

University of Victoria

From the Selected Works of Sam Grey

2019

Returning to the Source - Revisiting Arendtian Forgiveness in the Politics of Reconciliation

Sam Grey, *University of Victoria*



Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/samgrey/23/>

Returning to the Source

Revisiting Arendtian Forgiveness in the Politics of Reconciliation

Sam Grey

Abstract: The idea of forgiveness is omnipresent in the transitional justice literature, yet this body of work, taken as a whole, is marked by conceptual, terminological and argumentative imprecision. Equivocation is common, glossing moral, theological, therapeutic and legal considerations, while arguments proceed from political, apolitical and even antipolitical premises. With forgiveness as a praxis linked to reconciliation processes in at least ten countries, concerns have grown over its negative implications for the relationship between the state and victims of state-authored injustices. Many of these debates reference Hannah Arendt. Drawing from a range of Arendt's published and unpublished work, this article challenges the academic claim that forgiveness has no place in the politics of reconciliation. Through this 'returning to the source', it presents a promising mode of thinking about political forgiveness in contemporary Settler-colonial states.

Keywords: Arendt, forgiveness, Settler colonialism, reconciliation, transitional justice, truth and reconciliation commissions

Since the 1980s truth commissions, official apologies and other state-authored processes of reparation and reconciliation have rapidly emerged across the globe. Although a transition to democracy is their paradigmatic context, mechanisms of transitional justice have recently come to the fore in the absence of regime change – most prominently, Indigenous-Settler reconciliation initiatives in



Settler-colonial states. These engagements have operated through a rough dialectic of admission and absolution, vacillating between moral and legal domains, so that the twentieth-century summoned a *politics of forgiveness* to animate an *age of apology* (Renteln 2008). Across the literature on this politics, viewed as a whole, conceptual precision, terminological clarity and argumentative consistency are lacking. There is considerable equivocation on the term ‘forgiveness’ itself, glossing moral, theological, therapeutic and legal aspects and applications while arguments about its political potential proceed from political, apolitical and even antipolitical premises. Most formulations have, as critics have noted, problematic implications for the specific relationship between the state and victims of state-authored injustices.

Many authors on political forgiveness reference Arendt (cf. Gobodo-Madikizela 2008; Govier 2002; Minow 1999; Schaap 2005; Vandevelde 2013, among others). Indeed, her work seems partially responsible for introducing the idea into political discourse (Young-Bruehl 2006). Although Arendt’s concern with responses to wrongdoing is longstanding, and although forgiveness plays a central role in her political thought, she engages in a focused discussion of the concept in only two published works. *The Human Condition* (1958 [1998]) contains the most in-depth treatment, refining thoughts recorded in her *Denktagebuch*,¹ the posthumously published journals Arendt kept between 1950 and 1973. The concept also finds mention in 1963’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, while a ‘duty to forgive’ is the subject of letters she exchanged with the poet Auden in 1960 (of which, his half of the correspondence is lost).² The brevity of her focus on forgiveness per se, coupled with the fact that her ideas about its political function evolved over time, has inspired a wide array of interpretations.

In the hope of avoiding some of the lacunae and inconsistencies that trouble prior accounts, this interpretation draws from a range of Arendt’s published and unpublished works to assemble a model of forgiveness supported by her political theory as a whole. Exploration proceeds with an eye to the most pressing concerns about forgiveness as a political praxis and with a specific focus on the contemporary ‘reconciliatory’ moment in Indigenous-Settler relations globally. ‘Returning to the source’ here catalyses a challenge to the increasingly popular claim that forgiveness has no place in

politics³ by theorising an alternative way of thinking about political forgiveness in contemporary Settler states. This work was inspired by the idea that Arendtian forgiveness, when coupled with her unique formulation of ‘the political’, might yield important insights in this specific setting – and, as it happens, Arendt’s account of forgiveness as a political faculty is both proven out and tested by the experience of Settler colonialism.

Critiquing Forgiveness in Reconciliatory Settings

Reconciliation has dominated late-twentieth and early twenty-first-century responses to historical injustice, with forgiveness an integral part of these responses. The increasingly common ritual of official apology typically invokes forgiveness, while countless projects have coalesced around the political utility of the sentiment. There is a straightforward, almost intuitive appeal at work: as part of the affective architecture of friendships and families, forgiveness may have a similar role in the lives of communities and nations. Consequently, there has been a remarkable proliferation of political processes worldwide dedicated to cultivating forgiveness – processes increasingly seen as not just good and desirable but also socially and politically necessary.

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) rested on an assertion that there could be ‘no future without forgiveness’ (Tutu 1999). Statements about forgiveness being a co- or prerequisite of peace and reconciliation opened the TRCs of Peru and the Solomon Islands (Otis 2002; Wickham 2009). Forgiveness was listed among the explicit goals of Rwanda’s *Gacaca* Tribunals as well as the Uruguayan, Ghanaian and Sierra Leonean reconciliation commissions (Attafuah 2004; Harris 2013). The National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction’s definition of ‘reconciliation’ had forgiveness as a core element, while the Haitian *Promotion of Reconciliation, Unity, and Tolerance Bill* of 2005 described ‘a process of ... the restoration of human dignity within the community through ... forgiveness’ (Attorney General of Fiji 2005: I.3, sub. 2b; CAVR 2006). When the mandate of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission expired, Morocco’s King Mohammed VI exhorted victims of the Makhazen to ‘forgive with a gracious

forgiveness' and all citizens to join in forgiving so that the country could 'reconcile ... with its past' (Hazan 2008, 7). Sixty percent of statement givers to the Liberian TRC identified 'forgive and forget' as a viable option for reknitting their society (Cibelli, Hoover and Kruger 2009). Similarly, the International Committee of the Red Cross understands 'reconciliation' to be 'an umbrella-term for an overall process which includes the search for truth, justice and forgiveness' (ICRC 2006: 1).

This popularity is attributable to the penetrating roots of forgiveness. It is among the highest virtues in many faiths, while globally reconciliation fused rapidly with transnational and hegemonic religious ideologies. The South African TRC, for example, was shot through with notions of Christian absolution (Farhadian and Emmons 2009; Nader 2000). The Rwandan government drew heavily on New Testament accounts of confession and absolution to coax admissions of guilt (McGreal 2013). Similarly, on the eve of the release of the national truth commission's report, the Salvadoran president recited the Lord's Prayer on national television before asserting that 'the time has come to forgive' (Human Rights Watch 1993: 15–16). Such deployments have triggered accusations of the Christianisation of reparations politics, along with caveats about universalising such a specific – and specifically religious – virtue.⁴

Support extends well beyond the ranks of the faithful, though, and raises objections on more than religious grounds. The mental health profession holds forgiveness as a psychological boon to both giver and receiver, while those who transcend their injuries and absolve wrongdoers are said to evidence superior emotional intelligence (Jacoby 1983; Worthington 2005). This is the therapeutic argument. Similarly, contemporary political liberalism hails forgiveness as the catalyst of those supreme political goods and 'vital needs of a community': peace and unity (Booth 2001: 784). Forgiveness thus demarcates a civil state of grace; in fact, Tutu referred to it as a 'civic sacrament' (Asmal, Asmal and Roberts 1998: 49). Accordingly, a significant portion of the literature on transitional justice presents forgivingness as a key trait of the idealised post-conflict actor. The forgiving champion the common good, showing 'a largeness of soul, the ability to let the past go for the good of the future' (Stauffer 2002: 5). This is the argument from civic virtue.

