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COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY AND RECONCILIATION WITH AUSTRALIA'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

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In 1998, Professor Raimond Gaita was appointed to the Australian Catholic University's first Chair of Philosophy.

Born in Germany, Professor Gaita came to Australia with his refugee parents as a small child.

He told the story of his parents and, especially, of his Romanian father in the acclaimed 1998 best seller, *Romulus, My Father*. Professor Gaita was educated at St Patrick's College, Ballarat, and Melbourne High School, gaining his BA (Hons) at the University of Melbourne in 1968. He was Lecturer in Philosophy at the Melbourne Primary Teacher's College (now Institute of Education, University of Melbourne) from 1970 to 1972.

He was awarded an MA (Hons First Class) from the University of Melbourne in 1972 and his PhD from the University of Leeds in 1983. In 1976-77 he was Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Kent at Canterbury before moving to the staff of University of London King's College where he now holds the position of Reader, Department of Philosophy.

He was Visiting Fellow to the Department of Philosophy, University of Melbourne, in 1981, 1984 and 1990 and Visiting Fellow to the School of Education, Flinders University, South Australia, in 1987 and 1989. He joined the ACU's Institute of Advanced Research in 1993.

His publications include *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* and *Value and Understanding: Essays for Peter Winch* which he edited and to which he contributed a paper and the introduction.

In recent years Professor Gaita has also contributed extensively to public discussion on issues such as Aboriginal affairs, particularly Mabo and the "stolen children", the Demidenko debate, euthanasia, social justice and the place of moral considerations in politics.

Non-Indigenous Australians are now often called upon to acknowledge the wrongs done to the Indigenous inhabitants of the country. Such acknowledgments are of a collective responsibility, sometimes directly *for* the wrongs done, but more often *to* those who were wronged by our political ancestors. It amounts to the acknowledgment that we are rightly called to a communal responsiveness to those who are the victims of our wrong-doing or the wrong-doing of those who preceded us. In their Mabo Judgment, Justices Deane and Gaudron spoke of "oppression and conflict which was, over the following century, to spread across the continent to dispossess degrade and devastate the Aboriginal peoples and leave a national legacy of unutterable shame". Responding to the Justices, Hugh Morgan of Western Mining said: "Despite their high office, these people seem ashamed to be Australians. They seem to have no pride in their country and they strive mightily to melt it down and recast it, furtively, in a new self-deprecating and much diminished mould". Others have spoken in similar tones of black armband accounts of Australian history.

The well known call upon the Prime Minister by the Aboriginal peoples to apologise to them on behalf of the nation is another example of the call to an acceptance of collective responsibility, although of a kind that can only be made by someone occupying an appropriate office. Explaining to Frank Brennan why John Howard could not apologise in his capacity as prime minister though he (the Prime Minister) had offered his personal apology, Peter Reith wrote: "The government does not support an official national apology. Such an apology could imply that present generations are in some way responsible and accountable for the actions of earlier generations". No explanation was offered of why the prime minister believed he needed to apologise personally.

Dispossession, perhaps genocide, at least in the case of Tasmania, and more recently, the wrongs done against those who have become known as 'the stolen generation', are amongst the evils we are asked to acknowledge. Nearly always they were the expression of, and compounded by, racial denigration. Justice Brennan called it the "denigration of the

capacities of indigenous peoples". Speaking last year to the Reconciliation Convention, in a tone he now professes to regret, the Prime Minister called those evils "blemishes" in a great Australian story.

The concept of a capacity is a tricky one in its application to racism, or at least, in its application to white racism against Blacks and Asians. Most often in question are capacities connected with intelligence, sometimes as narrowly as implied in the concept of IQ, but more generally it is the kind of intelligence presupposed in depth of feeling. We naturally take it, and we are encouraged by most psychological accounts of racism to take it, that these capacities are empirically discoverable in the way that an IQ rating is. We think, therefore, that the denigratory claims made by racists are of a kind that can be assessed by social scientists, perhaps with help from biologists, and that their results could be recorded in journals and books, and if they are sufficiently corroborated, in encyclopaedias. It is a corollary of this way of looking at the matter that we can come to see how things stand in reality with a racially denigrated people by reading books about them. For psychological reasons, this thought continues, some of us - the racists amongst us - may be deeply reluctant to accept these findings, but it is possible, at least in principle, for a person to say truthfully that extensive reading of reputable authorities convinced her that none of the stereotypes she had believed about Blacks are true. The theory, then, is basically that racists are hostile to their victims for deep psychological reasons which are often instinctively exploited by politicians, and that racists rationalise (both in the sense of make rational to themselves and in the sense of hide from themselves and others) the nature of their hostility by appeal to stereotypes which have the form of empirical generalisations about the nature and capacities of their victims.

