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ARTICLE

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Apology and Forgiveness

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Abstract
Canada has a history of unjust injury inflicted on innocents by institutions, by collectives, and by individuals in personal relationships. There is widespread consensus in Canadian society that a proper response to such injury is an apology. I argue that for moral repair to take place the apology is not a good place to start. Explicit apologies conceal systemic social, political, and hermeneutic questions: by speaking out, they silence. As an alternative, I propose forgiveness, which I fill with meaning drawn from a particular Canadian perspective of diversity and recency in nation building.

Résumé
Le Canada a une histoire de blessures injustes infligées à des personnes innocentes par des institutions, des collectifs et des individus dans leurs relations personnelles. La société canadienne s'accorde généralement à reconnaître que la réponse appropriée est la présentation d'excuses. Je soutiens que pour qu'il y ait réparation morale, les excuses ne sont pas un bon point de départ. Les excuses explicites dissimulent des questions sociales, politiques et herméneutiques qui sont systémiques : en s'exprimant, les excuses réduisent au silence. Comme alternative, je propose le pardon, que j'enrichis d'une signification tirée d'une perspective canadienne particulière de la diversité et de la récente édification de la nation canadienne.

Keywords: apology; Canada; forgiveness; Heidegger; hermeneutics

1. Introduction

I will use three stereotypes about Canadians as a starting point for a serious proposal for what a culture of forgiveness meaningfully entails for a distinctly Canadian public conversation. First, Canadians have a reputation for the excessive use of the word "sorry"; second, Pat Buchanan labelled Canada "Soviet Canuckistan" to highlight policy differences with the United States (Allan, 2009, p. 85); and third, in 1936, Prime

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Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King quipped about the difference between Canada and some European countries in the following way: "If some countries have too much history, we have too much geography" (Ratcliffe, 2016). It is trivial that many apologies are poorly or perhaps even immorally executed. On the day I began writing this article (in the summer of 2023), Danielle Smith delivered an apology to the Alberta legislature that was roundly criticized for failing the most basic expectations of an apology, for example, in David Climenhaga's editorial in the online newspaper *The Tyee* (Climenhaga, 2023). It is not my task to add to the philosophical literature providing a normative account of a morally successful apology. These normative accounts are generally an apology of apology: they constrain proper apologies with a list of conditions that safeguard the positive contribution of apologies to social cohesion and individual well-being.[1] According to Nick Smith, this is a tradition that begins with Maimonides in *Hilchot Teshuvah* (Smith, 2005, p. 493).

I have no *apologia* (defence) for apologies, only a *kategoria* (prosecution). Apology and forgiveness do not complement each other; they stand in contrast, contra Aaron Lazare in his book *On Apology*, where he claims that "we cannot choose between apology and forgiveness because they are inextricably bound together" (Lazare, 2004, p. 130).[2] An apology is a speech act: explicit, intentional (based on agential choice), a dialogical reaction to a demand for an apology (possibly external, possibly based on the interior moral pressure of a conscience). It presumes a hermeneutics of trust, where language as the medium of communication transparently preserves the sender's intent for the receiver's interpretation. Paul Ricoeur introduces the distinction between a hermeneutics of trust (or a hermeneutics of the sacred) and a hermeneutics of suspicion making reference to the three masters of suspicion Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud (Ricoeur, 1970).

I have prior philosophical commitments that colour my view of apology and my view of Canada: the historical condition in this country is by and large one of industrialized, capitalist, and now digitalized, modernity, which makes a straightforward hermeneutics of trust problematic. Marxist epistemology provides a useful analytic perspective on what it means to live in a modern society.[3] Apologies create what Marx-inspired philosophers call "false consciousness," as if language and the rationality that produces it could sustain a framework by which we can access objective truths and order our relationships while setting aside power and class relations (Srinivasan, 2020).

Set in contrast to apology, forgiveness is a reparative social phenomenon that operates within the modern condition. As such, it is constitutively implicit — it cannot be articulated in a language that is at its root an agent of concealment before it is an agent of transparency; political — it is always self-consciously attentive to the power structure within which it develops; and tragic — its reparative effects do not ultimately resolve moral conflicts.

