**Title:** “On the Possibilities and Purposes of Apology: Levinas and Political Apology”

**Author:** Brock Bahler

**Affiliation:** University of Pittsburgh

**Contact Information:** [bab145@pitt.edu](mailto:bab145@pitt.edu); 412-999-0162

**Abstract:** When is an apology meaningful? What is an apology supposed to achieve, and how do we know when it has achieved its purpose? Must an apology include other obligations on the part of the one making the apology—such as exhibiting regret or repentance, offering financial reparations to the victim(s), receiving a just punishment for the action being apologized for—or on the part of the one receiving it—such as accepting the apology, offering forgiveness to the oppressor, or attempting reconciliation—for the apology to be efficacious?

In this paper, I will argue that Levinas’s ethics provides a positive basis for the self’s obligation for enacting an apology, and yet his asymmetrical, nonreciprocal account of intersubjectivity as infinite obligation lacks the capacity to explain what an apology can or seeks to achieve on a substantial political level. For this, I believe we must articulate a Levinasian-inspired account of the self-other relation that more adequately takes into account both parties—perhaps, what Adriaan Peperzak has called “chiastic asymmetry” or what elsewhere I have named a “dialectical spiral.” To provide political substance to this account, I turn to two thinkers who have written extensively on the importance of apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation on a political scale—Miroslav Volf, writing in light of the Yugoslav Wars, and Desmond Tutu, writing in the aftermath of South African Apartheid.