

XII—APOLOGIES

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There is a cognitive, an affective, a conative, and an attitudinal component to a genuine apology. In discussing these components, I address the following questions. Might apologies be due for non-culpable actions? Might apologies be due for choices in moral dilemmas? What is the link between sympathy, remorse and making amends? Is it meaningful for resilient akratics to apologize? How much moral renewal is required when one apologizes? Why should apologies be offered in a humble manner? And is there some truth to P. G. Wodehouse's dictum that 'the right sort of people do not want apologies'?

I

Introduction. Social relations benefit from the practice of apologizing—apologizing functions as a social lubricant. In the public sphere, we welcome apologies from Volkswagen for employing forced labour during the Second World War. In the private sphere, we expect our friends or loved ones to apologize for the harm or hurt they have done to us. At the same time, it is also being said that there is too much apologizing, both in public and private life. In *The Man Upstairs*, P. G. Wodehouse (1914) writes, 'It is a good rule in life never to apologize. The right sort of people do not want apologies, and the wrong sort take a mean advantage of them.' Clearly, Wodehouse's quote is tongue-in-cheek, but it does point to the fact that there are constraints on applying the social lubricant of apologizing—that more is not necessarily better. One might retort that there are not too many apologies, but rather too few *genuine* apologies. 'A stiff apology is a second insult', the saying goes (Chesterton 1950). But what makes an apology a genuine apology? There is a cognitive, an affective, a conative, and an attitudinal component to

a genuine apology.¹

As to the *cognitive* component, the offending party may fail to recognize properly her wrongdoing. Japan offered formal apologies for the Second World War, but China and South Korea consider these apologies disingenuous because they are inconsistent with visits of Japanese public officials to the Yasukuni shrine honouring Japan's wartime dead (including fourteen Class A war criminals) and with the Japanese coverage of the war in history textbooks and in the press.²

As to the *affective* component, an apology may express little remorse or sympathy for the suffering caused and may be motivated more by opportunism. The compensation of Volkswagen and other German companies for slave labour during the Second World War has been criticized for being ridiculously low and motivated by political expediency.³

As to the *conative* component, the offending party may not display a willingness to change its ways. Apologies for the treatment of Native Americans in the US have little bite if private companies can continue to invoke the 1872 General Mining Law, which is harmful to native peoples.⁴

As to the *attitudinal* component, we expect an apology to be accompanied by an attitude of humility. A Kuwaiti public official rejected Saddam's apology for the invasion in Kuwait as 'an apology disguised in arrogance',⁵ because of the provocative nature of his speech and his military uniform.

I will discuss each of these components in turn and point to some puzzling features in §§II–V; I will then return to P. G. Wodehouse's dictum in §VI; §VII concludes.

¹ Subsets, supersets and overlapping sets of this set of components (expressed in more or less explicit forms) can be found in many historical and contemporary sources on apologies and on repentance as a requirement for forgiveness. It would take a separate paper to document and discuss these differences. Nick Smith (2008) recently published a monograph on the ethics of apologies. Since we were both rummaging the world news for examples during the same period of time, some of our examples are bound to overlap. For a bibliography of contemporary sources on apologies, see Smith (2008, p. 259, n.1). For a recent monograph on forgiveness, including a chapter on political apologies, see Griswold (2007).

² 'Ambivalent Apology', *World Press*, taken from the *World Press Review*, 48, 12, 2001.

³ 'Offer called too low to compensate Nazi-era slave laborers', CNN, 5 October 1999.

⁴ 'Supporting Native Americans Affected by Mining', *Oxfam America* 2006.

⁵ 'Kuwait deplors Saddam's twisted apology', *Middle East Online*, 12 September 2002.

II

The Cognitive Component. A genuine apology expresses the recognition that one's action (or omission) was an instance of wrongdoing. Now, apologies are not due for actions that are merely wrong *in hindsight*, for actions that turned out badly. Suppose that all the medical evidence points in favour of one treatment, the treatment is pursued, and yet the patient dies as a consequence of the treatment, say, due to an unforeseeable allergic reaction. In this case, no apologies are due. The doctor might say that she is sorry for what happened, for how things turned out, but she does not need to apologize for what she did.