[1] See, for example, Davis (2002), Gill (2000), Govier and Verwoerd (2002), Joyce (1999), Kort (1975), Smith (2005), and Thompson (2000).

[2] For a counterpoint, see Margaret Urban Walker's book *Moral Repair* (Walker, 2006), where apology is backgrounded in favour of hope, trust, forgiveness, and amends.

[3] For a pragmatic epistemological use of Marx by a Canadian philosopher, see Wylie (2003).

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Forgiveness is correlated with the concepts of reconciliation and restorative justice. I use the term "forgiveness" in order to express Marx-inspired reservations about the way in which reconciliation is tied to truth and restorative justice is tied to justice. Truth and justice, as understood in the way Canadian democracy is set up, are important public policy goals; my analysis of apology in a Canadian context suggests, however, that the semantics of truth and justice cannot be divided out operationally from the semantics of capitalism and ideas of democracy that are subordinated to capitalism. Using the term "forgiveness" directs our attention to these semantic entanglements. That forgiveness has pre-Enlightenment connotations and originates in religious discourse is not unwelcome. Religions often come about as a semantic challenge to a dominant culture; Christianity is a good example (Bloch, 2009; Girard, 2001). Jacques Derrida's emphasis in *Le Siècle et le Pardon* (Derrida, 1996) on New Testament notions shows that the post-modern and the pre-modern have intersecting concerns: pardoning the unpardonable, the foolishness in the message of forgiveness, the purity of forgiveness as it is free of contamination by a marketplace of exchange and available only as inarticulate gift.

Canada, according to its tenth prime minister W. L. M. King, is uncharacteristically unencumbered by history — there is an interesting prejudice revealed in this claim — and equally uncharacteristically encumbered by its geography. I will charitably read King's comment as pointing to an opportunity for Canada: its public discourse, of course, does not operate in a historical near-vacuum, but it does operate at a relatively recent multitude of intersections of many different histories and cultures. Language is a treacherous medium to negotiate these intersections. In its reluctant but compulsory use, in the struggle for words — where the struggle and not the speaking is the action — there slumber, especially if there are many languages, possibilities for repair.

2. Heidegger's Apology

Rudolf Bultmann and Martin Heidegger were colleagues and friends in Marburg in the 1920s. Bultmann — Ricoeur's example of someone who against the masters of suspicion maintained a hermeneutics of the sacred — always kept at a critical distance from the Nazi regime after 1933, while Heidegger at least briefly embraced it. They broke off contact until Heidegger requested a meeting with Bultmann after the war, indicating that he wanted to ask for forgiveness.

> At the end of a day of animated conversation and exchange of ideas in which old bonds were spontaneously restored, Bultmann came back to the remark made over the phone: "'Now you must, like Augustine, write your *Retractationes*,' I said to him, 'and not only for the sake of the truth of your thought.' Heidegger's face froze into a stone mask. He left without saying a word ... one probably has to explain his reaction psychologically." (Kisiel, 1992, p. 31)

I will argue that Bultmann misinterprets Heidegger's inability to apologize by adducing Heidgger's psychology.[4] While Heidegger hopes for forgiveness, he cannot

[4] For a moving encounter between Heidegger and the poet Paul Celan many years later, where Heidegger again fails to apologize, see Kunisch (2020).

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articulate the apology. This accords with Heidegger's philosophical position on hermeneutics, language, and ethics. There is a large amount of literature tying Heidegger's Nazi past to the content of his philosophy. I do not necessarily disagree with this literature but want to highlight the perhaps equally interesting connection between his refusal to apologize explicitly and his views on hermeneutics.

One of the central tenets of Heidegger's philosophy, one that he was clearly not willing to surrender after 1945, is that post-Socratic/Cartesian Western philosophy, especially in its Enlightenment form, conceals Being to itself by representing it as a generic subject — for example, as a fungible rational ego or a psychological subject that can be investigated by empirical science. In Western culture, Being reductively conceives of itself this way often by means of representation (see "The Age of the World Picture" in Heidegger, 2002).