I shall argue that such an account of racism directed against people whose skin colour and whose facial features are significantly different is mistaken, at least when racism is not on the defensive (as all forms it now are) in the face of widespread anti-racist sentiment. The account is mistaken, moreover, in a way that obscures the degree to which such racism is a denial of the full humanity of its victims. Because the matter is so important to understanding the radical humiliation suffered by most Aborigines, I will spend a little time

trying to explain why I believe this. A remark by James Isdell, Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia in the 1930's, will help me do it. Commenting on the forcible removal of Aboriginal children of mixed blood from their parents, he said that "he would not hesitate for one moment to separate any half caste from its Aboriginal mother, no matter how frantic her momentary grief might be at the time. They soon forget their offspring".

When I read this in *Bringing them Home*, the report on the 'stolen children, I was reminded of a woman I knew when she was grieving over her recently dead child. I shall call her 'M'. M was watching a television documentary on the Vietnam War which showed the grief of Vietnamese women whose children were killed in bombing raids. At first she responded as though she and the Vietnamese women shared a common affliction. Within a minute or so however, she drew back and said, "But it is different for them. They can simply have more".

That remark could mean different things in different contexts. Coming from her I knew it to be a racist remark of a kind I trust is easily recognisable. Isdell said much the same of Aboriginal mothers. M did not mean that whereas she was sterile they were not. Nor did she mean that as a matter of established fact Vietnamese tended to have many children. Hers was not an anthropological observation. She meant that whereas 'our' children are irreplaceable 'they' can replace their dead children more or less as we replace dead pets.

We would misunderstand M's sense of the difference between herself and the Vietnamese women if we thought that she did not believe that they suffered. After all, just like Isdell, she saw their 'frantic grief' and heard their wailing. Her sense of difference centred on how she conceived what that may *mean* to the Vietnamese. She might have gone on to say "They breed like rabbits", meaning not that, as a matter of observed fact, they tend to have many children, but that children and all that is involved in having them and caring for them cannot mean to 'them' what it does to 'us'. In her eyes, nothing the Vietnamese could do or suffer could go deep, not because of anything she discovered about them as individuals, but because she believes that is the essence of their kind - the defining essence that makes 'them' different in kind from 'us'. That is why racists like Isdell are, in the

words of Justice Brennan, able "utterly to disregard" the sufferings of their victims. If they are to see the evil they do, they must first find it intelligible that their victims have inner lives of the kind which enable the wrongs they suffer to go deep. But that is exactly what they do not find intelligible.

Study after study of racism tells us that the rationalisations racists offer to support their attitudes towards those whom they denigrate are not vulnerable to argument and to evidence in ways that reckless generalisations and careless inferences usually are. The reason, we are told, is that complex and deep psychological causes drive racists to evade evidence that bears on their stereotypes, unless of course they consider it favourable. It goes with this way of looking at the matter to suggest two consequences of the way blacks appear to white racists. Either those appearances tempt racists into sincere but false beliefs of an empirical kind (no one who looks like that has the brain power to do physics; anyone who looks like that must have uncontrollable sexual desires, for example). Or those appearances reinforce and deepen the psychological incapacity of racists to attend, with even the semblance of objectivity, to the evidence. Put more generally, it is assumed that how Blacks look to white racists constitutes only a contingent - though often overwhelmingly powerful - psychological obstacle to racists objectively appreciating how things really are.

Such a misunderstanding - as I take it to be - of White on Black racism - is a function of the fact that we attend too much to the stereotypes with which racism is rationalised - stereotypes which usually have a factual, sometimes a pseudo scientific, content. We achieve a better understanding of the nature of such racism - of what for example Isdell and M meant - if we reflect on racist caricatures of Black or Asian faces. In other writings I have drawn attention to the caricature of Afro-American faces in *The Black and White Minstrel* face. Could we cast someone who looked like that to us to play Othello? The answer of course is no, and the reason is of great importance to understanding this kind of racism. We would find it literally unintelligible that someone who looked like that could have the inner life expressed in the poetry of Shakespeare's play.

I must now plead for your patience because I am about to subject you to the only relatively technical part of this lecture. If racists cannot accept arguments against their stereotypes because the psychological obstacles which prevent them are so powerful, then it must make sense, even if it is unrealistic, to urge them to try to be more open to reality, perhaps not directly, but by means of a strategy. Why must it? Because that is part of what we mean by calling an obstacle 'psychological', distinguishing it, for example, from moral or logical obstacles. By contrast, if someone says that morally they cannot give out certain information because it would amount to betraying a trust, then one would either have misunderstood what they had said, or be cruelly cynical if one replied, "Why don't you try. Let me help you devise a method to make it easier". And if someone were to say, "I must conclude, after agreeing that all men are mortal and that Socrates is a man that Socrates is mortal", then only in a Monty Python or Goon script would we hear the reply, "Don't be such a wimp. Try not to".