This distinction can be exploited in an expression of regret over the consequences of one's actions that comes short of a genuine apology. For a genuine apology, it is not sufficient that the offender admit that her action turned out badly—she must also recognize her culpability. This issue is in the forefront of two recent controversies.⁶

Jylland Aftenposten published satirical cartoons on the subject of the Muslim faith and the person of Mohammed. There was an outcry in the Muslim community; many Muslims considered these cartoons to be highly offensive. Carsten Juste, the editor of *Jylland Aftenposten*, offered apologies for the feelings of Muslims having been hurt, but did not apologize for publishing the cartoons, since this action, he says, is protected by freedom of the press. Many Muslims did not accept these apologies, presumably because Carsten Juste merely apologized for the fact that his action turned out badly in some respects, but denied that there is culpability in the action itself.⁷

There was a similar reaction to the statement of Pope Benedict after his public lecture at the University of Regensburg in September 2006. Pope Benedict discussed the incompatibility of faith and violence and quoted the fourteenth-century Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Paleologus: 'Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as

⁶ Davis (2002) distinguishes the special case of saying that one regrets the offence caused by one's actions and apologizing for one's actions. Smith (2008, pp. 33–8) distinguishes between the acceptance of blameworthiness in 'categorical apologies' and the mere expression of sympathy. Swinburne (1989, pp. 73–4), on the other hand, sees a need for apologies for actions that harm others 'even if my actions were done in total ignorance of their nature or consequences (and even if I had taken all reasonable precautions to ensure that they had no such nature or consequences)'.

⁷ 'The Editor's Dilemma', *Internetavisen Jyllands-Posten*, 10 February 2006.

his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.⁸ In response to the outrage in the Muslim world about the use of this quotation, the Vatican made the following statement: ‘The Holy Father ... sincerely regrets that certain passages of his address could have sounded offensive to the sensitivities of the Muslim faithful, and should have been interpreted in a manner that in no way corresponds to his intentions.’⁹ But once again, to say that one regrets having caused offence and having been misunderstood is not the same as admitting culpability for one’s actions. The Turkish State Minister Mehmet Aydin puts the point as follows: ‘You either have to say this “I’m sorry” in a proper way or not say it at all—are you sorry for saying such a thing or because of its consequences?’¹⁰

What about the mirror image of this phenomenon, namely genuine wrongdoings that happen to turn out well? Suppose that a doctor maliciously administers what she takes to be an overdose of a medicine to rid herself of a patient, but that the dosage, in fact, cures the patient of a debilitating disease instead. Clearly the doctor is culpable. Is an apology due? If the patient is aware of the doctor’s intentions, then yes. But what if the patient is not aware of the doctor’s intentions? In this case there are still *pro tanto* reasons for an apology, but there are conflicting moral considerations—namely, that the apology itself may affect the general trust in the medical profession or inflict psychological harm on the patient. Sometimes it is, all things considered, better to let bygones be bygones.¹¹ We will return to this point below.

Moral dilemmas raise some special challenges for apologies. I will distinguish between *hard*, *tragic*, and *authentic choices*. This taxonomy and the role of culpability in this taxonomy is not uncontroversial, but this is not the place to enter the debate on moral dilemmas. I will simply stake out a position against which to assess when apologies are fitting.

Let a *hard choice* be a choice in which there are good reasons on both sides of the fence but there is a right answer nonetheless—for instance, when my professional integrity forces me to fire a be-

⁸ ‘Pope sorry for offending Muslims’, BBC News, 17 September 2006. For a more extensive discussion of this case, see Smith (2008, pp. 5–7).

⁹ ‘Pope’s statement in full’, CNN.com, World, 16 September 2006.

¹⁰ ‘Pope’s statement fails to end anger’, BBC News, 18 September 2006.

¹¹ For a humorous rendering of this point, see ‘Butters’ Very Own Episode’, *South Park*, episode 514.

friended colleague. Do I owe my friend an apology?

Let a *tragic choice* be a choice in a situation in which there simply is no right moral answer. Reasons on both sides of the fence are incommensurable and individually deeply compelling, and there is no choice that constitutes the right choice—whatever one does is wrong. Let us assume here that there are indeed such cases. One can think of Agamemnon's choice to let Iphigenia be sacrificed as a tragic choice, on the assumption that his fatherly duties were as strong as his duties as a statesman (Williams 1987, p. 123). Does Agamemnon owe Iphigenia an apology?

Let an *authentic choice* be a choice in which moral considerations unequivocally point to one course of action but there are conflicting non-moral considerations that point in a different direction. One can construe Gauguin's choice to leave his family and to pursue his painting career in Tahiti as an authentic choice.¹² Or think of a scientist's frustration with the injunction to refrain from performing radio-carbon and DNA tests on the Kennewick man in order to respect Native American sensitivities.¹³ Considering how a person conceives of herself, say, as a committed artist or scientist, it may be the case that she genuinely ought to do one thing—in the sense that doing so is constitutive of living her life well—though she would thereby be violating what morality demands from her. Arguably, morality may not provide overriding reasons for how one ought to live one's life. Let us assume that there are indeed such authentic choices. Should Gauguin apologize to his family? Should our dedicated scientist apologize to affected Native Americans?