Both elevations have prompted a host of critiques, most focusing on the fact that forgiveness, absent evidence of substantive remorse, leaves victims vulnerable to future exploitation (Govier 2002). Such a risk is exponentially exacerbated when the perpetrator of past harms is the present state, as is invariably the case in Settler-colonial contexts. Further, Western individualism, inflected with Christian and liberal democratic notions of meritorious overcoming, places primary responsibility for forgiveness on the wronged. Forgiveness here is an internal shift troublingly detached from external circumstances. Here Tinker is worth quoting at length:

Politically and materially, native people remain as disempowered and dispossessed of their land and resources as ever. So, too, the settler-colonizers' control over these assets. The colonizers, moreover, have gained an explicit statement from the colonized forgiving the very fact of their colonization.... A more complete assimilation to the settlers' internal colonial order is hard to imagine. (2004: xxix)

Indeed, from a certain perspective there is no objective reality beyond what the wronged chooses to make of his situation, working from the understanding that 'to err is human'.

More than merely acknowledging human fallibility, though, forgiveness appears to esteem the offender too highly. As Ozick relates, reflecting on the Holocaust: 'The rabbis said, "Whoever is merciful to the cruel will end by being indifferent to the innocent": Forgiveness can brutalize.... It negates the right of the victim to his own life. It blurs over suffering and death. It drowns the past' (1998: 215–216). Overall, both the therapeutic and the civic virtue argument can be said to obscure the link between absent *forgiveness* and absent *justice*, raising concerns that the languages of healing and overcoming are obfuscating the fact that more substantive justice is actually out of reach or is not actually being reached for (Jacoby 1983). Here, personal curatives and character development become the moral and social runners-up (Dwyer 1999).⁵

Closely related to these arguments is the futurist claim, with its mining of the bond between affect and memory – or, more specifically, its endorsement, tacit or explicit, of the dictum 'forgive and forget'. In Adorno's view, the ubiquitous TRC mandate of 'coming to terms with the past' never signifies 'a serious working through [but] rather, wishing to turn the page and, if possible, wiping it from

memory. The attitude that it would be proper for everything to be forgiven and forgotten by those who were wronged is expressed by the party that committed the injustice' (cited in Ignatieff 1996: 112). This echoes James's conclusion that official apologies in Canada have yielded 'unseemly advantage' for the current government in particular and the state in general (2009, 137). Religious and secular NGOs, which proliferate in postconflict environments, often espouse an even more salutary narrative of forgiving and 'moving on'.

In the wake of grave harm, discourses of forgiveness may indicate a profound category error in political reasoning, as the concept itself is often highlighted as 'simply irrelevant, ... as extraneous as the moon' (Alford 2012: 235–236). Anything that permits redemption logically applies only to conditions susceptible of redemption – a grouping that surely excludes phenomena such as genocide (Ozick 1998).⁶ Further, the ability to forgive is a prerogative underwritten by privilege, while fate confers different standings on individual survivors. As one testimony giver at the South African TRC noted, 'It is easy for Mandela and Tutu to forgive ... they lead vindicated lives. In my life, nothing, not a single thing, has changed since my son was burnt by barbarians. ... Therefore I cannot forgive' (quoted in Krog 1998: 142). This additionally summons Kolnai's (1973: 91) 'forgiveness paradox': 'deservedness' would seem a precondition of forgiveness, which at its upper limit alters the offender's standing – being deserving, he seems less of a wrongdoer, making forgiveness pointless.

Ultimately, as a personal act or interpersonal process (as even TRCs call upon the mercy of individual survivors), the existence of a political or public justice function for forgiveness is debatable. Moreover, by drawing the response parameters from the furthest bounds of legitimate retribution, forgiveness vacillates between *tempering* and *tampering with* justice (Murphy 1986: 1).⁷ Common-sense ideas about the line between the two compel a choice between rival truisms, as it cannot simultaneously be the case that we should 'forgive and forget' and that everyone will 'reap what they sow'. Jacoby finds that the admonition to forgive 'implies a lack of respect for the profound sense of moral equilibrium impelling us to demand that people pay for the harm they have done' (1983: 361). Because we can be seen as (or worry that we are)

endorsing that which we forgive, Levi asserts that the wronged who grapples with forgiving evil imposes upon himself ‘a terrible moral violence’ (1998: 191).

Forgiveness has thus earned charges of deploying explicitly Christian, Western, (neo)liberal reasoning⁸ in presenting a specific (and specifically utile to the state and status quo) personal disposition as a universal social-political good. It has also been accused of inappropriateness or inapplicability in cases of profound wrongdoing, as both exploiting and obscuring positionality,⁹ as a self-defeating or circular proposition, as apolitical or even antipolitical in form and function and as corrosive of a moral-legal order that is both well respected and civically necessary. To dispatch these charges, one would need a nontherapeutic, noncharitable, nonmoral, non-theological account of forgiveness, one that is inherently political, internally consistent, firmly oriented toward justice, attentive to social particularity and does not entail forgetting or tacitly condoning the original wrong. Developing such an account was Arendt’s self-set task.

Arendtian Forgiveness

After the Second World War, in the wake of those attendant atrocities that deeply troubled both legal and political thought, Arendt initiated a lifelong struggle against what she perceived as a reactive retreat from the political sphere. Her proximate goal was an account of politics as a communicative, revelatory, relational activity rather than one concerned with domination or distribution. Hers is an explicitly noninstrumental politics, and in this formulation, forgiveness plays a pivotal role – making it necessary to begin an account of Arendtian forgiveness with Arendt’s theory of action.

The Theory of Action and Necessity of Forgiveness

According to Arendt (1998), the fundamental human activities are labour, work and action. Labour is the sphere of necessity, conditioned by life itself, wherein we are occupied by everything that flows from our biology/physicality. Work is the sphere of utility, conditioned by worldliness, wherein we create the durable things that give us a sense of ease and continuity. Action is the sphere of

freedom, wherein we come together to disclose our unique identities and collectively affirm the world. Human flourishing requires engagement in all three, but only the third sphere circumscribes a uniquely human and, thus, explicitly political undertaking. Action is the actualisation of the birth right of every person: natality, the potential to introduce something wholly new and unexpected into the world. Such action is conditioned by the essential human characteristic of plurality, implying both distinction and equality: each person is an individual ‘who’ and a shared ‘what’.¹⁰ When individuals come together in the sphere of action they perform deeds and speak words that disclose their singular identities; with each action they tell one another the story of ‘who’ they are.