The kind of impossibility we encounter when we realise that we cannot cast faces that look like the Black and White Minstrel face to play Othello, because it is unintelligible that such a face could express the necessary depth of feeling, is neither moral nor logical impossibility. But like those forms of impossibility, it makes nonsense of any suggestion that those afflicted by it should try to overcome it. Therefore, it is not psychological difficulty, of the kind that might be caused by complex defence mechanisms. Nor is it psychological difficulty of the kind that might be caused by contingent limitations in our understanding. Not even God could not make sense of the claim that The Black and White Minstrel Face has the expressive possibilities needed to play Othello. No more than He could make sense of the proposition that there are square circles. Once we see that, we understand that the generality expressed in the belief that a face like that cannot play Othello is not an empirical generalisation. We see too that M was not expressing an empirical generalisation when she said "They can just have more".

When a racist says that someone who looks like that can easily replace their children, he is not expressing an opinion that has been built up, by him or by others, from observation of like instances. It is true that racists sometimes give up such beliefs because of

experiences they have had, mostly because of what they have learned through living with the people they had previously denigrated. But 'experience' is a tricky word, just as capacity is a tricky word. For complex reasons, we assimilate it to the concept of the empirical as that lends itself to the idea of building up understanding by means of generalisations supported by confirming instances. But coming, through living with a people, to see dignity in faces that had all looked alike to us, to see the full range of human expressiveness in them, to hear suffering that lacerates the soul in someone's cry or in their music, or to see it in their art, to hear all the depth of language in sounds that had seemed merely comical to us - all or any of that is quite different from coming to acknowledge that they score well on IQ tests. We do not discover the full humanity of a racially denigrated people in books by social scientists, or not at any rate, if those books merely contain knowledge of the kind that might be included in encyclopaedias. If we discover it by reading, then it is in books by a Sally Morgan, a Roberta Sykes or a Sally Dingo. For such books to be published, however, and for them to reach a reasonably wide audience, the days of that kind of racism must be numbered.

You can see, therefore, how carefully we must attend to the grammar of the language used by racists and the language we use in reflecting on them. Racists are 'mistaken about how things are', in some sense of that tricky expression they are mistaken about the 'facts of the matter'; in some sense of that tricky expression, 'experience' might teach them to see things differently. But if we regiment what we might mean with those expressions under a prototype that makes science the perfection of factual knowledge, of knowledge gained through experience, then we will fail to understand the most important aspects of racism. We will fail to see the difference between the racist claim that Blacks have little brainpower and the claim that having children and caring for them cannot mean to them what it means to us. We accord undue weight to the empirical, sometimes pseudo scientific, rationalisations of racists because we have deep prejudices against attributing anything important to people on account of how they look. We think that is superficial. Faces, we think, belong to the surface. The soul is deep below all surfaces. But reflecting on why the Black and White Minstrel face could not express a soul capable of all the magnificence and misery of Othello should make us think again about what counts as surface and what as depth.

II

I have spoken at some length about the kind of racism whites direct against Blacks or Asians because I have wanted to show how radically denigratory - how literally dehumanising - it really is because it denies its victims inner lives of any depth and complexity, any possibility of responding with depth and lucidity to the defining features of the human condition. Often Aborigines say they were treated as 'subhuman'. In many cases - perhaps the majority - that is not even slightly an exaggeration. In a natural sense of the word 'human' - when it is not used to refer simply to the species homo sapiens and when it is not explicitly morally inflected, as when we exclaim 'What a human being!', those who are deemed incapable of an inner life of any depth and complexity are rightly said to be treated as less than fully human, as sub-human. Not all racism is like that. Anti-Semitism characteristically is not. Indeed the most terrible humiliations visited on the Jews by the Nazis, presupposed exactly the depth of inner being that white racists deny their black victims. There are many kinds of racism.

I am now in a position to draw out two important implications of what I have said about the racism that historically has been directed against the Aborigines. The first offers a perspective on what is often called the symbolic value of the rejection, in Mabo, of the claim that the land was terra nullius at the time of its settlement.