When considering moral dilemmas, the notion of culpability is once again central. One might say that apologies are due in moral dilemmas just in case there is culpability. In hard choices, there is a right answer, and, arguably, pursuing this course of action releases one from culpability. In tragic choices, there is no right answer, and, arguably, no matter what one does, there is some kind of culpability. In authentic choices, one turns one's back to moral demands, and again, arguably, there is some kind of culpability. So, one might say, apologies are due in tragic and authentic choices, but not in hard choices.

¹² The case of Gauguin is discussed in Williams (1981, pp. 36–8) and in a response to an earlier version of Williams's paper by Nagel (1979, p. 28, n. 3) within the context of moral luck. Nagel and Williams disagree about the role of morality in Gauguin's choice, but a discussion hereof is beyond the scope of this paper.

¹³ 'Scientists finally study Kennewick man', BBC News, 6 July 2005.

But this may be too simplistic. As to hard choices, one might argue that even in the absence of culpability, an apology is due. There may be no culpability, but there is always a *moral remainder* (Williams 1987, p. 129). If I miss an appointment with you because my child suddenly became ill, I certainly chose to do the right thing by attending to her, but nonetheless I owe it to you to inform you and maybe even to make reparations if my failing to honour our appointment was costly to you in some way or other. If there is indeed such a moral remainder, might it not be reasonable to say that I owe you an apology? And if it is indeed reasonable, then apologies could be fitting and even obligatory for non-culpable agency. But maybe this is asking for too much. Indeed, alternatively, one might say that what I owe to you is an expression of regret for having been placed in this situation and for the consequences of my actions. This would then take care of the moral remainder, and a genuine apology for what one did would be misplaced considering that there is no culpability.

As to tragic and authentic choices, one might argue that even in the presence of culpability an apology would not be fitting. As suggested above and as further developed below, there is a conative component to apologizing—a willingness to act differently. Tragic and authentic choosers may admit that they are culpable for transgressing a moral boundary, but they typically do not say that they would have acted differently or will act differently in relevantly similar situations. Agamemnon may stand by what he did while admitting that he is culpable. And the same holds for Gauvain and for our dedicated scientist. But if this is the case, could they be said to be offering a genuine apology? How could one accept an apology if one were to know full well that the person offering the apology stands by her actions and will do the same in relevantly similar situations? What might be more fitting in this case is not an apology for what one did, but an expression of regret for having been placed in a tragic or authentic choice situation or an expression of sympathy for the suffering caused by one's choice.

This tension is present in Zidane's statement about the infamous headbutt on Materazzi in the World Cup final of 2006 after a provocation.¹⁴ Zidane states: 'I reacted, and it of course is not a gesture that one should do. I must say that strongly.' He apologizes, not to

¹⁴ 'Zidane explains', BBB Sport, 12 July 2006, and 'Zidane Interview on Canal+ (Subtitled)' [my translation].

Materazzi but to fans and educators in saying that ‘it was an inexcusable gesture’. But at the same time, he claims that he has no regrets for what he did, since to have regrets ‘would be like admitting that [Materazzi] was right to say all that’. Zidane’s action can be interpreted as an authentic choice in which the moral demand not to engage in unsportsmanlike actions is outweighed by what his honour demands of him—‘Above all, I am a man’, he says. He recognizes that what he did was *morally* wrong and that provides sufficient reason for an apology to the world, although not to the offending party. Nonetheless, the fact that he says that he does not have regrets can be interpreted as affirming that if he could do it over again, he would not act differently, because his conception of a good life stipulates that moral demands are trumped by a sense of honour in this situation. But it remains questionable whether an apology that is not accompanied by regret for what one did is indeed a genuine apology.

III

The Affective Component. A genuine apology expresses certain *emotions*. There is the emotion of remorse about one’s wrongdoing and there is the emotion of sympathy with the harm or hurt that may have been caused by one’s wrongdoing.

Is the emotion of remorse required for an apology to be genuine? I take it that remorse requires that the agent recognize culpability for what she did. Hence, the answer to our question is contingent on our stand on whether apologies are fitting in hard choices. If they are indeed fitting, then we cannot ask for remorse. Instead, for a genuine apology when faced with a hard choice, one should require that the agent experiences *regret* about having been placed in such a choice situation or about having caused harm or hurt through her agency.

As to sympathy, it may well be the case that my action did not have any harmful or hurtful consequences, as in the case of the patient for whom a maliciously administered overdose constituted a cure for her disease. If there is no harm or hurt, then we could not require an emotion of sympathy from the doctor. After all, there is nothing to sympathize with, since the emotion of sympathy is conditional on the presence of harm or hurt.