Heidegger never said so, but I suspect that he had illusions of being able to navigate the Scylla and Charybdis of on the one hand maintaining this central tenet and on the other hand pacifying his environment and saving his reputation with respect to his actions in 1933 and 1934. It is difficult for us to see (more because of a blind spot on our part than on his part) how irreconcilable an explicit apology would have been with a foundational element of Heidegger's philosophy.

As a typical Westerner, when I read the story of Heidegger's encounter with Paul Celan, I keep thinking: "Spit it out, old man, apologize to him already! At least acknowledge his pain by saying something!" But Heidegger had believed and taught all his life that the most important things needed to be communicated by silence. Opposition to Heidegger's apotheosis of silence would later kickstart Jürgen Habermas' career and remained a mainstay of Habermas' theory of communicative action (see "Martin Heidegger's Hidden Political Affinities" in *Die Zeit* on 11 June 1953).

Here is where I agree with Heidegger, as humanly painful and tragic as it may be: an explicit apology would have absorbed Heidegger in an ascendent culture to which he desperately sought an alternative. He realized very soon after 1933 that the deadly caricature of romanticism peddled by the Nazis was not an alternative. He had made a mistake, but then was willing to pay a higher price than a convenient apology. He continued to believe that there was an alternative to a world where the exchange of communicative tokens outstrips the irreducible personal uniqueness (*Jemeinigkeit*) of Being.

"Dasein is in general always determined by *Jemeinigkeit*," Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*. "In accordance with the character of *always-being-my-own-being* (*Jemeinigkeit*), when we speak of Dasein, we must always use the personal pronoun along with whatever we say" (Heidegger, 2010, p. 40). For Heidegger, the ascendent American culture that in the 1950s performed a remarkable victory lap around the world that came to a climax in 1989 is no competitive peer to a philosophy of Being but rather its cheap imitation, not least in its emphasis on sexual and communicative intimacy.[5]

The mimetic culture of the United States assumes a hermeneutics of trust as a matter of fact and thereby precludes a dissection of capitalist ideology along the lines

[5] For an innovative analysis of these aspects of American culture and Kant's, rather than Heidegger's, alternative of "depersonalizing intimacy," see Vogler (1998).

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of Marx-inspired epistemology. It centres psychological health around authenticity and turns discursification of all things that matter to humans into an overriding imperative (see Foucault, 1976). It de-ontologizes Being so that Being as it perceives itself reduces to the location it occupies in a formal configuration of relations that are subject to optimization and efficiency calculations. Heidegger considers an explicit (and therefore strategic) apology a genuflection to this culture.

In his book *Social Systems*, Niklas Luhmann remarks: "The more explicitly one co-communicates the intention of a message, the more it is received with doubt" (Luhmann, 1984, p. 499, translation mine). Luhmann recognizes that an articulated intention in a speech act sabotages the stated goal. Matthew's Jesus makes this observation with respect to charity in Mt. 6:1–4. The two words "I apologize" mire the person who utters them in a paradox between declarative illocution and its self-undermining perlocution.

It is again Matthew's Jesus who astutely observes, by sarcastically applying this insight in Mt. 18:22, that forgiveness is incommensurable with countable apologies. Initial apologies about a certain behaviour are often psychologically effective in rebuilding relationships, while second and third apologies actively serve to degrade those relationships (see Koch & Zerback, 2013). Apologies are linguistically but not practically repeatable and must conceal their complexity from themselves. Heidegger was caught between Ludwig Wittgenstein's dictum "whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (Wittgenstein, 1922, p. 23) and the dictum commonly attributed to his nephew, Paul Wittgenstein: "whereof one cannot be silent, thereof one must speak."[6]

This dilemma could have been resolved by valuing more highly the friendship with Bultmann and Celan than the integrity of his public pronouncements. Heidegger's hazard, the uneasy cohabitation of Heidegger's pre-war thinking with the post-war *Bundesrepublik*, avoids the easy resolution and stubbornly insists on "off the beaten track" (*Holzwege*) thinking favoured by Heidegger. With the advent of mass media, a popular version of Western philosophy, blending together life, truth, and communication as one conglomerate, has swept away Heidegger's *Holzwege*. *Holzwege* are not Euclidean optimized straight lines. They run with the land rather than across it and point to a long history of varied use. To funnel the labour of forgiveness into an apology is to Heidegger like abandoning the *Holzweg* in favour of a highway. Heidegger is not willing to give up the *Jemeinigkeit* (personal uniqueness) of his own path in order to join a mass market communications strategy.

