The Philosophy of Forgiveness

Volume III
Forgiveness in World Religions

Edited by
Gregory L. Bock
The University of Texas at Tyler

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Most of all, I am deeply grateful to my wife, Heather Bock, for her constant love and support, without which I would not have finished this project, let alone made it this far in life. I am the beneficiary of her loving and forgiving nature.

Introduction
Forgiveness in World Religions

Gregory L. Bock

The philosophy of forgiveness is a burgeoning field, and there have already been many important contributions made, such as the ideas articulated by Jeffrie Murphy, Jean Hampton, Charles Griswold, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Glen Pettigrove, and Martha Nussbaum, among others. In addition to these more recent perspectives on forgiveness, we look back through history and discover ideas in the writings of philosophers as early as Aristotle and Seneca. However, if we only focus on the philosophical literature, we may miss an important part of the conversation which has carried on since ancient times in the realm of religion. The purpose of this volume is to scour the great religious traditions for philosophical insights on forgiveness and to provide a source for interested scholars and students to engage in comparative analysis.

The Philosophy of Forgiveness, Volume I touched on several religious perspectives, such as Man-to Tang's "The Double Intentionality of Forgiveness: A Non-Reductive Account of Forgiveness in Confucius," Gregory Bock's "Unconditional Forgiveness and Christian Love," and Christopher Ketcham's "Buddhism and the End of Forgiveness." While these essays shed light on some important aspects of forgiveness, it was apparent that a more extensive collection was needed to study some of the questions raised in the essays more deeply and to compare these perspectives with the teachings of other religions.

As a work of comparative religious philosophy, this volume examines several dimensions of forgiveness, including divine forgiveness of human beings, human forgiveness of divine beings, interpersonal forgiveness, group forgiveness, and forgiveness of self. It also explores many philosophical questions, including but not limited to the following: whether forgiveness is conditional or unconditional, whether some moral wrongs are unforgiveable, whether God has standing to forgive, whether forgiveness should override justice, and whether resentment is a necessary precursor to forgiveness. Moreover, several of the chapters put their religious perspectives in dialogue with philosophers, like Aristotle, Kant, and Derrida.

The scholars in this volume come from different cultural and religious backgrounds and represent different disciplines, such as Philosophy, Religious

Studies, and Psychology. All offer unique perspectives on their topics, and I have done my best as an editor to allow their voices to be heard. It is my hope that the diversity of perspectives presented here allows the reader to appreciate what each of these religious traditions has to offer and how each is similar to or different from one another. In the following paragraphs, I present a summary of each chapter.

In "Forgiveness in Judaism," Jae Jerkins surveys the concept of forgiveness in Jewish thought. First, he considers cases of forgiveness in the Torah and notes that the first established case appears in Genesis when Joseph forgives his brothers for selling him into slavery. He contrasts this instance of forgiveness with what happens in the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, and more. He describes the path of forgiveness taught by the Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides, that a wrongdoer must (1) recognize the action as wrong, (2) confess it, (3) regret it, and (4) commit to never do it again. He considers what it means to sin against and be forgiven by God on Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement – and how reconciling with others is important if one wants God's forgiveness. Jerkins concludes his chapter with an application of Jewish forgiveness to the Holocaust.

In "A Christian View of Forgiveness: Integrating Theology and Philosophy into a Psychological Approach," Everett L. Worthington, Jr. defends a stress-and-coping theory of forgiveness in which forgiveness is described as one way individuals deal with stress. He explains four dimensions of this forgiveness as found in Christianity: divine forgiveness, self-forgiveness, person-to-person forgiveness and organizational-societal forgiveness. He considers what makes Christian forgiveness specifically Christian, arguing that Christian forgiveness is particularly effective, a normative and central part of the Christian community, oriented toward others, and reinforced by the doctrine of prevenient grace.