The sincerity of an apology is often measured by one’s willingness to make amends, or more concretely in some cases, to pay repara-

tions. This willingness can be thought of as a proxy for the presence of the emotion of sympathy. If one really cares about the harm or hurt that one has caused then one ought to be willing to take steps to alleviate this suffering. It can also be thought of as a proxy for the emotion of remorse. A remorseful person wishes that she could do things over again. But the past cannot be undone, and the next best thing is to make amends. In making amends we are attentive to the victims needs, and in doing so we try to distance ourselves from our past agency. So an unwillingness to make amends is a sign that one's apology is not genuine, since it indicates the lack of emotions of remorse or sympathy. Of course, the willingness to make amends is not conclusive evidence for the presence of these emotions—one could make amends grudgingly because one is under pressure, or one could make amends because restoring social interaction opens up interesting business opportunities.

Sometimes there just is no room for making amends. The wrongdoing may be victimless. Or the victim may be unreachable or dead. Or the victim may simply reject apologies and overtures to make amends. But it may matter very much to the offender that she is able to make amends. In a religious context the wrongdoer can appeal to the practice of penance. The wrongdoing is construed as an offence to God, and at least the wrongdoer can make amends to God through acts of penance. In a secular context a proxy for the victim is sometimes found—think of the support that Germany provides to the state of Israel, which extends well beyond reparations to Holocaust survivors.

The willingness to make amends rides on the emotions of remorse and sympathy. How much is required in the way of making amends? I take it that this would be a function of the amount of remorse and sympathy that is fitting in the case at hand. It may be difficult to determine how much remorse and sympathy would be fitting and how this is to be translated into a proper measure of amends. But there is a special problem when the turpitude of one's wrongdoing does not match the size of the harm or hurt that is caused. The turpitude of the wrongdoing may be either greater or smaller than the size of the harm or hurt.

In the lucky overdose case the turpitude of the wrongdoing is greater since no harm or hurt was done. Assume that even the doctor's confession would not cause any psychological harm to the patient. The patient is just happy to have recovered. It's not clear to

me that amends could meaningfully be made in this case, since the patient is not any worse off than if the wrongdoing had not occurred. Similarly, Samantha Geimer says that she never felt angry at Roman Polanski for having had sex with her when she was thirteen.¹⁵ Or children who fled the Holocaust in the Second World War might say that they doubt that they would have had better lives had their families not fallen victim to Nazi persecution so that they would not have moved to Brooklyn. In all such cases, is it meaningful to ask of the offenders that they make amends? One possible solution is that the wrongdoer be asked to make amends by supporting causes that support victims of the *types* of crimes they committed who were genuinely harmed.

What if the size of the hurt or harm is greater than the turpitude of the crime? These are cases of ‘moral bad luck’ and are covered under negligence, strict liability, felony murder and the eggshell skull doctrine in jurisprudence. The *legal* question is the question of what the proper measure of punishment should be in such cases. In the context of apologies, the question is whether a genuine apology requires that the willingness to make amends be proportional to the limited turpitude of the crime or to the extensive harm or hurt that was thereby caused. This is a puzzling issue. One would certainly expect some sympathy from the offender for the extensive harm or hurt caused and it is hard to believe that this sympathy is genuine if it does not translate into a willingness to make amends that provide genuine relief for the harm or the hurt. But then again, it does seem excessive to impose substantial reparations for wrongdoings of limited turpitude as a requirement on a genuine apology.

One might suggest that there are two types of amends—amends that address the wrongdoing and amends that address the harm or hurt caused. Through the former type of amends, I make it clear to you that, unlike in my past agency, I consider you to be a person who is worthy of respect, who deserves to be taken into account (Govier and Verwoerd 2002, p. 70). For example, doing something for you that is costly to me may convey this message. Through the latter type of amends, I compensate you for the harm or the hurt that I inflicted on you. What is due are different types of agency, viz. respect-conveying

¹⁵ This is her first response to Larry King, but the case is more nuanced. Later, she says that she cannot assess whether she was angry or not because she was deeply harmed by the publicity of the case (‘CNN Larry King—Interview with Samantha Geimer’). The lucky overdose makes a cleaner case, because it is more plausible to say that no actual harm was done.

agency and harm-repairing agency.¹⁶ Both types may be instantiated by one action-token, but they need not be. Should we then say that the same harm-repairing agency is due from a maximally reckless and from a minimally negligent driver causing an accident with similar consequences? Or does the turpitude of the crime matter at least somewhat in setting the measure of harm-repairing agency that is due? And should we say that the same respect-conveying agency is due after two assaults by equally determined offenders, one successfully carried out, the other successfully averted? Or do the consequences matter at least somewhat in setting the measure of the respect-conveying agency that is due? The distinction between two types of amends is promising but still leaves some questions unanswered.

IV

The Conative Component. A genuine apology expresses counterfactual and conditional *commitments*. There is a counterfactual commitment that if the clock were turned back, then I would act differently. There is a conditional commitment that if I encounter a future situation that is similar in morally relevant respects, then I will act differently.