Of course, he is wrong to deny the apology, as the protagonist of a Greek tragedy must always do what is morally compromised. There is a delicious ambiguity of the idiom "du bist auf dem Holzweg," going back to Martin Luther. Heidegger uses the expression exclusively as a cipher for the road less travelled, following the characterization above; but it also means (Luther's use) to be dead-wrong on an issue, to follow a trail that leads nowhere. It is my hope that in the spirit of forgiveness Heidegger covertly alludes to this subversive ambiguity while never making it flippantly explicit.

[6] Although frequently attributed to Paul Wittgenstein and the book *Wittgenstein's Nephew* by Thomas Bernhard (1986), the phrase does not appear in that work.

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I conclude with a passage from *Being and Time*, written long before Heidegger's own need for forgiveness became infamously public. It poignantly draws the connection between saying something and maintaining reticent silence, revealing their mutual need for each other.

> Thus the mode of articulative discourse belonging to wanting to have a conscience is reticence. We characterized silence as an essential possibility of discourse. Whoever wants to give something to understand in silence must "have something to say." In the summons, Dasein gives itself to understand its ownmost potentiality-of-being. Thus this calling is a keeping silent. The discourse of conscience never comes to utterance. Conscience only calls silently, that is, the call comes from the soundlessness of uncanniness and calls Dasein thus summoned back to the stillness of itself, and calls it to become still. Wanting to have a conscience thus understands this silent discourse appropriately only in reticence. (Heidegger, 2010, p. 273)

3. Forgiving Canada

Canada as a cultural construct has a unique history. It is structurally dominated by European culture and has a powerful neighbour towards whom Canadians feel strong mimetic attraction. In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, René Girard (1965) distinguishes between the heroic desire of romanticism, which a critical analysis reveals to be a diseased and concealed mimetic desire that operates by suppression, and the imitating desire of the novelistic ("romanesque") hero. Romanesque desire is named, artistically processed in its vexing complexity, and always undergirded by a hermeneutics of suspicion, by *dissimulation* and *mensonge* — for example, Don Quixote's desire to be part of the chivalric world (Girard, 1965).

What distinguishes Canada and the United States is not so much the professed values, cultural attitudes, and their resulting history and actions, but the historic contingency that Canada is smaller by population and must conceive of itself as an imitator. Americans must deal with their historically developed romanticism, whereas Canadians are confronted with themselves as a romanesque character. The relationship of apology to forgiveness serves as a watershed moment in this romanesque character development. While the (European) political and (North American) geographic contingencies of Canada push it towards a Habermasian enlightened culture of explicit articulation (in terms of its ethics, the legitimacy of its laws, and the aesthetic that ultimately guides people's lives), there is a potential in Canada to resist the apology and favour a historical process of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is multilingual and deeply polytheistic in the sense of Odo Marquard's "In Praise of Polytheism" (Marquard, 1989, pp. 87–110). The diversity of Canada's population does not allow for frictionless translation and dialogue; consequently, its central semantics is located at the abrasions of the communicative process rather than in the content that is transported by it. Indigenous populations, Black Canadians, Chinese, and South-East Asian Canadians are aware of the structural imbalance of alterity and victimhood that is enforced by public apologies about historical events. Because Canadian history is so superficially sparse and its geography so improbably

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stretched, a Marquardian monomyth of cultural homogeneity among Canadians is out of the question.

What remains is a hope that Canada's political stability, which owes much to the Enlightenment commitments of its public administration, can give rise to forgiveness, a situation in which humans find themselves as Beings rather than political subjects. To quote Derrida: "nous ne sommes pas définis *de part en part*, par le politique, et surtout pas par la citoyenneté" (Derrida, 1996, p. 128). The existentially personal nature of the monarchy versus the legally effective nature of the presidency symbolizes this potential.