Donald B. Kraybill's "Anabaptist Forgiveness in Cultural Context: An Amish Example" explores the concept of Amish forgiveness embodied in the Nickel Mines tragedy, where a thirty-two-year-old truck driver opened fire in a one room Amish schoolhouse, killing five and injuring five others. The act of forgiveness that followed made international headlines because of the nature of the crime and the speed at which the Amish community forgave the killer and his family. Kraybill examines the history of forgiveness in the Amish community and shows how the Amish culture and belief system led to this extraordinary act of forgiveness. Philosophically, he defines forgiveness as forgoing resentment and retaliation but recognizes that there are different degrees of it. He shows how forgiveness is contextualized in the Amish community as part of its ethos and as a regular habit, and he explores the idea of third-party involvement and secondary victims. He shows how in Amish circles forgiveness is both unconditional and conditional – unconditional with regards to outsiders and conditional

with regards to baptized members of the Amish church, who are occasionally subject to church discipline. Kraybill also considers the degrees of difficulty of acts of forgiveness and compares Amish forgiveness in this case to the more recent forgiveness of Dylan Roof by the families of the Emanuel Nine.

Raja Bahlul's "Justice and Mercy: Two Islamic Views on the Nature and Possibility of Divine Forgiveness" wrestles with the notions of justice and mercy in Islamic thought. First, Bahlul considers the grounds of forgiveness. Does God have standing to forgive? Can wrongdoing even affect God? Second, he considers whether forgiveness is even possible in light of divine justice. He explores Mu'tazilite views on the matter since this is the school of thought that seems to put the greatest emphasis on divine justice. He concludes that on the Mu'tazilite view, there is not much to be said about God's forgiveness, for God's role is reduced to bookkeeping and aggregation, within the framework of a strict calculus of good and evil deeds. Third, he articulates the view of Ash'arite thinkers, who, he thinks, offer an important corrective to the one-sided justice of the Mu'tazilites. On the Ash'arite view, God punishes sinners but also shows mercy.

In "The Lord of Retribution is All-Forgiving: Dynamics of Forgiveness in Shi'ite Islam," Mahdi Hasanzadeh and Rasool Akbari explore the concept of forgiveness in Shi'ism, where they place a particular emphasis on the multiplicity of voices within this faith system. First, they explain the foundational beliefs of Shi'ite Islam and highlight the diversity of sources for epistemic, legal, and moral authority in the tradition. Second, they consider how various Shi'ite scholars, including exegetes, theologians, jurists, moralists, and mystics interpret the Qur'anic passages about divine chastisements in hell and their consequences for understanding divine forgiveness, mercy, and justice. This they call the vertical level of forgiveness. Third, continuing to accentuate the diversity of perspectives within Shi'ite Islam, Hasanzadeh and Akbari examine forgiveness on an interpersonal level and discuss how Shi'ism relies mainly on the Qur'an and Hadith to understand when either one of the ambivalent options, forgiveness *('afw)* or retribution (*qiṣāṣ*) is appropriate.

In "Aristotle, Avicenna and Aquinas on Forgiveness," Enzo Guerra and Adam Barkman argue that Aristotle's thinking on forgiveness influenced both Avicenna and Aquinas. Guerra and Barkman locate Aristotle's thoughts about forgiveness in his discussions of justice and good temperedness. They describe Aristotelian justice as individuals receiving what they deserve or "where both are in a mutual state of impartiality." They describe good temperedness as responding to wrongdoing in a virtuous manner – not with too much or too little anger. Aristotle describes four conditions that help us know when to retaliate against or forgive a wrongdoer. Guerra and Barkman show how a similar virtue or "balance" can be found in the writings of Avicenna. When one's body or spirit is out of balance, one's temper is, too. Avicenna departs from Aristotle, however,

by emphasizing God's role in returning the spirit to its state of balance. In Aquinas and Christianity, there is also a balance that has been disrupted by sin. Guerra and Barkman consider the doctrine of original sin, Jesus' teaching on forgiveness, and Aquinas' thoughts on retaliation and restitution.