In Arendt’s theory of action (1998) the purpose of politics is the exercise of freedom – but this is an unfamiliar freedom. She notes that it has become a philosophical tradition to think freedom begins when man has left the political realm and starts to concern himself with his inner will. Thus, *freedom* eventually equates with *free will*, and from this conceptualisation most connotations of sovereignty arise. For Arendt, freedom evolves out of action itself. It is the realisation of the capacity to act, to begin. Considering this in light of the essential condition of plurality yields an Arendtian political axiom: human action and, thus, human freedom is nonsovereign, as

[m]an’s inability to rely upon himself or to have complete faith in himself ... is the price human beings pay for freedom; and the impossibility of remaining unique masters of what they do, of knowing its consequences and relying upon the future, is the price they pay for plurality and reality, for the joy of inhabiting together with others a world whose reality is guaranteed for each by the presence of all. (1998: 244)

Action’s animating principle and validity are internal, almost definitional. As Arendt explains, ‘the meaning of a thing ... is always contained within the thing itself, and the meaning of an activity can exist only as long as the activity continues’ (2005: 192). Politics cannot be instrumental, for then its aim would lie outside the political – it would become *freedom from* or *freedom to* rather than *freedom in and of itself*. According to Arendt, people do not come together merely for strategic or instrumental purposes but rather principally for expressive and communicative ones, to ‘live together in the world’ (1998: 52). There is a kind of instrumentality,

here, to be certain, but the temporal is key to the distinction, in Arendt, for whom the 'world' is not one we build in hope of future occupation, making politics a means, but one constructed as it is inhabited, making it an end in itself (or perhaps, subsuming the ends within the means). Her claim is, 'essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world . . . relates and separates men at the same time' (1998: 52).¹¹ There is a worldly in-between, concerned with specific, objective interests, 'overlaid' and 'overgrown' with a subjective, intangible in-between, in which men act and speak directly to one another. This latter in-between, made up of deeds and words, is what Arendt calls the 'web of human relationships' (1998: 182–183). Action always takes place within this preinstitutional space ('pre-' in the sense of both preceding and pre-dating organised government). 'Wherever people gather together it is potentially there', she notes, 'but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever' (1998: 199).

It is the nature of action that it is boundless (which it must be to unite people), irreversible and unpredictable. Having performed an action, a person is immediately demoted to mere witness, unable to alter the fact of its existence or direct its impact. Not only do humans literally 'know not what they do'; in Arendt's theory they *cannot* know what they do. 'To act' is to send unstoppable, uncontrollable, unretractable words and deeds out along the strands in the 'web of relationships', at least some of which will cause or contribute to harm. Freedom is thus simultaneously our greatest political achievement and the source of our principal political woes. 'Men . . . never can guarantee today who they will be tomorrow', and so to live in the world is to live in doubt (1998: 244). Although each individual discloses his own identity, our identities only coalesce into a coherent whole in retrospect, in the narratives that inscribe political words and deeds in public memory. Ironically, only in stories of the past do future-oriented actions gain meaning; only in this recorded, reordered form do they become instructive, and as such they are essential to the transit of the public-political realm (which, without them, would have no memory beyond a single lifetime).

Each sphere of Arendtian action has inherent flaws and each redeems the one it exceeds, as she proposes a progression from labour (necessity) to work (utility) to action (politics). The stability

of work rescues us from the vicissitudes of labour; the vibrancy of action lifts us above the meaninglessness of necessity. Because there is no sphere above action, its frailties cannot be addressed in this same way, so its salvation must come from within. Action cannot become *inactive* through withdrawal from the world, or redeem itself from without – at least not without destroying its own essence. Only further, equally irreversible and unpredictable action can make the inevitability of harm sufferable. Accordingly, political actors ameliorate action's fundamental unpredictability by engaging in mutual promise-making and mitigate its irreversibility by forgiving and being forgiven. Without these, every person would be bound to the past and incapable of 'newness'. 'These moral precepts arise ... directly out of the will to live together ... and thus they are like control mechanisms built into the very faculty to start new and unending processes' (1998: 246).

The Nature and Place of Forgiveness

In *The Human Condition* Arendt concludes the section on 'action' with a discussion of promise-making and forgiveness. Just as action is rooted in experiments in living together in the world, heuristics in forgiveness originate with Jesus,¹² the first person in an Abrahamic tradition to remove forgiveness from God's hands and place it into man's.¹³ Arendt's goal, though, is a noncharitable, nonmoral, non-theological forgiveness, so her work will not yield a political theology or an account of the public-political utility of a private virtue. Her inspiration is not the divine *Christ* but the historical, human *Jesus*, whose 'authentic political experiences ... in the small and closely-knit community of his followers ... have been neglected because of their allegedly exclusively religious nature' (1998: 239).

It is following Jesus, too, that Arendt develops a typology of wrongs and wrongdoers. In *Luke 17* a differentiation is made between 'offenses' and 'trespasses', of which only the latter are candidates for forgiveness (1998: 240). Trespassers 'miss the mark' or 'go astray', so that 'wrongdoing' lacks the specific intent to cause harm. Much as Arendtian action has effects that can never be predicted or controlled, Jesus refers to men who 'know not what they do', a group that excludes those who commit 'offenses' or 'the extremity of crime and willed evil' (1998: 239). Similarly, Arendt differentiates between evils, using Kant's idea of 'radical

evil' initially in her 1948 essay 'The Concentration Camps' before refining it 1951's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and 1958's *The Human Condition*. In 1963, covering the trial of Adolf Eichmann, she develops the concept of the 'banality of evil'. Both the 'banal' and 'radical' incarnations are outside of forgiveness, representing aspects of 'an attack upon human diversity as such, that is upon the character of the "human status" without which the words "mankind" or "humanity" would be devoid of meaning' (Arendt 1977: 268).¹⁴

Arendt never specifies whether criminals, those doers of subevil wrongs yet possessed of *mens rea*, are candidates for forgiveness. Her thoughts, instead, focus on 'trespassing', which is 'an everyday occurrence which is in the very nature of action's constant establishment of new relationships within a web of relations, and it needs forgiving, dismissing, in order to make it possible for life to go on by constantly releasing men from what they have done unknowingly' (1998: 240). 'Unknowingly' is left unqualified except by omission ('trespassing' being neither criminal nor evil) and suggestion (being 'everyday'). The term thus traces the contours of those acts done for a good or neutral purpose, out of constrained choice or ignorance or for the sake of comfort and convenience, which cannot help but involve, implicate and impact others.

Jesus's reference to 'trespassers' is made in the course of generating a duty to forgive – a duty that Arendt doubts exists. Logically, because the particulars of an action (as the disclosive deeds of a unique actor) are always relevant, there cannot be a duty to forgive. Such a duty is owed generally (and so is unconcerned with particularity), as are all duties, and as all laws are similarly precedent based, judicial pardon is likewise flawed. In a 1960 letter Arendt equates charity and law in that both 'level out distinction' (3). Wrongdoers are glossed together so that actions lose their singularity and the actors their individuality – their deeds disclose a 'who' but are reframed as proclaiming a 'what'. Any 'philanthropic' act, when brought into the public sphere and, thus, stripped of anonymity, additionally takes on an air of strategy. Similarly, grounding forgiveness in something as general as respect for humanity or universal rights eliminates the inherently personal quality of the action: 'The majesty of the law demands that we be equal – that only our acts count.... 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' (1968: 248).

Christian conceptualisations of forgiveness as a duty based on a common sinfulness or propensity to sin create a different generalisation: that between actual and potential wrongdoers. Arendt's objection, here, mirrors her dismissal of Eichmann's having been merely a man performing a job (1977). Anyone who forgives on the grounds of such 'negative solidarity' reduces all of humanity to the status of the wrongdoer (2002, cited in Lavi 2010). Charity additionally demands forgiveness of a wrong in principle, which Arendt casts off: 'I may forgive somebody who betrayed me but I am not going to condone betrayal *überhaupt* [in itself]. ... I would admit that there is a great temptation to forgive in the spirit of Who am I to judge?, but I'd rather resist it' (1960: 4). The traditional view¹⁵ of forgiveness, by way of contrast, is based on a qualitative *difference* between forgiver and forgiven (e.g., a parent and child or God and man). In the *Denktagebuch* Arendt dismisses this superior/inferior dialectic as equally antipolitical, as negating forgiveness as an intercourse between peers, 'after such an act no further relationship ought to be possible' (2002, cited in Berkowitz 2011a: 40). The mutuality essential to Arendt's politics is thus lost in any consideration of forgiveness as 'doing good' (1960). She therefore maintains that charity is suited only to an 'unpolitical', 'non-public', 'worldless' community (1998: 53).

