

# **LS 810: Mercy and Regret: An Inquiry into the Nature of Forgiveness and Apologies**

Fall 2025 – Gary McCarron, Instructor – [gmccarro@sfu.ca](mailto:gmccarro@sfu.ca)

Thursdays, 6:30 – 9:30 pm – Online via Zoom

Forgiveness and apologies are forms of repentance in which gestures of conciliation are employed to ensure the social order proceeds uninterrupted. These gestures serve many purposes: to draw boundaries between the past and the present; to separate wrongdoers and their victims; and – for some religious followers – to keep clear the distinction between sin and redemption. The different modes of repentant behavior in which we commonly participate can be part of commonplace conversations or highly ritualized expressions of contrition. Indeed, they can take on an intensely private or an extremely public character, especially in the age of social media where apologies are demanded on a nearly daily basis. Hence, the study of forgiveness and apologies must be broad in its scope and diverse in its approach. This is the aim with this course.

We will inquire into the meaning of forgiveness and the nature of apologies with particular attention to the historical and philosophical questions these topics raise. Examples will be drawn from a range of sources, authors, and perspectives that will include philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, and linguistics. We will follow specific lines of inquiry relating to apologetic and forgiving behavior as these are represented in the popular arts such as literature and cinema. In short, we will trace the

nature of apologies, and the mystery of forgiveness across a varied and often challenging intellectual landscape.

These are the books required for the course, but there will be a few articles also that I will make available via Canvas.

1. Améry, Jean. *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities*. Translated by Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1964. ISBN: 978-0-253021173-6
2. Bennett, Christopher. *The Apology Ritual: A Philosophical Theory of Punishment*. Paperback: 222 pages. Publisher: Cambridge University Press; Reissue edition (Sept. 30, 2010). ISBN: 978-0-521-14700-8
3. Callard, Agnes. *On Anger*. MIT Press, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-946511-54-6
4. Derrida, Jacques. *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*. New York and London: Routledge University Press. ISBN: 0-414-22712-7
5. Engels, Jeremy. *The politics of resentment: A genealogy*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015. ISBN: 9-780271-06664-6.
6. Lazare, Aaron. *On Apology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. ISBN: 0-19-518911-6
7. Myisha Cherry. *Failures of Forgiveness: What we Get Wrong and How to do Better*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2023.
8. Minow, Martha. *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence*. Boston: Beacon Books, 1998. ISBN: 978-0-8070-4507-7

9. Murphy, Jeffrie. *Getting Even: Forgiveness and its Limits*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. ISBN: 0-521-39567-4
10. Tavuchis, Nicholas. *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation*. Stanford California, Stanford University Press, 1991. ISBN: 0-8047-2223-4
11. Tutu, Desmond. *No Future Without Forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday Books, 1999. ISBN: 978-0-38549690-2