In "Forgiveness in Hinduism," Winfried Corduan analyzes the concept of forgiveness in Indian literature, such as the Mahabharata and the Bhagavad Gita. He shows that Hinduism not only teaches divine forgiveness, in which human beings break divine rules and ask for forgiveness from a god, but also human forgiveness for a god who may have strayed. He goes on to the bristly issue of forgiving one's enemies in the Hindu context. The Mahabharata, at whose core is the conflict between the two clans called the Pandavas and Kauravas, relates a fierce debate on forgiveness and anger. Were it not for the writing style, it could have taken place today. The characters Draupadi, Yudhishthira, and Bhimasena cannot reconcile their points of view with each other. Later on, in the Bhagavad Gita, the god Krishna teaches Arjuna (brother of Yudhishthira) a possible resolution. Corduan recognizes the many competing views in Hinduism, and concludes that, on the whole, forgiveness is considered a virtue that people should practice for their own spiritual improvement.

In "Forgiving the Unforgiveable: The Buddha and Aṅgulimāla," John M. Thompson explores forgiveness in Buddhism through the story of the infamous finger-necklace serial killer, Aṅgulimāla. After terrorizing the countryside, Aṅgulimāla encounters the Buddha in a dramatic confrontation and becomes one of his disciples. He changes his ways and becomes a beacon of compassion and reaches nirvana. Does this mean that the Buddha forgave Aṅgulimāla? Should the victims' families do so, too, even without an apology? Should the Buddha turn him over to the authorities to face his just punishment? Thompson considers these questions and many others and concludes that while we might feel conflicted about the fate of Aṅgulimāla, the forgiveness that the Buddha demonstrates causes us to reconsider how we normally think about justice and mercy. Should compassion override the rule of law at least in *some* cases, as this story seems to suggest?

In "Forgiveness in the Global Age: Derrida and Buddhism" Sinkwan Cheng compares and contrasts Derridean and Buddhist concepts of forgiveness in order to assess their efficacies for promoting world peace. Cheng notes how "the 'cosmos' underpins both kinds of praxis. Both seem to hold out new alternatives for peace where existing 'institutions of forgiveness' have failed. Both are radically anti-essentialist and harbor little illusion about 'self' and 'substance'; both push aporetic thinking to the extreme where language, concepts, and ontology deconstruct themselves." Despite such similarities, the two differ widely in their ethics. Derrida challenges conventional forgiveness by enjoining an "absolute forgiveness" which rehypostatizes the self (the "absolute victim") and its binary

opposition to an evil *other* (the "absolute wrongdoer"). By contrast, Buddhism teaches "no self," which means that there is no victim, no aggressor, and thus no injury. Derrida's "absolute forgiveness" leads him to enjoin an "impossible but necessary" forgiveness, in contrast to which Buddhism offers a "possible but unnecessary" forgiveness. For Derrida, forgiveness is impossible but necessary, not least of all because "absolute forgiveness" entails forgiving the unforgiveable. Cheng contrasts this to Buddhism – according to which "nothing is unforgiveable. By giving up the self, there is no victim, no aggressor, and no sin to forgive in the first place." Derrida's "impossible but necessary forgiveness" gets him trapped in an abyss of *aporias*. This is a far cry from Buddhism which "uses *aporias* to get beyond the entrapment of language, thoughts, and ontotheology. In contradistinction to Derrida who is held captive in an abyss of the impossible but necessary, "Buddhism could potentially offer a more promising future for healing wounds in the cosmos."

In "Confucian Forgiveness and the Rectification of Names," David R. Corner and Jordan R. Corner consider forgiveness in the Confucian tradition. It has been argued that forgiveness involves, as an essential component, the forswearing of resentment, and that, because Classical Confucianism places no moral value on resentment, that tradition has no place for forgiveness. Corner and Corner argue for a broader notion of forgiveness that makes forgiveness consistent with Confucian principles, and then show the importance of forgiveness to the restoring of proper relationships, which is significant to the Confucian doctrine of the Rectification of Names.

