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# What's the Point of Apologising?

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## Résumé

Apologies play a crucial role in how we navigate our everyday moral relationships. Recently, however, it has been suggested that there is a "paradox of apologies": a proper apology requires recognising that the victim's negative feelings towards you are appropriate, and yet apologising is asking the victim to give up these appropriate negative emotions (Hallich 2016). Thus, genuinely repentant and remorseful agents have no reason to apologise to the victims of their wrongdoing.

But the paradox only arises because of an all-too-common static picture of normativity. I want to challenge that picture. By offering an alternative account of our practice of apologising – what we do and convey when apologising – I sketch a dynamic view of normative relationships and show that there is nothing paradoxical about apologising.

More specifically, I propose a characterisation of apologies which builds on Ruth Millikan's (2005) suggestion that speech-acts can be classified in terms of their *function*. The motivation for this approach is that it is especially suited for characterising acts, like apologies, that can be performed in such diverse ways. Drawing primarily from work by Walker (2006), Pettigrove & Collins (2011), and Cohen (2017), I suggest that the function of an apology is to provide a basis of *moral repair*: to convey the possibility of and commitment to restoring the moral relationship after wrongdoing. I then go on to argue for how an apology can have this power and why it is important. I will defend the claim that apologies enable moral repair primarily by being a way of taking responsibility and providing the grounds for rebuilding trust. We wrong and hurt each other all the time. But all is rarely lost. Apologies are one important tool for maintaining and rebuilding our relationships when we, as fallible agents in the world, inevitably fail one another.

## References

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\*Intervenant

**Mots-Clés:** apologies, paradox of apologies, functionalism, function of apologies, moral repair