The significance of the High Court's judgment lies in its acknowledgment that Aborigines had lived under property laws that were based on a doctrine whose application dispossessed them of their lands. Worse, it effectively denied their full human status because it denied the depth of moral and spiritual being which alone makes dispossession such a terrible affliction, and thereby, a terrible injustice. For that reason, the concept of native title is essentially the acknowledgment of the meaning of the Aboriginal peoples dispossession. In the historical context of Australia, that is no less than a belated legal recognition of their full humanity, because it was the repudiation of the doctrine whose application denied that they are beings who have inner lives of the same depth and complexity as we do; and that therefore they could be wronged as deeply and as seriously as we can be. Justice Brennan made the point

explicitly when he said that in many cases the application of terra nullius denied "the capacity of some categories of indigenous peoples to have any rights or interests in land"; it expressed a perception of them as beings so "low" and "barbarous" that their claims could be "utterly disregarded". For many of the settlers, the Aborigines were not the kind of limit to our will, to our interests and desires, that we mark when we speak of respecting someone's rights, or treating them as ends rather than as means, or of according them unconditional respect, and so on. Not all the settlers were like that nor was such racism always expressed in the acts and institutions of the colonial government. However the acceptance of terra nullius as a concept which could justify settlement in Australia and elsewhere was, I think, the expression of the kind of racism that finds literally unintelligible that its victims could seriously be wronged.

The second implication of my analysis of white on black racism affects the claim often made on behalf of those who are now acknowledged to have wronged the Aborigines, that they acted with good, although often benighted, intentions. That claim has most recently been made on behalf of those who took Aboriginal children from their mothers and those who accepted them, during the period covered by the report on the stolen children. The concept of a good intention cannot, however, be relativised indefinitely to an agent's perceptions of it as good. If it could, then we would have to say the Nazi murderers had good, but radically benighted intentions, because many of them believed it to be their duty to human kind to rid the earth of a race that polluted it. We call 'good' only those intentions that express values we can take seriously, even when we do not hold them. The intentions of many who were involved in those programs were saturated with their racist perceptions of the Aborigines, and sometimes by the disdain for them expressed in the attempt to ensure that they would disappear as a people. Even when they sincerely professed concern for the children, their concern was for children who, in their eyes, carried the blood of a radically denigrated people. For that reason their intentions were different from the intentions that informed the (sometimes arrogant and brutal) confiscation of white children from white mothers deemed unfit to care for them. And just as that racist disdain saturated the intentions of the perpetrators of the wrongs, so it saturated the suffering of their victims. Few wrongs lacerate the soul so deeply as those that are compounded by the humiliation suffered by those who

are treated with such radical condescension. The report tells us, "Aboriginality was denigrated and Aboriginal people held in open contempt. This denigration was among the most common experiences of witnesses to the Inquiry"

We achieve, I believe, a just perspective on the good intentions of many of those who participated in the absorption programs when we realise they were akin to the intentions of some slave owners in the southern states of the USA, who wished to improve the conditions of their slaves while at the same time never dreaming that slavery itself constitutes an injustice. Such a person might sincerely have condemned his slave owning neighbour when he raped a slave girl, but the nature of his condemnation was conditioned by the fact that he found it unintelligible to think that his neighbour wronged the girl in the way he would if he raped a white girl. He could no more believe that the girl's soul could be lacerated by this violation of her sexual being than many Australian racists could believe that an Aboriginal mother could grieve all her life for her lost child.

Who then is answerable to the call to acknowledge collective responsibility, and in what way? First, those who are guilty by deed or omission and those sufficiently close to them in time to feel obliged to bring them to justice. Secondly, those who are related to the guilty in such a way that they rightly feel ashamed. Thirdly, those who are related to the guilty in such a way that they should seek an appropriate figure - usually the head of an institution or of government - to apologise on their behalf and to acknowledge other responsibilities, generally, the responsibility to make reparation. Obviously this last group will include many members of the first and second, but it may also have members who are not guilty and who are rightly not ashamed because they do not have the kind of attachment to the country which would make shame appropriate. They might think of themselves merely as citizens of their nation, acknowledging certain rights and duties, but unable yet to appropriate the distinctive use of the first person plural characteristic of those who are rooted in their country, who love it and who are nourished by its historically deep traditions. National shame requires an historically deeper and more intense attachment, perhaps a more *defining* attachment, to country than citizenship.

Discussion of these issues is sometimes muddled by conflation of the concepts of shame and guilt. Because remorse - which I take to be the pained acknowledgment of one's guilt - is taken as a paradigm of the acceptance of responsibility, people sometimes think responsibility must be restricted to what one has done or omitted to do. Moral guilt is indeed so restricted; the guilt of others can be the occasion for one's own guilt only if one failed to do something to prevent their deeds or at least to protest them. Perhaps that is why collective responsibility is so often taken to mean collective guilt rather than national shame. It is tempting to say that one's omissions must reasonably be judged to stand in some causal relation to the wrong deeds of others if one is justifiably to be held responsible together with their perpetrators - roughly, that one must reasonably judge that one could have played a part in stopping them. That temptation should be resisted. If one soberly judges that one's actions could achieve nothing, one might nonetheless rightly feel obliged to protest, perhaps so it be known that, or merely so it be true that, at least someone cared that wrong was done to people. But in such cases, one must be in sufficient proximity to the deeds to give sense to the guilty thought that evil was done and one did nothing to stop or to protest it. That is not a thought that can justifiably occasion guilt in later generations, although they may rightly feel guilty for not responding, in ways appropriate to them, to the fact that their ancestors did wrong, because they have not offered reparation, for example.