Chapter 1

Forgiveness in Judaism

Jae Jerkins

In the popular stories of the ancient Mediterranean, the gods were capricious and life was bound to their fate. In the face of such fickleness, the best one could hope to have was a virtuous character and a stoic acceptance of what the gods chose for you. Sometimes you could appease the gods. For example, in Book I of the *Iliad*, the mortal Agamemnon offends the god Apollo by taking a rival priest's daughter as a war prize. He then appeases Apollo's wrath by sacrificing a hundred bulls and goats. The moral here, passed from Bronze Age father to son, was that you are nothing like the gods and therefore have no real control over your own life. Meanwhile, in ancient Israel, the Torah will turn this entire worldview on its head.

In the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, it is said that humanity is made in the "image of God" (Gen. 1:27). In the Jewish tradition, this is taken to mean that like God we too have free will and therefore have the responsibility to be ethical. So, while ancient Greek narratives concerning the gods taught that divine fate rules the world, the Jewish people taught that we are free moral agents who are responsible for ourselves and each other. As it says in Leviticus, "You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy" (19:2). This is the foundation for Jewish ethics — the pursuit of righteousness. The Torah teaches that God expects us to be righteous, and yet, time and again, we stumble. As moral agents with free will, we fail to live up to the ethical standards that have been placed before us. It is for this reason that *forgiveness* is a key component of Jewish thought. What follows is an analysis of what forgiveness means to the Jewish people and how the Jewish concept of forgiveness evolves over time.

The Torah — the biblical books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy — is the foundation of all Jewish wisdom and tradition. These books set up the moral expectations for living a Jewish life. In Deuteronomy, Moses tells the Hebrews who are about to enter the Land of Israel that they have a choice.

> See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity. For I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His laws, and His rules, that you may thrive and increase, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land that you are about to enter and possess. (30:15-16)

This passage alludes to the "everlasting covenant," or permanent two-way agreement, that forever binds God with the People of Israel and vice versa (Ezek. 37:26-27). The People of Israel are expected to love God, walk in the ways of God, and observe His commandments. For their obedience, they are promised life, descendants, and the eternal blessing of God.

The Righteous Path: Leaving & Returning

This correlation between doing good and remaining connected to God is found in the very word "commandment." The Hebrew word commonly translated as "commandment" is "mitzvah." The Semitic root of the word *mitzvah* is "tzavtah," meaning "to connect." In this way, Jews seek righteousness by remaining connected to God and maintain that connection by keeping the commandments or mitzvot. There are 613 such commandments in the Torah: 248 positive mitzvot (i.e. "thou shalt") and 365 negative mitzvot (i.e. "thou shalt not"). However, due to the radical differences of our modern context compared with the realities of ancient Israel, there are now only 77 positive Torah mitzvot and 194 negative Torah mitzvot that remain applicable today (Chayim 1990, xi-xxxiv). When Jews live by these Torah *commandments*, by the ancient *Rabbinic teachings* collected in the Talmud, and by long–standing Jewish *tradition*, they are living according to "Halakhah." This is a foundational concept of Jewish thought. *Halakhah* is often translated as "Jewish law" but more literally and elegantly means "the Path."

When a Jew acts against Halakhah, then she has sinned. The Hebrew word for "sin" is "chait." The concept of sin has a variety of treatments in Christianity and Islam, but in a purely Jewish context, the Hebrew *chait* means "to miss the mark." So, for Jews, sinning is an act of temporarily straying from the path of righteousness. According to the Torah, we are born without sin, though all people have an inclination to sin from the time they are young (Gen. 8:21). For Jews, this "Yetzer Hara," or *Evil Inclination*, does not stem from a devil like one finds in Christianity or Islam (cf. Matt. 4:1 and Quran 2:208). Rather, the Evil Inclination is rooted in our own internal instinct to misuse the world. In other words, we have a natural inclination to sin. The 11th century Jewish scholar Rashi taught that the *Yetzer Hara* "yearns" to lead one to sin, but "if you wish, you may overcome it" (on Gen. 4:7). It is only with the development of a "Yetzer Tov," a *Good Inclination*, that we begin to seek righteousness. Rabbinic tradition teaches that

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