In *The Human Condition* Arendt pens a passage that has caused considerable confusion: 'Forgiving and the relationship it establishes is always an eminently personal (though not necessarily individual or private) affair' (1998: 241). She makes this assertion not because forgiveness belongs to a particular sphere (i.e., outside the public-political) but because it concerns itself with specific, individual persons. And although Arendt's 'eminently personal' formulation references a bond, it is not the bond common understandings of forgiveness posit – that of private affection or the Christian idea that love alone forgives. Love, in the theory of action, is not merely personal but also private; not subjectively experienced but passionately felt; and neither worldly nor intangible but quite *unworldly*. Love 'destroys the in-between which relates us to and separates us from others', leading Arendt to call it 'the most powerful of all antipolitical human forces' (1998: 242). Conversely, she finds

unconditional love, the foundation of unconditional forgiveness, too rare to have any meaning for or effect on politics. Ultimately, even kept in their place ('the shadowy interior of the household'), private virtues do nothing to create the conditions that make politics possible. They are much more likely to erode those conditions or distract from their construction (1998: 38).

Ultimately forgiveness, as a free act, cannot be dictated by external demands, be they human justice, personal affection or divine command. Any political account of forgiveness must take the essential conditions of human life into account: natality and plurality. Returning to *Luke 17*, Arendt finds the requisite essence by translating the Greek *aphienai* as 'dismiss' or 'release'. This complements the theory of action, as without forgiveness, action degenerates into rote and reaction, at best autonomic and at worst an unbroken cycle of revenge. While Arendt understands vengeance as an authentic response to being wronged, she rejects it as based on natural rather than political equality – the fact that all creatures know pain. She then points out that forgiveness is itself an action, one that speaks directly to natality: 'Forgiving ... is unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven' (1970: 241).

Punishment stands apart from the oppositional nodes of forgiveness and vengeance, and the three, together, map the terrain of possible reactions to a past wrong.¹⁶ Like forgiveness, punishment may close the cycle of reaction; however, unlike forgiveness, it does not speak to essentially human conditions, being incapable of newness and blind to plurality (akin to charity, it aims at the offender as an offender, a 'what' rather than a 'who'). The power of rupture with the past is no small one, though. It is because of this shared power that Arendt writes, 'It is therefore ... a structural element in the realm of human affairs, that men are unable to forgive what they cannot punish and that they are unable to punish what has turned out to be unforgivable' (1998: 241). She later rescinds this, perhaps one of her most famous quotations, in another letter to Auden, endorsing the poet's argument that it is properly punishment and *judicial pardon* that are antipodes (1960: 6). What remains certain is that while both punishment and forgiveness stand as ruptures with the past, neither act can erase it. If forgiveness obliterated a wrong, it would undo the conditions of its own action, facilitating its own

extinction with each iteration. Not only is it impossible to undo a past action; in fact, it is an untenable move in theory: allowing forgiveness to so negate itself casts every recipient not as *forgiven for* but somehow *innocent of* wrongdoing. Thus, Arendt's single characterisation of forgiveness as 'the undoing of what was done' merits careful attention (1998: 241). In this passage she speaks of forgiveness as being directed at a person, not an action; a wrong is forgiven for the sake of the wrongdoer. Instead of love – that most antipolitical of forces – as a motivation, Arendt here offers something like Aristotle's civic friendship, 'a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us, ... independent of qualities which we may admire or of achievements which we may highly esteem' (1998: 243). In this treatment of respect (which, perhaps ironically, she describes as a *kind* of love), we find another admonishment to attend to the 'who' instead of the 'what'; while that which is 'undone' is the power of the past action to determine the identity of the present actor.

Arendtian forgiveness thus doubly addresses natality: the giver engages in newness, in action free from the dictates of history, while that action recognises the receiver as distinct, allowing him to, in turn, initiate an unprecedented course. This is a mutual disclosure, necessitating the participation of the offender. Returning to *Luke*, Arendt translates the terms *metanoieins* and *shuvs* as 'changing one's mind' or 'retracing one's steps'. Excluded are therapeutically tinged 'repentance' and active 'penance', as the change of mind alone is definitive. Arendt writes that 'only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can [we] be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new' (1998: 240). There is no mention of apology here nor any description of how one might elicit forgiveness; indeed, there is no qualification of what it is to 'retrace one's steps' or whether trespassers, alone, are eligible.¹⁷ The 'change of heart' must refer to the identity of the wrongdoer, and so presumably this break with the past enters the public sphere as a disclosure: a new 'who' revealed in word and deed. Once there, the disclosure requires recognition *as* a new beginning, an action-reaction that cannot be predicted (1998: 241). Foregoing vengeance and 'retracing one's steps' become the dual disclosures that together constitute forgiveness (made up of forgiving and meriting forgiveness), in which both the forgiver and

forgiven are released from the past to begin anew.¹⁸ Thus, Arendtian forgiveness is a dialogic, ‘constant mutual release’ (1998: 240) as well as an invitation to ‘civic friendship’.

Forgiving shows the unpredictability of effect that is the hallmark of all action, so that its trajectory will only become apparent over time. Unlike other actions, though, forgiveness has a curious dual, even self-contradictory relationship with time and narrative: through memory, forgiveness ensures continuity while disrupting the flow of events. Because identities are always being forged and reformed and can only be seen entire in retrospect, forgiveness allows history to record words and deeds while simultaneously preventing it from determining them. Natality is preserved. The record is amended. Moreover, forgiving is itself an act of memory, because to absolve a transgression one must first summon it to mind. Arendt thus firmly severs forgiving and forgetting, in keeping with her longstanding commitment to using the past as a political compass. Moreover, there is no reason why recollection should not be subject to the same conditions of nonsovereign freedom that hold in the web of relationships so that memory becomes a space in which interpretation of wrongs is subjected to contest and revision.

Arendt’s relocation of forgiveness from the realm of private morality to the public-political sphere is less intuitive than her characterisation of promise-making as a political act. Conventional accounts of politics are rife with promising – what are treaties, conventions and constitutions if not ‘promises’? Young-Bruehl points out, too, that forgiveness ‘has always seemed unrealistic in the public realm, imported from a theological elsewhere’ (2006: 122). Yet forgiveness is undeniably political in the context of Arendt’s theory of action. It presupposes the presence of others, as it cannot be performed alone. It is disclosive, ‘correspond[ing] so closely to the human condition of plurality’ (1998: 237). It embodies human natality, as it is ‘the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew’ (1998: 241). Further, it is the necessary companion of promise-making, as forgiveness renews the space that promise created but human frailty could not maintain, making genuinely new words and deeds possible. There is also something of promise-making in forgiving or seeking forgiveness, as the former holds a commitment to cease merely reacting, and the latter, an implicit oath that the ‘who’ of now differs from the ‘who’ of past transgression.