But such commitments and apologies do not always go hand in hand. On the one hand, such commitments may be present without apologies being due. This is the case for actions that are wrong in hindsight. I now have certain information at my disposal that I did not have before, and I am not culpable for not having had this information at my disposal before. If my action hinges on a lack of empirical information for which I am not culpable, then there is no reason to apologize—rather, my ignorance is an exculpatory excuse for my action. Whether this predicament can be extended to non-culpable lack of moral information—due to the offender's youth or poor upbringing, say—is an open question.¹⁷

The relation between apologies and excuses is notoriously problematic. 'Never ruin an apology with an excuse', writes Kimberly Johnson.¹⁸ But the matter is more complicated than the quote sug-

¹⁶ I owe this suggestion to George Hull.

¹⁷ For a qualified defence of a positive response to this question, see Rosen (2003).

¹⁸ I have not been able to trace the original source of this quote. It can be found on quote-world.org.

gests. We expect the offender to provide an account of the wrongdoing—what is it that brought her to act in the way she did?¹⁹ Now this account may contain mitigating excuses and should be as complete as possible. But there is a fine line between telling the story extremely well and making exculpatory excuses. The mitigating excuses in a well-told story may add up and come to sound like an exculpatory excuse. The offender must make it very clear in what respects she considers herself to be genuinely culpable throughout the narrative that she provides of her wrongdoing.²⁰

On the other hand, there are cases in which counterfactual or conditional commitments are absent and yet apologies may be fitting. We already discussed the controversial cases of tragic and authentic choices. Furthermore, consider cases of resilient *akrasia*. I genuinely recognize my culpability for a past weak-willed action. But I also know my *akrasia* in the manner at hand to be resilient. I know that, being the *akratic* person that I am, I would act in precisely the same way if I were placed in the same situation and I will act in precisely the same way if I am placed in a similar situation. Would an apology then be disingenuous? I do not think so—people in loving relationships continually apologize to one another for very similar types of wrongdoing, knowing full well that virtue is not easy to come by.²¹

These considerations prompt the following: one might say that I need not be confident that I will act differently—it suffices that I *intend* to act differently.²² However, can I intend something, when I know full well that I will fall victim to *akrasia* and that I will not be able to do so? This brings us to Kavka's (1983) toxin puzzle. I can obtain one million dollars merely by intending at midnight today to

¹⁹ Cf. Griswold's account (e.g. 2007, p. 51) of the need for a narrative as a requirement for forgiveness.

²⁰ Smith (2008, p. 49) is more sceptical about mixing excuses (e.g. 'my migraine headache struck') and apologies. He writes: 'We play both sides by asserting that we might not need to apologize, but if that argument is not convincing we will apologize anyway.' I don't think that apologies *cum* excuses need to be instances of bad faith. I think that it is upon us to explain the background of our agency and this may require mentioning mitigating excuses. What is important is that we make it clear that we consider our excuses to be merely mitigating and not exculpatory excuses.

²¹ When Jesus enjoins us to forgive our brother 'even if he wrongs you seven times in one day and turns to you and says "I am sorry" seven times' (Luke 17: 3–5), does he enjoin us to forgive the resiliently *akratic* after a genuine apology or does he enjoin us to forgive unconditionally, also when there is no genuine apology on the table?

²² I dropped counterfactual commitments from this discussion. It seems to me that it makes no sense whatsoever for a person to *intend* to act differently in the counterfactual situation in which the clock is turned back and she is placed in the very same situation.

drink a toxin tomorrow afternoon that will make me painfully ill for one day. I do not need to actually drink the toxin, it suffices that I intend to do so. This seems like easy money, but the problem is that, as Kavka points out, by tomorrow afternoon, I will have no reason whatsoever to drink the toxin—after all, the money will be in the bank by the time I have the toxin in hand. And since I know this to be the case, how can I intend today that I will drink it tomorrow? Similarly, a resiliently *akratic* person who has self-knowledge would be unable to form an intention to change her ways. Does this block her from apologizing? Is it the case that a resilient *akratic* who has the epistemic virtue of self-knowledge is not capable of offering a genuine apology, but her counterpart who lacks this virtue would be capable thereof? Is ignorance bliss in the practice of apologizing? I find this difficult to swallow—it seems to me that even *akratiks* who have self-knowledge can offer genuine apologies.

There is a further issue about the scope of conditional commitments. Suppose that I swindle an elderly woman out of her savings. I offer my apologies. What kind of commitments does a genuine apology impose on my future actions? Clearly, I cannot be plotting to swindle another elderly person out of her savings while making a genuine apology. Nor can I be plotting another crooked money-making scheme. So a necessary condition is that I commit myself to improve my agency in the types of choices that are similar in morally relevant respects. At the same time, it would not commit me, say, to stop drinking. So, in general, it does not commit me to refrain from unrelated vices. A genuine apology requires a moral renewal in relevantly similar areas but not a fully fledged moral renewal—and, of course, in particular cases, the scope of relevant similarity may be difficult to determine.