I am aware that Habermas would attack such a segregation of public and private discourse as an insidious form of pietism. With Heidegger, especially in keeping with the fascinating way in which Heidegger's biography illustrates this point, I accept this attack as a problematization of an irreconcilably tragic aspect of human life: we cannot integrate our private and public selves as little as we can rationally differentiate between our private interests and public welfare by a "veil of ignorance" (see "The Original Position and Justification" in Rawls, 1999, pp. 15–19). I consider Michel Foucault's work a definitive refutation of the possibility that agents can implement this kind of integrity and authenticity (Foucault, 1979).

An apology is not only an apology; it is also a commitment to a hermeneutics of trust, to authenticity, to the romantic versus the romanesque, and to capitalism, for capitalism dominates exchange in Canada, both in terms of semantics and in terms of land, goods, and services. Forgiveness makes no such commitments. It is a historical process that seeks to hold concealment and revelation in tenuous balance without letting one of them eradicate the other. With Heidegger, it says, "to the disclosedness of Dasein discourse essentially belongs; Dasein expresses itself" (Heidegger, 2010, p. 205), and "conscience speaks solely and constantly in the mode of silence" (Heidegger, 2010, p. 252).

Forgiveness critically questions imperatives stemming from the instrumentalization of authenticity and homogeneity, which applies moral pressure towards the semantically dominated to disclose and expose themselves. Forgiveness is pre-critical with respect to subjectivity and allows for the *jemeinige* (irreducibly one's own) irrepresentability of the ways in which humans interpretively engage the world, themselves, and each other. It is post-critical by rejecting structuralist binaries and monomyths — examples for monomyths include capitalism, liberalism, and the technological progress of secularity — while understanding that there is no history that can be started from scratch. A dynamic of forgiveness constantly searches for political forms that meaningfully connect to available traditions, such as capitalism, liberalism, and religious narratives, of which secularity may be one version (Taylor, 2007).

In his specifically European context, Foucault uses Greek antiquity to achieve leverage over the cultural hegemony that the historical process of capitalism, industrialization, and colonization exerts over the language that he uses. One may call this leverage "semantic" in the sense that the meaning of articulated concepts is covertly managed by the historical process if speakers of the language remain entirely immersed in their own culture. Heidegger goes a step further and extends the leverage to one that is grammatical in the sense that not only the meaning of words but also the

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formal rules by which they are put together is a result of an impersonal, concealed, and administrative technology.

> [I]t is one thing to report narratively about beings and another to grasp beings in their being. For the latter task not only most of the words are lacking but above all the "grammar." (Heidegger, 2010, p. 34)

Heidegger primarily has in mind the grammar and metaphysics of Western philosophy in the Socratic tradition, for which he seeks leverage in the pre-Socratics and his own brand of poetic philosophy. Canada with its diverse population and geographically unique position can extend the leverage (in agreement with Heidegger) against the Aristotelian narrative that dominates the creative imagination of the West (and of which the story of the apology and its road-to-Damascus elements is an example). There is no Hollywood in Canada, only its mimesis in Vancouver and Toronto. However, there is room in Canada for Indigenous and immigrant experience that defies Aristotelian narrative and problematizes narrativity itself (Strawson, 2008, pp. 189–208).[7]

What the Greeks are to Foucault and Heidegger, Indigenous and immigrant (including European immigrant) experience is to forgiveness in Canada. This experience does not follow Aristotelian story lines. Instead, it reveals the complicity of Aristotelian story lines in the colonization of our attention and our attitudes by digital corporations and in the colonization of the land on which we live by extractive industries (Kimmerer, 2013).

Apologies in Canada — such as Stephen Harper's apology to former students of Residential Schools on 11 June 2008, or Justin Trudeau's 2018 apologies to descendants of Jewish refugees aboard the MS St. Louis and East Indian immigrants aboard the Komagata Maru — serve a variety of purposes (many of them commendable) and are for this reason impure by Derrida's standards. As Karen Pagani explains:

> When one contemplates existing phenomenological approaches to forgiveness, Derrida's account is one that immediately and unavoidably comes to mind. In *Le siècle et le pardon*, he painstakingly attempts to distinguish true from false, authentic from inauthentic forgiveness. It is clear that Derrida's primary concern in this work is to establish forgiveness as a pure phenomenon, something that may at times appear in the world but whose true being or essence is intellectually inaccessible, fundamentally disinterested in the factical world, and without causation. It is thrown into the world — much like Heideggerian Dasein (though with a few crucial differences) — simply so that it may be and, in so doing, be made manifest in an endless process of becoming. As such, forgiveness as Derrida understands is impervious to calculation, judgment, and intellectualization.
>
> The correlate and, arguably, the basis of Derrida's thinking on the subject of forgiveness is the absolutely pure gift. Derrida's primary concern as regards the gift, of course, is to "free" it from a "horizon of exchange and economy." (Pagani, 2018, p. 184)

[7] Compare Vice (2003), for a South-African context.

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Canadian public reconciliation procedures and their academic critique often search for the voice of survivors (James, 2012; MacLachlan, 2008). There is an awareness that survivors must often subversively speak the language of perpetrators in pursuit of this voice. Alice MacLachlan speaks of the "best imaginative reconstruction of [the victim's] voice and experience while acknowledging that such efforts are, at best, asymptotic and in need of constant reassessment and readjustment" (MacLachlan, 2008, p. 9). Matt James uses the "idea of the carnivalesque, developed by the anti-Stalinist Soviet cultural critic and touchstone for the cultural studies movement, Mikhail Bakhtin, [which] evokes the transgressive potential of medieval festivals, with their antiauthoritarianism, reversal of hierarchy and suspension of routine" (James, 2012, p. 189).

The phenomenology of forgiveness that I am trying to reconstruct in this article has several important lessons for this search of survivor voices in response to an apology and a social desire for reconciliation. I agree with James that the metaphor of the carnival disrupts a narrative hegemony. I want to add that the apology itself often entrenches the hegemony and by its discursification of forgiveness silences the non-narrative aspects of forgiveness — for example material and bodily aspects as well as questions of power relations and relations that we as biological creatures entertain with the land.

The discursification of forgiveness in an apology is not unlike the discursification of sex in Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, where:

> [. . .] le sexe n'a pas cessé de provoquer une sorte d'éréthisme discursif généralisé. Et ces discours sur le sexe ne se sont pas multipliés hors du pouvoir ou contre lui [. . .] on le débusque et on le contraint à une existence discursive. De l'impératif singulier qui impose à chacun de faire de sa sexualité un discours permanent, jusqu'aux mécanismes multiples qui, dans l'ordre de l'économie, de la pédagogie, de la médecine, de la justice, incitent, extraient, aménagent, institutionnalisent le discours du sexe, c'est une immense prolixité que notre civilisation a requise et organisée [. . .] ce qui est propre aux sociétés modernes, ce n'est pas qu'elles aient voué le sexe à rester dans l'ombre, c'est qu'elles se soient vouées à en parler toujours, en le faisant valoir comme le secret. (Foucault, 1976, p. 35)

Derrida explicitly tips his hat to Foucault when he writes in *Le Siècle et le Pardon*:

> [. . .] il faut aussi respecter, en politique, le secret, ce qui excède le politique ou ce qui ne relève plus du juridique. C'est cela que j'appellerais la « démocratie à venir ». Dans le mal radical dont nous parlons et par conséquent dans l'énigme du pardon de l'impardonnable, il y a une sorte de « folie » que le juridico-politique ne peut approcher, encore moins s'approprier. Imaginez une victime du terrorisme, une personne dont on a égorgé ou déporté les enfants, ou telle autre dont la famille est morte dans un four crématoire. Qu'elle dise « je pardonne » ou « je ne pardonne pas », dans les deux cas, je ne suis pas sûr de comprendre, je suis même sûr de ne pas comprendre et en tout cas je n'ai rien à dire. Cette zone de l'expérience reste inaccessible et je dois en respecter le secret. (Derrida, 1996, p. 129)

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For Derrida, it is impossible to forgive the perpetrator who has repented of his wrongdoing, for the repentant perpetrator is no longer the perpetrator who can be forgiven purely. More importantly, the perpetrator has been identified as the perpetrator. A taxonomy of power relations and an exchange narrative of wrongdoing and amends have been created and superimposed on the "victim." In *Forgiveness From a Feminist Perspective*, Kathryn Norlock astutely observes that forgiveness requires "considerations of power between relata" (Norlock, 2009, p. 2). Apologies in the popular imagination are almost always wisely observed to be a function of changes in power relations, from the apology of the prodigal son in Luke 15 to the song "Verzeih" by Reinhard Mey on his record *Flaschenpost*.

