

# The Philosophy of Forgiveness - Volume I

## Explorations of Forgiveness: Personal, Relational, and Religious

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**Vernon Series in Philosophy of Forgiveness**



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# Introduction

## Explorations of Forgiveness

Court D. Lewis

To explore is to seek out and to discover the yet unknown. Even though exploration is challenging and tiring, it is one of the most rewarding aspects of human engagement; for it is through exploration that we learn, grow as individuals, and mature as moral beings. The French use the term 'flâneur' to describe a visitor, who purposely gets "lost" in order to engage and gain a more direct and interpersonal understanding of the symbolic meanings and beliefs of a society. The flâneur immerses herself in the culture of society, ignoring advice featured in guidebooks, so as to intimately participate with and learn from the actual members of the society. In this way, the flâneur gains a more accurate understanding of the people and community being explored, while at the same time gaining a better understanding of her own values and assumptions.

Vernon Press's series on the Philosophy of Forgiveness is designed as a type of philosophical flâneur, engaging past and contemporary issues of forgiveness, in order to develop and arrive at a clearer, more dynamic understanding of forgiveness and its related concepts. The Philosophy of Forgiveness is multi-dimensional and complex. As recent scholarly philosophical works on forgiveness illustrate, incorporating personal, relational, political, ethical, psychological, and religious dimensions into one consistent conception of "forgiveness" is difficult. *Explorations of Forgiveness: Personal, Relational, and Religious* begins the task of creating a consistent multi-dimensional account of forgiveness by bringing together multiple voices from around the globe to analyze,

discuss, and draw conclusions about how best to understand forgiveness.

It is my hope that by the end of the book readers' previously held conceptions of forgiveness will have been engaged, challenged, and clarified. The readings are diverse, and they contain a wide variety of philosophical schools of thought and interests. Each author has her or his own cultural, philosophical, and theological assumptions, and I have worked hard to ensure that their unique voices were not lost during the editing, and in some cases translation, process. I hope, like me, you will find this volume, and future volumes, rewarding and insightful.

As Series Editor, my goal is to provide contributing authors a platform on which to offer insightful analysis of the myriad of issues relating to forgiveness. The authors contained in this volume span the globe, and even though their interests and concerns vary greatly, there is considerable overlap in many areas. In order to gain a general understanding of the authors' divergent and convergent themes, I will provide a short summary of each chapter.

The volume is divided into three sections. Section 1, "Relational Aspects of Forgiveness," contains three chapters offering insights into the role of forgiveness in repairing, sustaining, stewarding, and healing relationships damaged by wrongdoing. Alexis Elder's "From Relationship Repair to Relationship Stewardship: Forgiveness and Friendship" begins the volume by questioning the common argument that forgiveness is solely a tool for relationship repair. According to Elder, recent work on belief norms in friendship suggests that forgiveness (at least partly) consists in the setting aside of the resentment of wrongdoing, in order for the friendship to be repaired. On such an account, forgiveness is the recognition and coming to terms with the fact that all people have shortcomings, including ourselves, and that by forgiving we commit to overlooking our friend's shortcomings, which then leads to a restored friendship. Elder, on the other hand, argues that forgiveness is consistent with the process of "cut-

ting ties,” especially if one is committed to maintaining (only) high-quality friendships. If true, then forgiveness can also be a tool for ending as well as repairing relationships. To support this conclusion, Elder suggests we view friendship in terms of stewardship, and that we replace the relationship-repair model of forgiveness with one of *relationship stewardship*.

William C. Gay’s “Restorative Justice and Care Ethics: An Integrated Approach to Forgiveness and Reconciliation” continues the relational theme by arguing that restorative justice, when coupled with care ethics, grounds a robust and integrated approach to forgiveness and reconciliation. Gay develops an account of restorative justice, the aim of which is to repair the harm generated by criminal behavior by seeking cooperative resolutions for victims, offenders, and the community. According to Gay, such an approach has clear advantages for fostering forgiveness and achieving reconciliation, and generally works more effectively than the punitive approach suggested by retributive accounts of justice. When coupled with care ethics, which provides a useful philosophical justification that stresses particularity and connection, we come to understand that persons are entangled in a web of dynamic relationships, which they may wish to maintain or repair. Forgiveness, then, provides a means for this maintenance and repair. Gay concludes that punitive orientations of retribution found in corporal punishment, capital punishment, and international war can be replaced by focusing on preservative love, complementing strategies of nonviolence during conflict, and practices of forgiveness and reconciliation following conflict.

Raja Bahlul’s “Injustice as Injury, Forgiveness as Healing” closes the opening section by exploring the nature of injustice and forgiveness, and how they relate to injury and healing. To understand their relations, Bahlul suggests an analogy between forgiveness and healing, based on two other analogies, one between injustice and injury, the other between resentment and pain. For Bahlul, injustice should be

viewed as a species of harm, whereas pain and resentment viewed as aversive states with protective functions connected to motivating powers. After examining the nature of each proposed analogy, he argues: just as healing follows upon injury under certain conditions, so too does forgiveness follow upon injustice when conditions are right—in both cases, aversive states are superseded, and the organism is restored to a previous condition of wholeness and integrity. Realizing the nature of such an argument, Bahlul concludes with a discussion of some objections and possible replies.