V

The Attitudinal Component. A genuine apology expresses a certain *attitude*. An apology should be delivered in a humble manner. ‘The manner of the penitent is to be meek and humble,’ writes Maimonides in the *Hilchot Teshuva* (1993, ch. 7, §8). Why is such an attitude required in offering apologies?

There are three aspects to the attitude of humility. First, I may metaphorically or literally bow my head as an expression of the

shame of my having done wrong. Second, in bowing my head, I attribute special respect to you and I thereby try to make up for the deficit of respect with which I treated you through my wrongdoing. Third, in bowing my head, I relinquish power to you in that I let you be in charge of restoring my moral stature. Let us look at each of these aspects.

First, an apology is an admission of a moral failing. Now admissions of failings sometimes engender shame, but not always. For instance, I don't think that it is shameful to say that I did not pass the exam for the Foreign Service considering the low success rate for these exams. Common failings do not engender shame. But then why would common moral failings engender shame? Of course, one might say that the particular failing that I apologize for does not need to be a common failing. Clearly, if I apologize for a rape or a murder then this is not an apology for a common failing. And shame would be in order. But we also apologize for losing our temper, for forgetting to do our chores, etc., and our apologies for such common offences are not any less genuine for it. So I don't think that shame tells the complete story of why we bow our heads when apologizing.

Second, apologies are admissions that I did not treat you with the respect that is due to you. I bow my head to make up for the deficit of respect in my earlier treatment of you. Kant (1793, Part 1, AK 6:332) describes a case in which a rich offender must not only apologize, but also kiss the hand of the victim who is of lower social status. This display of humility expresses an excess of respect, and this excess is meant to put the scales of respect back into balance.

This brings us to the problem of apologizing amongst offenders. Consider the following two cases. Zidane makes it clear that he is not apologizing to Materazzi. In Zidane's eyes, Materazzi has foregone a claim to respect in virtue of his own wrongdoing—his verbal insults, his 'words which were harder to take than actions'.²³ The Bishop of Salisbury demanded an apology from Prince Charles to Camilla's former husband Andrew Parker Bowles for breaking up his marriage to Camilla.²⁴ This was considered ludicrous by some, considering that Andrew Parker Bowles had not been a picture of faithfulness himself during his marriage to Camilla. By sleeping with

²³ 'Zidane Interview on Canal+ (Subtitled)' [my translation].

²⁴ 'Charles must apologise for adultery, says top bishop', *The Sunday Times*, 27 March 2005.

a philanderer's wife, one does not violate the respect that is due to him, since no such respect is due to a philanderer. When one engages in a certain type of wrongdoing, then one can't appeal to a claim to respect when one becomes the victim of a similar wrongdoing.²⁵ Now this is not to say that offenders become outlaws (or even outlaws in certain respects). There may be stringent moral reasons for not reciprocating Materazzi's insults or for not having an affair with a married Camilla. But be this as it may, these moral reasons are not grounded in claims to respect owed to Materazzi or Bowles.

This has implications for mutual apologies. Should parties to a row apologize for blowing up at each other? Should spouses apologize to each other when both have had extra-marital affairs? Did they not forfeit their claim to respect by their own culpable agency? I think that this is indeed so and that apologies *are not due* in such cases. Why would I need to apologize to a person for a wrongdoing when she has foregone the respect that is owed to her by engaging in a similar wrongdoing, assuming that there is no clear first offender? There is no deficit of respect in my wrongdoing. But whilst apologies *may not be due*, apologies could nonetheless be offered with an eye to *restoring* the mutual respect in the relationship.²⁶

Third, there is something risky about offering an apology. Note that the victim is put in a position to either accept or not accept the wrongdoer's apologies. What is it to accept an apology? Let us think about why a person may not want to accept an apology. She may think that there is no reason to apologize or she may think that the apology is not genuine. That is fair enough. But could a person not refuse to accept an apology that she considers both in order and genuine? One might suggest that she does not accept the apology because she does not want to return to the way things were.²⁷ But I don't think that the acceptance of an apology commits one to doing that. A date rape victim might accept an apology for the offender

²⁵ This is an intuition that provides one kind of anchor for *lex talionis*, but as the remainder of the paragraph shows, one can agree with this intuition without endorsing *lex talionis*.

²⁶ What is especially upsetting is when apologies are unilateral and the apologizing party considers the offences from the non-apologizing party to be weightier.