The apology-centred understanding of forgiveness is power-driven while maintaining power as "the secret." It operates in analogy to a popular understanding of honesty where the parent demands honesty from the teenager, the lover from the beloved, under the guise of morality, when honesty is really a convenient instrument to obtain inexpensive information and to establish hegemony. In the final paragraph of his interview with Michel Wieviorka entitled *Le Siècle et le Pardon* (Derrida, 1996), Derrida dreams of the "purity of forgiveness deserving of its name, that would be forgiveness without power" and ends the interview with the hopeful "cette folie n'est peut-être pas si folle" (Derrida, 1996, p. 14).

I have in the final paragraphs of this section the dream of forgiveness in Canada that in its articulations of remorse is always aware of the narrowing that such articulations produce. Perpetrators and victims are too easily narrativized into roles and ciphered into binary structures; the promulgation of the apology creates a corset for its possible semantics. This does not mean that I always oppose the expression of an apology. In an interview with *The Straits Times* on 17 April 2015, Haruki Murakami said, about Japan's responsibility for its 20th century aggression:

> I believe it is important that Japan makes straightforward apologies. I think that is all Japan can do — apologize until the countries [China, South Korea] say: "We don't necessarily get over it completely, but you have apologized enough. Alright, let's leave it now." (*The Straits Times*, 2015)

What Murakami masterfully highlights in this quote is how little effect the words of the apology ought to have in terms of determining the symbolic environment of the reconciliation, which he leaves to the countries that were affected by the aggression.

Derrida insists that forgiveness is a type of communion with someone who will not change, at least not as a function of either forgiveness or apology. He problematizes the *mondialization* of forgiveness and its immediate association with a crime against humanity. Perhaps a better model for forgiveness than the power inversion of perpetrator and victim is people who by historical circumstance inhabit the same location — for example, the two sets of in-laws in Paul Auster's *The Invention of Solitude* who live together for decades even though their adult children have split up as a couple long ago. Instead of expecting a sudden flood of semantic transparency about moral responsibility, forgiveness tends a garden of weeds and wildflowers, always stretching to accommodate what is foreign and to conserve integrity with its past,

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always maintaining surprise as one of the first principles of its aesthetics, and always aware of the importance of value (or goodness) in human life as well as its tragic incongruence with the natural facts.

4. Conclusion

Forgiveness — as is true for happiness, gratitude, and generosity — is predicated on a necessary mismatch of intentions, articulation, and behaviour. The person seeking forgiveness, rather than asking for it in an apology, communicates the (re)quest entirely by how they behave while simultaneously and fruitlessly needing to struggle through an articulation of the (re)quest in an alien grammar. The *aphesis* (forgiveness) of the New Testament is a transitive removal of sins. The forgiveness that I seek is intransitive: it has no object, is orthogonal to moral categories, and in contrast to the Canadian apology is not a matter of agency and verbal articulation.

Augustinian theology clarifies that there cannot be a choice to ask for forgiveness. The person who chooses to ask can only do so because they already live within the historical process of forgiveness. The choice, the asking, the articulation are downstream consequences and symptoms of forgiveness, neither its cause nor its necessary or, God forbid, sufficient conditions.

Perhaps the *selichah* (forgiveness) in Psalm 130 provides a better picture of what I have in mind, despite the different context of an Ancient Near East that with too little land and too much history is the opposite of W. L. M. King's modern Canada. Psalm 130 is full of (a) the awareness of an existential emergency — not at all spiritual or intellectual: the psalmist is deeply wounded, and the wound is one of bodily life experience; and (b) anticipation of some kind of goodness both in the future and in the character of the world (or its creator) as a whole. The bond between the other person and me is not our shared value — the shared value turns out on closer inspection to be monetary value dressed up in ideology — but our shared need.

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