‘Without being forgiven’, asserts Arendt, ‘released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would ... be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever’ (1998: 237). Unforgiveness encourages paralysis and a retreat from the world. These are perfectly logical, perfectly antipolitical reactions to the paradox of action – to which forgiveness presents a political solution. In fact, forgiveness solves it thrice over: by interrupting the domino-effect of a wrongful deed or speech act, in which a single harm might be compounded endlessly; via opening space for novel and initiatory actions, salvaging natality and reweaving the web of relationships, and through restorying the lives touched in the process without erasing the past, thus amending individuals’ biographies to reflect their distinction. Ultimately forgiveness is political because there can be no politics, in the Arendtian sense, without it.

Further Considerations of Arendtian Forgiveness: ‘Reconciliation with the World’, the Social and the Problem of Collective Guilt

Motivated by a conversation with Heidegger during her first trip to postwar Germany, Arendt began to keep her *Denktagebuch* (Berkowitz 2011a; Lavi 2010). Significantly, those journals – twenty-eight notebooks recorded over twenty-three years – begin with a discussion of forgiveness and reconciliation. Arendt’s conceptualisations, here, are an example of her lifelong advocacy of ‘unlearning’ inherited philosophies. Forgiveness becomes the keystone of her politics only after she discards an earlier notion: that forgiveness is a ‘sham event’ releasing the wrongdoer while obliging the wronged to ‘accept a burden and at the same time appear to be “unburdened”, to rise above the other and his misdeed’ (Knott 2013: 66). Her treatment of forgiveness in these journals will, in turn, be supplanted by a more thorough, nuanced theory in *The Human Condition*; while her thoughts on reconciliation will reappear only sporadically (most obviously in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, though also in some of her early essays) and be focused on by only a handful of Arendt scholars working in transitional justice (see, e.g., Berkowitz 2011a, 2011b; Lavi 2010). Nevertheless, the *Denktagebuch*’s incipient theory of reconciliation contains numerous

insights relevant to the question of political action in the wake of historical injustice.

For Arendt, the precondition for any public-political action is reconciliation with the world, which is, in turn, based on understanding. Unlike engaging with empirical facts through academic analyses, Arendtian understanding is a lifelong, complex process of interaction with a world in constant flux, yielding only provisional results. Through it ‘we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world. [Understanding] is the specifically human way of being alive; for every single person needs to be reconciled to a world into which he was born a stranger and in which, to the extent of his distinct uniqueness, he always remains a stranger’ (1994: 307–308).

One of the obstacles to initiating a move back toward the political is a lack of clarity around whether and how ‘collective guilt’ stands as a barrier to individual initiative. In *Responsibility and Judgment* (Arendt and Kohn 2003), Arendt rejects the idea of collective guilt on three grounds: because groups cannot form the requisite *mens rea*, which is an attribute of persons and not people, because ‘collective’ guilt is really aggregate individual guilt and because the idea of diffuse/universal guilt means that no one is really guilty and ‘guilt’ itself becomes meaningless. Like forgiveness, guilt ‘always singles out; it is strictly personal’ (Arendt and Kohn 2003). Perhaps Arendt’s most damning statement on the notion, however, has to do with the performative, diversionary nature of collective guilt in a post-totalitarian society. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem* she writes, ‘Those young German men and women who every once in a while – on the occasion of all the Diary of Anne Frank hubbub and of the Eichmann trial – treat us to hysterical outbreaks of guilty feelings are not staggering under the burden of the past, their fathers’ guilt; rather, they are trying to escape from the pressure of very present and actual problems into a cheap sentimentality’ (1977: 251). Regardless of the cogency or utility of a ‘collective guilt’, it remains that forgiveness is profoundly personal, speaking always to the ‘who’ and never the ‘what’. (This is why collectivities are not candidates for forgiveness. Not being persons in any relevant sense, no collectivity can be a ‘who’.)

Applying Arendt: Political Forgiveness in Indigenous-Settler Reconciliation

Concerns over the negative implications of forgiveness for the relationship between the state and victims of state-authored injustice amplify significantly in the absence of regime change, making non-transitional settings ideal testing grounds for an Arendtian reformulation. Such an inquiry is also timely, as those initiatives conceptually bound up with forgiveness – including official apologies, truth telling and reconciliation activities – have recently proliferated in Settler-colonial states. In fact, Indigenous-Settler reconciliation, as a liberal political project, appears to be the preferred mode of grappling with the (past) injustices of colonisation. As it happens, Arendt's account of forgiveness as a political faculty and an action in itself is both proven out and tested by the experience of Settler colonialism.

Arendt's provision of a nontheological account of forgiveness is particularly important in light of religion's history of service in 'calming down the natives' (Fanon 2004: 19). As Fanon relates, 'All those saints who have turned the other cheek, who have forgiven trespasses against them, and who have been spat on and insulted without shrinking are studied and held up as examples' (2004: 28). Similarly, her dismantling of the futurist argument tracks with the demands of justice in nontransitional settings. In such locations, the incitement to 'move on' holds profound potential to compound the many erasures of colonialism, for as Baudrillard notes, 'Forgetting the extermination is part of the extermination' (2008: 91). Concerns about forgiving equating with forgetting are ameliorated by Arendt's commitment to memory and narrative and her ability to clearly link these with forgiveness as a public-political action versus a private event. The therapeutic argument and the argument from civic virtue are similarly undone: the notion of a duty to forgive – whether for individual benefit or the common good – explicitly rejected by many Indigenous advocates,¹⁹ is also rejected by Arendt as un- or even antipolitical.

Arendt's delineation of the rise and functioning of the social also has powerful implications for Indigenous-Settler reconciliation. To date, formal apologies, truth-telling exercises and declarations of forgiveness have primarily taken place in public – but Arendt

reminds us that the public and the political are not synonymous, and political forgiveness belongs to the sphere of action alone. Further, state institutions imprint reconciliation processes with profoundly instrumental reasoning, rendering them incapable of catalysing an Arendtian political space. Such projects posit reconciliation as a historical point to be reached, mirroring concerns Arendt had with discussions of democracy. To her, sabotage of the ‘now’ of politics lies that way, as, ‘[b]y turning democracy “into a cause”, something that would arrive in the future and to which the present must be devoted, the present became unfree’ (Knott 2013: 69). Looking to Arendt thus inspires a certain disregard for the officially constituted spaces that have, to date, dominated reconciliation in Settler states; Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike should refuse to be limited to or by these conceptualisations and conduits. Moreover, as forgiveness is unmediated by disinterested criteria, a determination outside of the objectivity of law and state structures (just as politics is preinstitutional), her work encourages the omission of these constructions from the basic equation.

‘The social’ troubles Indigenous-Settler reconciliation in other ways too. The issue is not that non-Indigenous persons today feel connected to historical injustice but that they feel utterly *disconnected* from it. What reading Arendt reveals is the contemporary Settler’s place in a chain of reactions that bind him to the past and constrain his initiative, while her typology of offenses (criminality and evil) and trespasses (everyday, unforeseen and unforeseeable wrongs) sheds additional light. What this reveals is how actions and reactions under Settler colonialism may themselves constitute trespasses, regardless of intention and independent of comprehension of the colonial situation itself. Settlers today may not be the offenders who initiated the direct effects of colonialism, but they are nevertheless actors who may – and often do – trespass within and as a result of an environment so structured.