²⁷ I disagree with Davis (2002, p. 172), for whom the acceptance of an apology constitutes a commitment to try to normalize relations, and with Taylor (1982, p. 105), for whom forgiveness constitutes a re-establishment of the relationship. Hampton recognizes that forgiveness can occur without reconciliation, but 'generally, one who is supposed to have experienced a "change of heart" towards a wrongdoer but who still finds the prospect of associating with the wrongdoer disturbing has probably not succeeded in forgiving the wrongdoer' (1988, pp. 42–3, n.9).

who once was a trusted friend, but the last thing she might want to do is to go back to the way things once were. So then why would I not accept an apology that I consider to be in order and genuine?

Just as, within a religious context, there is humility in letting God be my judge, there is also humility in giving the victim of the wrongdoing the power to restore my moral stature.²⁸ In accepting an apology, the victim awards the offender the status of a moral equal again, that is, a subject to whom respect is due on grounds of his personhood.²⁹ To put this colourfully, if I accept an apology, then I can no longer proclaim that the offender is a *schmuck*, treat him as a *schmuck*, or even think of him as a *schmuck*.³⁰ Of course, it is not the case that I condone what you did, that is, it is not the case that I change my mind about the fact that what you did to me was a *schmuck*-like thing to do.

There is a complex economy in the simple social interchange of ‘apologies offered’ and ‘apologies accepted’. The victim of the wrongdoing was not treated with due respect. The offender pays excess respect to the victim to restore this deficit and transfers power to the victim as a form of respect to the victim. This increases the self-respect of the victim. The offender acknowledges a loss of moral stature due to her wrongdoing. She can regain this moral stature only if the victim freely awards her the respect that is due to her on grounds of her personhood. The offender does not have a claim right that the victim accept her apologies, though, at least in some cases, the victim really ought to accept the offender’s apologies.³¹ It is sometimes said that being able to apologize is a sign of strength. This is consistent with my analysis. A person with strong self-confidence is not hurt by paying some special respect to a person in order to make up for the deficit of respect and can afford taking up the gamble of her apology being turned down.

²⁸ For the loss of moral stature on grounds of wrongdoing, see Swinburne (1988, p. 74), with reference to Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, I.19 and to Taylor (1982, p. 98). For a discussion of the role of forgiveness in the restoration of the wrongdoer’s moral stature, see Bovens (2008; 2009).

²⁹ Murphy (1988, p. 22) makes this same point concerning forgiveness.

³⁰ Similarly, Hampton writes that forgiveness is inconsistent with sustaining the belief that the wrongdoer is a ‘terrible person’ (Murphy and Hampton 1988, p. 36). Similarly, Maimonides (1993, ch. 7, §8) writes that ‘it is an outright sin to say to a penitent, “Remember your previous actions!”’, or to mention them in his presence in order to embarrass him, or to mention matters or topics which are similar [to his previous actions] in order to remind him of his previous actions—it is forbidden to do any of these’ (cited in Smith 2008, p. 117).

³¹ Cf. Maimonides (1993, ch. 2, §§9 and 10) on the duty to forgive.

How does accepting an apology relate to granting forgiveness? In the forgiveness literature, there is a sharp distinction between the position that forgiveness can be granted unconditionally and the position that forgiveness is conditional on repentance. If forgiveness can be granted unconditionally, then of course it is possible to forgive without accepting apologies, namely, in case no apologies are offered. If forgiveness is conditional on repentance, one may forgive a repentant offender who is unable to apologize, maybe because she believes that her deed is so monstrous that it is beyond apologies. But suppose that the offender has offered genuine apologies. Then it seems to be a conceptual confusion to respond that you are willing to forgive, but not to accept apologies. But the converse does strike me as meaningful, namely that you accept the apologies but are not able to forgive—or at least, are not able to forgive yet. Forgiving requires something more than restoring someone's moral stature. An emotional commitment on behalf of the victim is also required—forgiving requires that we commit ourselves to letting go of the negative emotions towards the offender who caused these emotions by her wrongdoing.³² Consider the following case. The Reverend Julie Nicholson lost her daughter in the 7/7 bombings in London. She has left her position because, she says, she is unable to forgive, and she takes this attitude to be in conflict with the Christian faith.³³ Now, if the offenders were still alive and truly repentant, then she might accept their apologies, but yet not be able to find it in her heart to forgive. In accepting their apologies, she would restore the moral stature of the offenders—she would commit herself to no longer thinking of them as moral monsters. But she may still find it much harder to let go of her feelings of resentment towards the offenders. Granting forgiveness is less under the control of the will than accepting apologies.

³² Following Allais (2008, pp. 56–9), I don't think that these need to be emotions of resentment as is commonly thought (see Murphy and Hampton 1988, pp. 14–87, and Griswold 2007, pp. 19–43, following Butler 2005, Sermons 8 and 9). If we forgive a loved one for a minor offence, it is typically not the emotion of resentment that we let go of. We would let go of disappointment and anger, but not of resentment.

