, an acceptance of guilt, the intention to not commit the offence again, and reparations to the aggrieved party. While we have advanced a secular account of apology, it is worth keeping in mind that in religious circles, the notion of repentance often plays the role that we have ascribed to the apology. For example, Maimonides offers the following steps towards repentance: confession, humility, remorse, forbearance, and reparation, which mirror the steps of the apology.

²¹ Trudy Govier and Wilhem Verwoerd, "The Promise and Pitfalls of Apology," *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 33.1 (Spring, 2002): 81.

²² Hanna Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 241.

²³ Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge*, 117.

²⁴ Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge*, 59: “No moral agent is ever absolutely unforgivable, though many may be, for important reasons, conditionally unforgivable.”

²⁵ See: Marcel Lieberman, *Commitment, Value and Moral Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 85, where he argues that the “constitutive role of commitment in self-understanding and identity...” is most important to character development. Deigh argues that “one can express sorrow and regret, offer explanations, ask forgiveness, and make apologies and further amends. By these actions, one disowns, as it were, one’s transgression, seeks to regain the trust one has lost, and signals a desire to renew good relations” (John Deigh, *The Sources of Moral Agency: Essays in Moral Psychology and Freudian Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 9).

²⁶ Deigh, *The Sources of Moral Agency*, 11. Also, see Murphy, “Forgiveness and Resentment,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 7 (1982): 503-516.

²⁷ Deigh, *The Sources of Moral Agency*, 11.

²⁸ Eric Lomax, *The Railway Man: A True Story of War, Remembrance, and Forgiveness* (New York: Random House, 1995).

²⁹ Berel Lang, “Forgiveness,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 31 (1994): 115.

Bibliography

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958

Deigh, John. *The Sources of Moral Agency: Essays in Moral Psychology and Freudian Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996

Deigh, John. “Empathy and Universalizability.” *Ethics* 105.4 (1995)

Fay, Brian. *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science*, London: Wiley-Blackwells, 1996

Govier, Trudy. *Forgiveness and Revenge*. New York: Routledge, 2002

Govier, Trudy and Wilhem Verwoerd. “The Promise and Pitfalls of Apology.” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 33.1 (2002)

Griswold, Charles. *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge UP, 2007

Hieronymi, Pamela. “Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62 (2001): 529-555

Ignatieff, Michael. *The Warrior’s Honor: Ethnic War and Modern Conscience*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1998

Lang, Berel. “Forgiveness.” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 31 (1994): 105-117

-
- Lazare, Aaron. *On Apology*. New York: Oxford UP, 2004
- Lieberman, Marcel. *Commitment, Value and Moral Realism*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998
- Lomax, Eric. *The Railway Man: A True Story of War, Remembrance, and Forgiveness*. New York: Random House, 1995
- Meninger, William, Fr. *The Process of Forgiveness*. New York: Continuum International Pub., 1997
- Murphy, J. G. and J. Hampton. *Forgiveness and Mercy*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988
- Radzik, Linda. *Making Amends: Atonement in Morality, Law and Politics*. New York: Oxford UP, 2008
- Roberts, Robert C. "Forgiveness." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1995): 289-306
- Tavuchis, Nicholas. *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Analogy and Reconciliation*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1991
- Wilson, J. "Why Forgiveness Requires Repentance," *Philosophy* 63 (1988): 534-535