Those citizens who unwillingly inherit the dividends of colonialism, as either descendants of the initial colonisers or as newcomers to the country, have few fruitful options and a counterproductive sense of unease. Memmi’s description of this is merciless: so long as he remains in the colony, ‘the colonizer who refuses’ colonialism ‘make[s] his life a perpetual compromise’ (1967: 43). The fear that compromise is not only inevitable but a ‘best case scenario’

haunts even the most ‘settled’ presence. Arendt speaks directly to this, without foreseeing this application, when she describes how, ‘confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever’ (1998: 237). In this situation, intuition and moral yearning trigger a quest for pardon without any real grasp of the wrongs in question, instilling a longing for forgiveness that Settlers can only link with the unforgivable, driving them away from politics. Instead of coming together, they seek refuge in ‘cheap sentimentality’, and reconciliation moves into the ‘unworldly public’ of the social – just as Arendt’s diagnostic predicts.

It is in this same space that forgiveness adopts its theological futurism. The urge to ‘move on’ becomes a rush to absolution, as critiques of the South African TRC highlight. After discovering where forgiveness articulates with understanding, judgement and reconciliation and realising how these make political action possible, reading Arendt prompts Settlers to reconsider their motivations in seeking forgiveness, and to better reflect upon both the milestones they set and the speed at which they travel down that road. Summoning an end-state of ‘being forgiven’ is imprudent without first attempting Arendt’s prior reconciliation: a ‘com[ing] to terms with reality as such and [affirming] one’s belonging to this reality as one who acts in it’ (2003, cited in Berkowitz 2011b: 30). Neither should the quest for forgiveness outpace other actions, as forgiving can only happen on the firmament that covenants and oaths build. Promise-making, Settlers must remember, is fully half of the dialectic. In reconciliation informed by Arendt, such promises would constitute disclosures of a Settler identity wholly inconsistent with past wrongdoing, in both word and deed, which must be actively witnessed. Indeed, Arendtian freedom itself is unattainable in contexts of unilateral disclosure.

Unfortunately, transitional justice processes in nontransitional settings tend to focus on statement gathering from victims alone, while most non-Indigenous citizens are not only uninvolved in but largely unaware of such projects as well as unfamiliar with Indigenous perspectives on their own national biography. Often positively characterised as ‘witnessing’, such an approach facilitates at most shallow engagement with the positionalities, experiences and histories of colonialism’s architects, bystanders and beneficiaries. It

therefore shutters opportunities for Settlers to query their assumptions about political communication, community and engagement as well as the legal, moral, economic and social norms that undergird their multicultural polities. These projects therefore risk reinscribing current (classical) sovereignty via the language of renewal or reunification, overlooking continuities of violence and subjugation and, thereby, negating their own transformative potential (Grey and James 2016; Motha 2007; Muldoon and Schaap 2012).

Though they do not benefit equally, all non-Indigenous persons are beneficiaries of Settler colonialism. Further, that boon is not only compound (arising from past injustices) but ongoing (stemming from present ones); it is not merely a legacy bequeathed by ancestral to current elites. This means that important components of Settler identity can only be gleaned from the Indigenous perspective and, like any truth, must be heard, grappled with and disseminated (Freeman 2014). This is certainly part of what it means to ‘examine and bear consciously’ the ‘burden’ of history. Care must be taken, though, not to use Arendt to historicise colonialism’s harms or to broadcast them carelessly. The place of forgiveness in the theory of action as well as Arendt’s conceptualisation of action as uncontrollable and irreversible could prove amenable to a reading of a kind of ‘colonial original sin’ – the aforementioned ‘single deed from which we could never recover’ (1998: 237), spurring Settler paralysis and retreat.

What Arendt fails to clarify is the chicken-and-the-egg problem within the promising-forgiving dialectic. *The Human Condition* relates that the two faculties are naturally paired, as forgiving ‘undo[es] the deeds of the past, whose “sins” hang like Damocles’ sword over every new generation’, while promising ‘set[s] up in the ocean of uncertainty ... islands of security without which not even continuity, let alone durability of any kind, would be possible’ (237). On this account, promise-making appears to stabilise the footing on which forgiveness will be negotiated, so it must occur first. Such a reading accords with the Settler-colonial situation, in which an *expectation* of forgiveness would rob the act of its novelty, truncate judgment; and make assumptions about the translatability of a concept across cultures, to those who may not welcome the communication.

Finally, Arendt’s key human characteristic of plurality – with its connotations of distinction and equality, a ‘sameness in utter

diversity' (1998: 57) – becomes a critical consideration in settings where past violence flowed from and took the form of both coercive inclusion in and enforced exclusion from the political community. Colonialism was an attack on plurality itself – the most antipolitical, world-destroying project imaginable and, as such, utterly unforgivable. Indigenous-Settler relationality today must therefore be grounded in a recognition that 'the more people there are in the world who stand in some particular relationship with one another, the more world there is to form between them, and the larger and richer that world will be' (Arendt 2005: 176). In the Settler state the Arendtian political community arises from the interplay of diverse particular perspectives: on the world itself, on historical relationships and on foundational terms of association of peoples. All of these remain open to contestation and revision, and out of such processes new understandings and perspectives will evolve. The necessary space for this undertaking is created through natality and promising, while 'forgiveness' here manifests as the very willingness to forge such a world-in-common.

Arendtian reconciliation is also relevant here. Unlike her forgiveness, Arendt's reconciliation does *not* release the wrongdoer from his past misdeed but rather leaves him burdened by it while committed to acting in a place of suspended retribution. She writes that, 'when we lose the faculty to judge – to suffer and condemn – we begin to think that there is something wrong with us if we cannot live under the conditions of desert life'. Internalising that insufficiency drives Settlers to seek out therapeutic instead of political solutions and retreat, again, into sentiment. This 'helps us "adjust" ... , taking away our only hope ... that we, who are not of the desert though we live in it, are able to transform it into a human world' (2005: 140). In the Settler state our options are to affirm the world that contains colonialism *in order to humanise it*; to 'silently pass by', turning away from the world; or to judge in favour of nonreconciliation, to reject the world as our common home (cited in Berkowitz 2011a: 46). If our choice is rehumanisation, we accomplish that by 'becoming an active being' – a task necessarily undertaken through solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons (2005: 200), in which the wronged become 'responsible-with' but not 'guilty-with' the wrongdoer. This solidarity emerges through (instead of catalysing) the project, only appearing fully formed as a product of the engagement (Berkowitz 2011b: 36).

Across the spectrum of work on reconciliation, from the most to the least critical diagnoses and prescriptions, the fundamental relationality of forgiveness is profoundly underplayed (if it is seen as relational at all). Arendt's larger theory, by way of contrast, hangs on a deeply relational reading. Reflecting on this relationality surfaces what other theories of forgiveness-in-reconciliation have not – most importantly, the roles and responsibilities of the newcomer 'trespassers' in (re)building the world-in-common with Indigenous Peoples. These include engaging in reciprocal disclosures; upholding a radical plurality and, further, a plural equality; communing with a diversity of perspectives; and considering deeply their own individual and collective inheritance, including both Settler privilege and Settler accountability. Ultimately, non-Indigenous persons must engage in reconciliation processes that expand their understanding of both past colonial evils and present colonial trespasses (including their own actions/reactions in the present) and that 'inform their promises to act differently'²⁰ – to *be* different, to act anew – in the future. The consciously undertaken task of humanising the world-in-common would thus stand as a mutual promise, while engaging in it would disclose a Settler identity irreconcilable with colonialism. It would simultaneously constitute and evidence a 'change of mind' and a 'retracing of steps' stripped of the overtones of penance and repentance that spur a retreat into inert reflection. Following Arendt, then, uncovers one possible preamble to a new Indigenous-Settler reconciliation politics: not *forgiveness itself* but *precursors to forgiving*.