³³ 'Vicar who cannot forgive tube bombers quits pulpit', *Guardian*, Tuesday 7 March 2006.

VI

P. G. Wodehouse Revisited. Let us revisit P. G. Wodehouse's quote. Who are the right sort of people not needing apologies? Following up on the discussion of the attitudinal component, there are two virtues the possession of which makes one less in need of apologies. First, people with a good dose of self-knowledge are keenly aware of their own shortcomings. Hence they tend to say 'no need for apologies' in the same way that Materazzi or Andrew Parker Bowles *ought* to say 'no need for apologies'. With this comes a general awareness of human frailty and the capacity to respect each other with our shortcomings.³⁴ Second, people with a good dose of self-confidence tend to be less affected by offences. It takes quite a bit to shake their sense of self-worth. So they see this excess respect coming from the victim and this transfer of power that the victim bestows on them in the apology game as a needless and annoying charade.³⁵

And what about the wrong sort of people? We can simply look at the vices matching the virtues that characterized the right sort of people. The wrong sort of people are smug—they are all too prone to see moral deficits in others but not in themselves, and hence overly eager to demand apologies. Second, insecurity makes people perceive minor offences (or even alleged offences) as major threats to their sense of self-worth. There is a Flemish saying that some people have 'long toes'—it's all too easy to step on their feet. In addition, people who are power-crazed and money-grabbing will take 'a mean advantage' of apologies, i.e. they will impose unreasonable conditions on accepting an apology.

³⁴ This appeal to an awareness of one's own shortcomings relates to Garrard and McNaughton's argument (2002, pp. 53–9) for unconditional forgiveness on grounds of our common moral frailty. I do not wish to defend unconditional forgiveness, but social arrangements in which this kind of unconditional forgiveness, at least for minor transgressions, is a matter of convention would indeed reduce the need for apologies. Compare also Griswold's forgiveness as love 'in the sense that it affirms our commonality, as human beings, with the morally worst amongst us' (2007, p. 34) in his discussion of Butler (2005).

³⁵ This appeal to a strong sense of self-worth relates to perfectionist misgivings about the practice of apologizing in Plato, Aristotle and Nietzsche as discussed by Griswold (2007, pp. 2–19) and by Murphy (1988, p. 18).

VII

Conclusion. When an apology is not genuine, the victim has good reason not to accept it. We examined a cognitive, an affective, a conative, and an attitudinal component of a genuine apology. The offending party should recognize her wrongdoing, show remorse or sympathy, be committed to changing her ways and display an attitude of humility.

A genuine apology requires that the agent recognize her wrongdoing, but the link between apologies and culpability is complex. There is a distinction between apologizing for one's culpable agency and being sorry for the consequences of one's non-culpable agency. As to moral dilemmas, an apology may be in place to fill in the moral remainder in hard choices, even though the agent chose to do what was right and does not acknowledge any culpability. In tragic and authentic choices, an agent may acknowledge the moral culpability of her agency and yet stand by her agency—and this may stand in the way of a genuine apology.

Emotions of remorse about one's agency and sympathy for the harm or hurt caused are essential to genuine apologies. These emotions should find their expression in a willingness to make amends. It is particularly difficult to determine the proper size of amends when the turpitude of the wrongdoing is not in line with the harm or the hurt caused.

Genuine apologies require a counterfactual commitment to act differently if the clock could be turned back and a conditional commitment to act differently in similar matters. But apologies and commitments do not go hand in hand in cases of non-culpable ignorance and in cases of resilient *akrasia*. As to conditional commitments, there is also a question about the scope of the moral renewal that should accompany a genuine apology.

Genuine apologies are made in a humble manner. First, I may bow my head in shame for serious wrongdoings. Second, I try to make up for the deficit of respect with which I treated you. This explains why an apology may not be due to someone who has squandered her claims to moral respect in some moral matter. Third, I relinquish power to you to restore my moral stature. The attitudinal component of genuine apologies casts light on the strange ritual of offering and accepting apologies.

I do not wish to embrace P. G. Wodehouse's dictum wholeheartedly, but nonetheless, there is a kernel of truth to it. People who are smug, insecure and eager to gain personal advantage are all too eager to insist on apologies. People who are aware of their own shortcomings and have a strong sense of self-confidence are in minimal need of apologies.³⁶

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³⁶ I am grateful for comments by Foad Dizadji-Bahmani, George Hull, Annabelle Lever, Alice Olbrecht, Michael Otsuka, Christoph Schickhardt and Alex Voorhoeve, and by members of the various audiences to whom I have presented earlier versions of this paper.

³⁷ All URLs were accessed on 13 June 2008.

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