Guilt and collective guilt seem simpler in their conceptual structure than national shame. That appearance should be trusted, on the whole, but there is an interesting complication to guilt, which may help us understand shame. It makes itself felt when one reflects on the response that many people have to Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex*. Oedipus killed his father and married his mother. He did both unintentionally because of ignorance for which he was not culpable. Or, so I read Sophocles. When Oedipus realises what he has done, his horror is of the kind we would naturally call 'remorse' - its character is determined by his sense of the evil-doer he had unwittingly become

Now, shedder of father's blood,/ Husband of mother, is my name;/ Godless and
child of shame,/ Begetter of brother-sons;/ What infamy remains/ That is not spoken of
Oedipus.

The chorus does not doubt that Oedipus did evil: it shows in the quality of its pity for him:

And now, where a more heart-rending story of affliction?/ Where a more awful swerve into the arms of torment?/ O Oedipus, that proud head!/ When the same bosom enfolded the son and the father,/ Could not the engendering clay have shouted aloud its indignation.

When reading Sophocles' play, and even more when watching it, few people would doubt that Oedipus and the Chorus respond appropriately. However, many question it on reflection, finding it irrational, the expression of superstitions of times long past, but psychologically understandable even now. In fact, as the philosopher Bernard Williams has pointed out, urging that we must distinguish what we actually believe from what we think we believe, we are not so distant from such ways of thinking as we sometimes sincerely profess to be. He cites our law of torts as an example where responsibility is assigned and compensation demanded from those who played no causal role in the suffering of the litigants

I don't, however, intend to argue for the rightness of Oedipus' response. To those who concede there is at least a case for it, I shall outline the more generous conception of responsibility that beckons even with something as severe as guilt. It shows in the response of the chorus. It doesn't blame Oedipus. That would indeed be irrational unless it judged his ignorance to be culpable, which it rightly does not. As I said earlier, the chorus pities him with, if I might put it this way, a stern pity that ensures that Oedipus does not evade his guilt by pleading, as he does in a later play, Oedipus at Colonus, that he was not culpable. Holding him in that way responsible, as properly responsive to the moral significance of his deeds, conditions what is morally possible for them in the future. It is the exercise of a responsibility that Oedipus and the chorus have to the community which has been polluted by his deeds. Importantly, the chorus' pity is conditioned by a judgment which is severe but

not 'judgmental'. It does not turn away from Oedipus in disdain, but towards him, expressing its sorrow for what he has (morally) become.

In my book, *Romulus, My Father*, I ascribe a similar attitude of, if I might put it this way, utterly non-judgmental moral severity to my father. The response to the book, the way people have been moved by it and to this aspect of my characterisation of him, convinces me that whatever we may say reflectively under the influence of a moralistic conception of morality, a conception we have inherited partly from Aristotle, our practice is thankfully more lucid. This is a passage from my book.

People argue about whether suffering ennobles. There is another and different thought, which is that only suffering makes one wise. Of course, people can suffer the most horrific experiences and emerge even more superficial than they were before. However, some kinds of wisdom - the kind that shows itself not only thoughts, but in the integrity of an authoritatively lived life - is given only to those who have suffered deep and long. His affliction gave authority to much of what my father said, gave power to his language, rich in peasant imagery, and spared his harsh moral judgment from any tinge of moralism, in the pejorative sense of that term which implies an ever present readiness to point the finger at others and to turn one's back on them.

In one sense of the term, my father was a fierce moralist. Not about the big and controversial issues of the day, but about simple moral requirements such as honesty and concern for one's neighbour. If he thought you were a liar or a cheat or had acted unkindly, then he would say so to you without a trace of euphemism. But there was never anything in his judgment which implied you should be shunned by decent people. Though fierce and uncompromising, his judgments were not what we now call judgmental. Even his most severe judgments were made in many tones. If he called you an incorrigible liar he might do it angrily, scathingly, sorrowfully, or strange as it might sound, matter-of-factly, but never in a tone that suggested he would turn his back on you. You were always welcome at his table, to eat and more importantly, to talk, always to talk. But he believed that it was essential to decent conversation that

one not pretend to virtues one did not possess - as essential as being truthful about one's identity. Only then could conversation be true to its humane potentialities and do its humanising work of opening up the possibilities of authentic human disclosure.