Conclusion

Although the first truth commission was convened almost decade after her death, there is undoubtedly a connection between the writings of Hannah Arendt and the political movements that ushered in the 'politics of forgiveness'. Today her work on the Eichmann trial and totalitarian regimes continues to make Arendt's books an obvious, if not uncontroversial source of inspiration in the transitional justice literature. Young-Bruehl writes that, prior to Arendt, 'there had been no precedent in modern political theory for reflections on forgiveness as a condition *sine qua non* of politics, a fundamental

political experience' (2006: 111). Over the course of her life's work, Arendt carefully elaborated a nontherapeutic, noncharitable, non-moral, nontheological conceptualisation of forgiveness: an inherently political, internally consistent, firmly justice-oriented account attentive to social particularity that neither forgets nor tacitly condones the original wrong. As a result, her theory of the role of forgiveness in politics surmounts the usual criticisms of its invocation in response to historical injustice – criticisms that resound in non-transitional polities, and Settler states in particular, where the current praxis has troubling implications for the relationship between the state and victims of state-authored injustices. 'Returning to the source' – beginning with Arendt's diaries and letters and reading forward across the entire corpus of her work, examining her theory as a whole – thus surfaces important diagnostics of and promising prescriptives for the contemporary politics of Indigenous-Settler reconciliation.

Acknowledgements

This article was initially written for James Tully's final political theory class at the University of Victoria, and it was Jim's comments and encouragement that first spurred it forward. A slightly evolved version was then copresented with Hannah Wyile at the 2016 conference of Canadian Political Science Association in the hope that it might eventually become a coauthored piece. While that collaboration never materialised, the current version nevertheless owes much to conversations with my copresenter as well as the substantive input of Raj Patel, additional direction from Michael Abhainn and Steven Orr, and the insightful feedback of the reviewers at *Theoria*.

SAM GREY is the Director of University and Lifelong Learning at Six Nations Polytechnic and a PhD candidate in political science at the University of Victoria, where her doctoral research explores the roles of emotion and virtue in Indigenous-Settler (ir)reconciliation. She has published on gender and truth commissions, decolonisation and peacemaking, and Indigenous women's human rights, and is

the editor of three books on Indigenous knowledge and rights-based advocacy. Sam's work is supported by the Fulbright Program, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Canadian Federation of University Women.

Notes

1. Currently available only in the original German; secondary sources were used to access partial translations and are shown in text as (Arendt 2002), as cited in Berkowitz's 'Bearing Logs on Our Shoulders' (2011a) and Lavi's 'Crimes of Action, Crimes of Thought' (2010).
2. Auden's thoughts can be extrapolated from *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (1975).
3. This trend may be seen as a response to the important intervention of Jeffrie Murphy (1986) and the more recent – and excellent – contributions from Thomas Brudholm, in particular *Resentment's Virtue: Jean Amery and the Refusal to Forgive* (2008). Also see endnote 16, below.
4. Significantly, in the five thousand accounts in Yale's Fortunoff Video Archives for Holocaust Testimony, two of only four utterances of forgiveness reference *refusals* to forgive (Alford 2012).
5. Similarly, Nietzschean criticisms offer that virtues like forgiveness are the province of the weak, offered in lieu of punishment by those who are in no position to levy the latter.
6. Recalling Patrick Wolfe's association between genocide and Settler colonialism, via an underlying 'logic of elimination' (2006).
7. Not all theorists find that forgiveness displaces justice. Minow (1999), for example, takes a processual view of justice in which forgiveness can play a key role.
8. See Dian Million's work, *Therapeutic Nations* (2014), on the rise of a particular international relations theory associated with trauma, which ascended alongside (and was propelled by) neoliberalism.
9. 'Positionality' refers to the sociopolitical contextual and relational situatedness of a 'knower'. Relational positions and contextual factors profoundly shape experience and contribute to identity formation and, thus, heavily influence *knowledge* or *knowing* (such as gender, race and class). See, for example, Alcoff (1988).
10. 'Who' is 'the living essence of the person as it shows itself in the flux of action and speech'; 'what' encompasses 'qualities he necessarily shares with others like him' (Arendt 1998: 181).
11. Actors have motives, goals, projects and so forth, but these are not the essence of political freedom.
12. Curiously, Arendt speaks of the related *compassion* as 'corrupting' the French Revolution. She traces both back to Jesus.
13. Promise originates with Abraham, who represents the promise maker (through contract), just as Jesus does the forgiver.
14. Arendt is quoting the chief French prosecutor at Nuremberg.
15. This view is presented in the prior section, 'Critiquing Forgiveness in Reconciliatory Settings'.
16. Importantly, Arendt's oppositional duality here is disputed by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, who asserts that *nonvengeance* is the true antipode of vengeance. In Gobodo-Madikizela's formulation, forgiveness occupies a place 'outside this

- vengeance/non-vengeance continuum', and to forgive is to 'transcend non-vengeance' (which requires that one first transcend vengeance) (2008: 61). Thus, 'It is not forgiving that dispels vengefulness, but the letting go of the need for vengeance that opens up the possibility for forgiveness' (2008: 61).
17. While Jesus disallows this, Arendt discusses legal mechanisms and legal theory in a way that endorses a 'criminality' that may be forgivable.
 18. It also explains why one cannot forgive oneself: 'the same who, revealed in action and speech, remains also the subject of forgiving' (1998: 243).
 19. For example, Murray Sinclair (2011), Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, characterised advocating or emphasizing forgiveness as unduly burdening survivors.
 20. Thanks to Hannah Wyile for this effective phrasing. Many of the ideas in this paragraph came out of our conversations on Arendt, as Canadian Settler academics and as political theorists working on reconciliation in Canada.

References

- Alcoff, L. 1988. 'Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory', *Signs* 13 (3): 405–436. <https://doi.org/10.1086/494426>
- Alford, C. F. 2012. 'Jean Améry: Resentment as Ethic and Ontology', *Topoi* 31 (2): 229–240. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-012-9131-1>
- Arendt, H. 1960. 'Letter to Wystan Hugh Auden (14 February)', *The Hannah Arendt Papers: Correspondence File 1938–1976*. Washington, DC: Library of Congress.
- Arendt, H. 1968. 'Bertolt Brecht: 1898–1956', in H. Arendt (ed.), *Men in Dark Times*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 207–250.
- Arendt, H. 1970. *On Violence*. New York: Harcourt.
- Arendt, H. 1977. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Penguin.
- Arendt, H. 1994. 'Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)', in J. Kohn (ed.), *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*. New York: Schocken Books, 307–327.
- Arendt, H. 1998. *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Arendt, H. 2002. *Denktagebuch 1950–1973*. Munich: Piper.
- Arendt, H. 2005. *The Promise of Politics*. New York: Schocken.
- Arendt, H. and J. Kohn. 2003. *Responsibility and Judgment*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Asmal, K., L. Asmal and R. S. Roberts. 1998. *Reconciliation through Truth*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Attafuah, K. A. 2004. 'An Overview of Ghana's National Reconciliation Commission and Its Relationship with the Courts', in W. Schabas and S. Darcy (eds), *Truth Commissions and Courts*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 125–134.

