Jerome Veith

Seattle University

veithj@gmail.com

206.491.5930

**Abstract: “Deep Apology: Beyond History, Narrative, and Solidarity”**

Apology for systemic or historic wrongs seems easy to avoid in our individualist culture: How can one take responsibility for something one did not do? Drawing on communal and narrative notions of selfhood, Sandel (2009) replies by noting that our belonging to a shared story involves us, through the bond of solidarity, in matters of responsibility beyond our agency. This undermines the liberalist neutrality that treats the social sphere as a mere container for our behavior, and paves the way for discussions of cultural mourning, shared guilt, and historical reparations.

As desirable as this development may be, it appears not to go far enough. By tracing responsibility to narratives and overt frameworks of belonging, solidarity remains dangerously bound to established and dominant identities (such as nationalism). Thus, solidarity fails to capture the viability of ethical pleas that seek to transcend borders and boundaries, but which nevertheless do not speak in the abstractness of universals.

In Levinas’ view, there is another category of obligation that avoids both the emptiness of the universal as well as the contractual voluntarism of the particular. It involves an Other whose demands do not reach one from the outside, but instead ‘hollow out,’ ‘substitute,’ and ‘denucleate’ one’s subjectivity from within. I will explore how the ethical structures in this account inextricably involve us in relationships that transcend narrative identity, and necessitate a form of mourning beyond the communal.