Such a non-moralistic desire severely to hold someone to their responsibility is, I think what people express when they say that in calling for a national apology they do not thereby wish to lay blame. Sometimes they say they want merely to express their sorrow, even their grief. The trouble, however, is that the connections in our understanding between morality and blame are so close, that people then think such an expression of sorrow is not a moral response, or more precisely, that it is not a response which allows a moral description of what one sorrows over. It then seems irrelevant to the sorrow felt for the Aborigines that their suffering is largely a consequence of the fact, and is saturated by their awareness of the fact, they were wronged rather than being victims of a natural catastrophe, and that it was our political ancestors who wronged them.

Pollution is not a bad metaphor for the way the guilt of its members can affect an entire community, including those who are not guilty. The crimes of the Nazis estranged some German poets and novelists so deeply from their country, that they could no longer write creatively in its language. Here it does seem as though the streams that nourish national identity, the love of country, and its culture have been poisoned, depriving them of the power fully to do so, at least for those with a certain kind of moral sensibility. Response to such pollution can of course be in various ways self indulgent. The maudlin self abasement that gives point to talk of black arm-band brigades, is an example. But any distinction between authentic and unauthentic forms of such responses will depend on whether and in what way they are conditioned by a sense that one is answerable to the victims of the polluting crimes.

To talk of political ancestors is of course to rely on another metaphor, one whose task is to bring national shame within the conceptual ambit of familial shame. Sometimes the shame of parents for the deeds of their children depends on what they did or failed to do to or for their children, but it is not always so, and one would have to be desperately committed to the causal connotations of responsibility to believe (facilitated by, for example, a theory of

unconscious projection) that it is generally so when children are ashamed of what their parents have done. But reflection on familial and national shame brings into focus the deep and sometimes intense attachments to groups which form part of a person's sense of identity.

The role of the metaphor of ancestry in bringing national shame within the conceptual ambit of familial attachments is perhaps a function of what Williams has called the "bonding interactive effects of shame". In this respect shame is quite unlike moral guilt. Severe remorse (which I understand to be the painful acknowledgment of one's guilt) is radically individualising. Remorseful suffering seems to be alone amongst the forms of human suffering in its need to resist the consolation which comes from the recognition that others suffer as we do. The commonplace fact that we may be consoled by the knowledge that we do not suffer alone informs Isak Dinesen's insight that "all sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story, or tell a story about them". Her point is not merely that stories characteristically are ways of making sense of the lives of their heroes. It is that they do so against a compassionate sense of a common human condition. But, the guilty who seek comfort in the knowledge that others are as guilty or even more guilty than they, have a corrupt understanding of their guilt. The consoling power of forgiveness, expiation, atonement and, sometimes, punishment differ in kind, therefore, from the consolation to be found in psychotherapy and *from whatever other forms of consolation come from a sense of fellowship with others who suffer as we do*. That being so, the lucid refusal of consolation in a fellowship of the guilty is not a form of pride and is not morally or psychologically unrealistic. It is not a consequence of setting standards that are too high, nor is it the expression of a severe and persecutory super-ego. It is merely the acknowledgment that such is the nature of guilt.

None of this means, however, that one should not speak of national guilt, as people did of the Germans after the Second World War. Such talk refers basically to the consequences for a sense of national identity of the fact that so many in the nation are guilty by deed or by omission. And although such people may have done their evil deeds under the inspiration of a corrupt nationalism and although many others did the same, they cannot lucidly face the

meaning of what they did in their capacity as members of a particular nation and in guilty fellowship with their compatriots. They can face it lucidly only as individual human beings.

I am now in a position to sketch a response to the thoughts expressed in Peter Reith's letter to Frank Brennan and to the political conclusion that is often drawn from them which goes something like this. The practical - and therefore the *really* moral - thing to do is to stop brooding on the alleged wrongs committed against the Aborigines in the past and to get on with the task of providing them with land, health, education and so on. This (the thought continues) should not be done in response to the divisive idea that their history entitles them to it, but in response to their present needs assessed equitably alongside the needs of all their fellow citizens.

Imagine someone who says that he fully understands the wrong he had done in swindling a friend, and who also says that while he is more than ready to make up his friend's losses, he feels no remorse and no need to apologise. Suppose he then indignantly denies that this compromises his claim fully to understand what he had done. He says that remorse is a useless and often destructive emotional addendum to the full understanding of what it means to be a wrong-doer. Such understanding, he goes on to say, entails only the desire to make good the damage to whatever degree one can. Now imagine the other extreme of this misunderstanding - someone who often and tearfully expresses remorse, but is never prepared to make reparation. Few people would deny that these characters have a desperately thin moral understanding. In the first the connection between remorse and the understanding of the wrong he has done has come apart. In the second, the connection between remorse and reparation have come apart in the same way.