- Attorney General of Fiji. 2005. 'Promotion of Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill 2005'. Suva: Attorney General's Chambers. www.fijibure.com/recon.htm.
- Auden, W. H. 1975. *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays*. London: Faber.
- Baudrillard, J. 2008. 'The Evil Demon of Images', in S. Redhead (ed.), *The Jean Baudrillard Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 83–98.
- Berkowitz, R. 2011a. 'Bearing Logs on Our Shoulders: Reconciliation, Non-Reconciliation, and the Building of a Common World', *Theory and Event* 14 (1): n.p. <https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2011.0001>
- Berkowitz, R. 2011b. 'The Power of Non-Reconciliation: Arendt's Judgment of Adolf Eichmann'. *Startseite* 6 (1/2): n.p.
- Booth, W. J. 2001. 'The Unforgotten: Memories of Justice', *American Political Science Review* 95 (4): 777–791. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055400400018>
- Brudholm, T. 2008. *Resentment's Virtue: Jean Améry and the Refusal to Forgive*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- CAVR. 2006. 'Formation of the Commission'. Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação de Timor-Leste. www.cavr-timorleste.org/en/cavr.htm.
- Cibelli, K., A. Hoover and J. Kruger. 2009. *Descriptive Statistics from Statements to the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Palo Alto: Benetech.
- Dwyer, S. 1999. 'Reconciliation for Realists', *Ethics and International Affairs* 13 (1): 81–98. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7093.1999.tb00328.x>
- Fanon, F. 2004. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove.
- Farhadian, C. and R. A. Emmons. 2009. 'The Psychology of Forgiveness in the World Religions', in A. Kalayjian and R. F. Paloutzian (eds), *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Psychological Pathways to Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding*. Dordrecht and New York: Springer, 55–70.
- Freeman, V. T. 2014. 'In Defence of Reconciliation', *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 27 (1): 213–223. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0841820900006305>
- Gobodo-Madikizela, P. 2008. 'Radical Forgiveness: Transforming Traumatic Memory beyond Hannah Arendt', in F. du Bois and du Bois-Pedain (eds), *Justice and Reconciliation in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 37–61.
- Govier, Trudy. 2002. *Forgiveness and Revenge*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Grey, S. and A. James. 2016. 'Truth, Reconciliation, and "Double Settler Denial": Gendering the Canada-South Africa Analogy', *Human Rights Review* 17 (3): 303–328. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12142-016-0412-8>
- Harris, I. M. 2013. *Peace Education from the Grassroots*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age.
- Hazan, P. 2008. 'The Nature of Sanctions: The Case of Morocco's Equity and Reconciliation Commission', *International Review of the Red Cross* 90(870): 399–407.

- Human Rights Watch. 1993. 'Accountability and Human Rights: The Report of the United Nations Commission on the Truth for El Salvador', *News from Americas Watch* V (7): 1–39.
- ICRC. 2006. 'Truth and Reconciliation Commissions', *International Review of the Red Cross* 862: n.p.
- Ignatieff, M. 1996. 'Articles of Faith', *Index on Censorship* 25 (5): 110–122. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F030642209602500522>
- Jacoby, S. 1983. *Wild Justice: The Evolution of Revenge*. New York: Harper & Row.
- James, M. 2009. 'Wrestling with the Past: Apologies, Quasi-Apologies, and Non-Apologies in Canada', In M. Gibney, R. E. Howard-Hassmann, J. Coicaud and N. Steiner (eds), *The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 137–153.
- Knott, M. L. 2013. *Unlearning with Hannah Arendt*. New York: Other.
- Kolnai, A. 1973. 'Forgiveness', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society (New Series)* 74: 91–106. <https://doi.org/10.1093/aristotelian/74.1.91>
- Krog, A. 1998. *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa*. New York: Times.
- Lavi, S. 2010. 'Crimes of Action, Crimes of Thought: Arendt on Reconciliation, Forgiveness, and Judgment', in R. Berkowitz, J. Katz and T. Keenan (eds), *Thinking in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics*. New York: Fordham University Press, 229–234.
- Levi, P. 1998. 'Response', in S. Wiesensthal (ed.), *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*. New York: Schocken Books, 191–192.
- McGreal, C. 2013. 'Rwanda Genocide 20 Years On: "We Live with Those Who Killed Our Families. We Are Told They're Sorry, but Are They?"', *The Observer*. www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/12/rwanda-genocide-20-years-on.
- Memmi, A. 1967. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Boston: Beacon.
- Million, D. 2014. *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Minow, M. 1999. *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence*. Boston: Beacon.
- Motha, S. 2007. 'Reconciliation as Domination', in S. Veitch (ed.), *Law and the Politics of Reconciliation*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 69–92.
- Muldoon, P. and A. Schaap. 2012. 'Confounded by Recognition: The Apology, the High Court and the Aboriginal Embassy in Australia', in A. K. Hirsch (ed.), *Theorizing Post-Conflict Reconciliation: Agonism, Restitution and Repair*. London: Routledge, 182–199.
- Murphy, J. G. 1986. 'Mercy and Legal Justice', *Social Philosophy and Policy* 4 (1): 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052500000406>
- Nader, L. 2000. 'Comment on "Reconciliation and Revenge in Post-Apartheid South Africa"', *Current Anthropology* 41 (1): 91–92. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/300104>

- Otis, J. 2002. 'Peruvians Begin Journey to Discerning Truth', *Houston Chronicle*. www.chron.com/news/nation-world/article/Peruvians-begin-journey-to-discerning-truth-2072686.php.
- Ozick, C. 1998. 'Response', in S. Wiesenthal (ed.), *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*. New York: Schocken, 213–220.
- Renteln, A. D. 2008. 'Apologies: A Cross-Cultural Analysis', in M. Gibney, R. E. Howard-Hassmann, J. Coicaud and N. Steiner (eds), *The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 61–76.
- Schaap, A. 2005. *Political Reconciliation*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Sinclair, M. 2011. 'Is There a Traditional Perspective of Truth and Reconciliation?', University of Manitoba. www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuFc_Z9F-NA.
- Stauffer, J. 2002. 'Seeking the Between of Vengeance and Forgiveness: Martha Minow, Hannah Arendt, and the Possibilities of Forgiveness', *Theory and Event* 6 (1): n.p. <https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2002.0011>
- Tinker, G. E. 2004. 'Tracing a Contour of Colonialism: American Indians and the Trajectory of Educational Imperialism', in W. Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man: The Genocidal Impact of American Indian Residential Schools*. San Francisco, CA: City Lights, xiii–xlii.
- Tutu, D. 1999. *No Future Without Forgiveness*. London: Rider.
- Vandavelde, P. 2013. 'Forgiveness in a Political Context: The Challenge and the Potential', *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 39 (3): 263–276. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0191453712473079>
- Wickham, D. 2009. 'Solomon's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Launched', *Radio New Zealand*. www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/183392/solomons-truth-and-reconciliation-commission-launched.
- Wolfe, P. 2006. 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (4): 387–409. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>
- Worthington, E. L. 2005. *Handbook of Forgiveness*. New York: Routledge.
- Young-Bruehl, E. 2006. *Why Arendt Matters*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.