Is the same true of shame? Up to a point it is. The similarities are sufficient to yield a reply to those who say that protestations of shame unaccompanied by serious attempts to ameliorate the effects of the wrong done is self indulgent and in the end harmful to the Aborigines. Would anyone deny it? Would anyone seriously say that shame is of itself an adequate response to the terrible plight suffered by most Aborigines, or that shame amounts to anything when it is separated from a serious concern with reparation? Relief of the

material and psychological misery of many of the Aborigines will not count as reparation, however, unless the spirit in which that relief is given is informed by a recognition of the wrongs they have suffered. That is part of what we *mean* by 'reparation' and it is why we distinguish reparation from other actions which would bring the same material benefits to those who have been wronged. Acknowledgment of those wrongs as a source of torment distinct from and not reducible to their material or psychological consequences is, I believe, what the Aborigines desire when they ask for a national apology.

Thus far the analogy with remorse goes through. But can one go on to say that those who say that they know full well the terrible wrong their political ancestors did to the Aborigines, but feel no shame, have broken the connection between shame and understanding in the same way as the character in my example broke the connection between remorse and understanding. One can, but one must add the qualification that the persons involved must have the kind of attachment to Australia that could make shame possible for them. Clearly, people from other nations and citizens with no deep attachment to the country can acknowledge the wrong done to the Aborigines, and acknowledge it in the sense that implies- as mere recognition does not - that they are morally responsive to a claim on them. But that would not be shame. The attachment that makes shame appropriate and sometimes called for is inseparable from the desire to celebrate achievements which shape an historically deep sense of communal identity. The pained, humbled acknowledgment of the wrongs committed by their ancestors, of those who are rooted and nourished by their country, who feel as do Justices Deane and Gaudron, that those wrongs constitute a stain on their country, and whose joy in its achievements is thereby blighted in some instances - that acknowledgment I take to be one of the forms of shame. If it is not, then I do not know what to call it. If we are right to be proud, then sometimes we are obliged to be ashamed. The wish for national pride without the possibility of national shame is an expression of that corrupt attachment to a collective whose name is jingoism.

Peter Reith's claim that we cannot be held responsible for the crimes of our ancestors is true, therefore, only if one takes him to mean the kind of responsibility expressed in remorse, that is, in the pained acknowledgment of one's guilt. We can rationally feel remorse (feel

guilty) only for what we have done or failed to do. But as well, or perhaps instead of, feeling guilty, we may feel ashamed, and that suggests a different notion of responsibility. Or, perhaps not a different notion so much as a different aspect of the same notion.

Martin Buber, the Jewish philosopher and theologian, wrote: "The idea of responsibility is to be brought back from the province of specialised ethics; of an 'ought' that swings free in the air, into that of real life. Genuine responsibility exists only where there is real responding." In remorse we respond to what it means to wrong another, which involves a new and terrible shock at their reality. Far from being intrinsically self indulgent, lucid remorse makes one's victim vividly real. Corrupt forms of remorse, of which there are infinitely many, do the opposite. When shame is the lucid expression of collective national responsibility for the wrongs done by our ancestors, we have risen in truthful response to the evil in our history - of the fact that it is *our* history. It is rightly called an acceptance of responsibility, because it is an acknowledgment of the fact that we must rise truthful moral responsiveness to the meaning of what we have been caught up in, often through no fault of our own.

The guilt of others can, therefore, place us in a variety of complex moral relations to their victims, and sometimes to the descendants of their victims - relations which compromise our innocence, as surely even if differently, than if we had ourselves been guilty of wrong doing. We are, in the words of Justices Gaudron and Deane, "diminished by a national legacy" of shame. In the language of ancient Greece, we are polluted, stained by it. To put the point more dryly: aspects of our lives rightly fall under moral characterisations that generate consequences for what it is morally possible for us to do with others if we are seriously to acknowledge the moral realities that govern our situation. We cannot for example, honestly celebrate national achievement with the Aborigines unless we also acknowledge our shame. This, more extended but I believe more adequate notion of responsibility than one that would confine itself to the remorseful acknowledgment of the wrongs we have done, includes the idea that we may be called upon to discharge obligations incurred by our relations to others who are guilty even though we are not. It also includes the idea that we may be required lucidly to acknowledge our shame over what we have inherited. There is nothing confused, therefore, in the thought that we may be responsible for deeds for

which we are not guilty and for which we are in no other way culpable. National shame is no more than the acknowledgment of that responsibility by those who love their country.

We Australians have recently begun a dialogue with our Indigenous peoples, many of us hearing for the first time authority in voices which a denigratory racism had made inaudible. The philosopher Peter Winch said that to be just to another person is to "treat with seriousness their own conception of themselves, their own commitments and cares, their own understanding of their situation and of what the situation demands of them". It means that we must be open to the distinctive voice of the other, and that in turn means that we must encourage the conditions in which that voice can form and be heard. When people's souls have been lacerated by the wrongs done to them, individually or collectively, openness to their voice requires humbled attentiveness. In certain circumstances, shamed acknowledgment of collective responsibility is the form such humbled attentiveness takes.

The Aboriginal peoples have no power to speak of. If their voices are heard when they demand things we may not wish to give, then it will be because we are just enough to listen. Good hearted people find it intolerable that the just treatment of the powerless should depend on the generosity, on (in the old fashioned sense) the *charity* of the powerful. Since at least 1789, the refusal to accept it has driven the rhetoric of human rights in an heroic attempt to give dignity to the powerless by granting them a kind of moral power, a sort of metaphysical shield, that thwarts the will of their oppressors. "I don't need your charity, your pity. I stand on my rights". It is a beautiful sentiment, but it is an illusion, one as deep as the illusion that all human beings possess an inalienable dignity. To talk of inalienable dignity is rather like talking of the inalienable right to esteem. Both are alienable; esteem for obvious reasons, and dignity because it is essentially tied to appearance. Like the protestation of rights to which it is allied, it will survive only if one is spared the worst. Those who are not spared, those whom Simone Weil described as having been "struck one of those blows which leave a being struggling on the ground like a half crushed worm", depend entirely on the light of justice to make their humanity visible. That light depends in its turn on the love of saints for those who are radically afflicted.

We must therefore not be sentimental about reconciliation. We must especially avoid the kind of sentimentality expressed in 'Sorry Day', which good hearted though it may be, really hides from us the terrible evil the Aborigines have suffered and our responsibilities to them. More often than not, talk of reconciliation assumes that the road will be relatively smooth and the end welcome to all people of good will, if only Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians will really listen to one another with an open heart. It might be so. But it might not. The assumption that it *must* be so, if minds and hearts are truly open, is inconsistent with anything that could seriously be called reconciliation. Anything really deserving of the name will be the result of an openness to the other which denies us the capacity to predict what will be consistent or inconsistent with an open heart and mind.

Last year Noel Pearson was moved to call some members of the Coalition "racist scum". This was at the time when the Queensland government together with the state's pastoralists steamrolled the federal government into treating a technical High Court judgment, supported by a black letter judge, as though it were a piece of gung-ho social engineering. They thereby made a High Court judgment an extreme position in a political debate. Seen against the brutish action of the Queensland government (in its own way a naked display of political force) and against the history of black/white relations which gave significance to Wik, the response to Pearson appears prissy when it is not disingenuous. It shows, I think, that we are not yet ready to hear the full truth about the evil done to the Aborigines and to bear the pain of it. If we were, we could not get so radically out of proportion our responses to Pearson and to the actions of the Queensland government and pastoralists

An emasculated notion of conversation applied to politics, enables us to hide this from ourselves. Michael Oakeshott celebrated the idea of conversation as a way of understanding the life of the mind and of politics in his enchanting essay 'The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind'. He insisted that strident, and even passionate, voices will destroy conversation. Even in academic life, however, that point has its limits. What is one to do with the many shrill voices in our intellectual history? How are they to speak to us? Must one first

'civilise' them? - civilise Plato, Augustine, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard to name just a few.

The rhetorical force of those questions becomes more powerful when they are directed to our attempts to converse with those whom we or our political ancestors have brutally wronged. If we enter such conversations with a determinate idea of what counts as their civilised forms, then we are bound to shut our ears to what we do not wish to hear. It happens often in personal relations. More often than not the injunction, "Try to be civilised" is a cruel reproach to those we have hurt, telling them not to make us too uncomfortable by showing their pain. We then add humiliation to their pain.

Martin Buber, who made the idea of dialogue famous in his book *I and Thou*, was wiser about this. He said that the basic difference between monologue and "fully valid conversation" was "the otherness, or more concretely, the moment of surprise". His point is not merely that we must be open to hearing surprising things. We must be open to being surprised at the many ways we may justly and humanly relate to one another in a spirit of truthful dialogue. It is in conversation rather than in advance of it, that we discover, never alone but always together, what it means really to listen and what tone may properly be taken. In conversation we discover the many things conversation can be. No one can say what will happen when we fully acknowledge the evil done to the Indigenous peoples of this land and when they see and accept that we have acknowledged it. More importantly, no one can say what should happen.

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