Continuing with the relational theme, Section 2, “Relational Accounts Influenced by Hannah Arendt,” contains three chapters that incorporate lessons from Hannah Arendt’s philosophical teachings (both her writings and personal life). Chapter 4 features Rebecca Dew’s “Filling that Moral Space: Forgiveness, Suffering and the Recognition of Human Identity.” That is, Dew combines an analysis of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s identification of the human experience with suffering, and Arendt’s view of Jesus of Nazareth as the most powerful representative of human compassion, to show that forgiveness creates an experiential bond between individuals as humans susceptible to shared pain. She argues that Arendt is best understood as viewing human suffering as of social significance as an identifier of private personhood, by way of the forgiveness-act.

In “Her loyalty survived his foolishness”: Hannah Arendt, Martin Heidegger, and Forgiveness,” Margaret Betz explores Arendt’s personal friendship with Martin Heidegger. For those unfamiliar with the controversy, Arendt’s Jewishness and Heidegger’s unapologetic affiliation with the Nazi party are at odds. Yet, in the face of such odds, Arendt forgave Heidegger after the war, and continued their friendship. Betz attempts to answer the question: How could Arendt continue to be friends with Heidegger, especially considering he never publicly expressed contrition for the role he played in the Third Reich? Betz suggests that by carefully examining Arendt’s life and philosophical writings, we come to under-

stand her forgiveness, which some have labelled “inexcusable” and “blind devotion,” as a representation of the political act *par excellence*.

Continuing the theme of the “unforgivable,” and closing Section 2, Jennifer Ang’s “Unforgivable Evil and Evildoers” argues that there are times in which forgiveness is morally inappropriate. Ang develops a conception of “moral bankruptcy,” as a class of wrongdoing that does not deserve forgiveness. To ground this class or wrongdoing, Ang explores the relationship between legal/political forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness, within the context of Hannah Arendt’s conceptualization of the crimes of the Holocaust—of wrongs that defy the limits of law, and are, hence, unpunishable. Moral bankruptcy occurs when an evildoer is unreflective and unrepentant, and when such evildoers commit wrongs against the community as a whole (and not only particular victims). According to Ang, forgiving in such cases compromises our moral integrity in two ways: 1) when we fail to mete out proper moral punishment, we concede our category of what is morally reprehensible (not just offensive) by accepting moral bankruptcy into our community; and 2) we fail to aid in the moral development of such individuals by not holding them responsible.

Section 3 shifts the discussion of forgiveness from matters of a strictly relational nature to four “Religious Perspectives” of forgiveness. Chapter 7 features Christopher Cowley’s “Unconditional Forgiveness and Practical Necessity.” In the chapter, Cowley defends unconditional forgiveness (such as that suggested by Christianity) against several prominent conditionalist accounts. According to conditionalists, victims must either have reasons for forgiving, or forgiveness is merely arbitrary. To show that such a disjunctive is incorrect, Cowley develops and explores the concept of “arbitrariness,” and argues that if properly understood, unconditional forgiveness is a morally admirable type of forgiveness.

Man-to Tang’s “The Double Intentionality of Forgiveness: A Non-reductive Account of Forgiveness in Confucius” at-

tempts to develop a new sphere of forgiveness exploration by using Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic account of intentionality and the Confucian doctrine of *shu* to create a conceptual bridge between Western and Eastern accounts of forgiveness. For Tang, traditional Western accounts of forgiveness tend to be reductive, dividing forgiveness into either purely personal or interpersonal accounts. Tang argues that instead of seeing forgiveness as an either/or between personal and interpersonal accounts, it should be reframed in terms of Ricoeur's hermeneutic account of "double intentionalities." Once this reframing is complete, parallels between Western forgiveness and the Confucian's doctrine of *shu* (translated as forgive, pardon, or excuse) can be developed, and such parallels promise to offer new approaches to addressing difficulties found in contemporary forgiveness literature.

Chapter 9 features Gregory Bock's "Unconditional Forgiveness and Christian Love," which provides a thoughtful and thorough examination of Glen Pettigrove's recent book *Forgiveness and Love*. According to Bock, Pettigrove stops short of endorsing unconditional forgiveness. To address this shortcoming, Bock explores the possibility of replacing Pettigrove's use of 'love' with the concept of *agape* love developed in the Christian New Testament, in order to ground a strong principle of unconditional forgiveness. He concludes by showing that unconditional forgiveness is not merely morally permissible, but also morally required.

Section 3 concludes with Christopher Ketcham's "Buddhism and the End to Forgiveness." Ketcham explores Theravada Buddhism, which is aligned to the Buddha's *suttas* (or lessons) as recorded in the Pali Canon, to argue that within its teachings the Buddha suggests an "end" to forgiveness, to be replaced with an unconditional compassion toward others. With disagreement in Buddhist literature about whether Buddhism contains the idea of forgiveness, Ketcham suggests that the Buddha would have told his followers to think beyond forgiveness. Since forgiveness requires an ill (i.e. wrongdoing), plus an attachment to that ill, and the path to

enlightenment (*nibbāna*) requires aspirants to release attachments to all ills, a truly enlightened one will no longer be attached to any ill that could be forgiven. In other words, when one becomes enlightened, there is nothing left to forgive. So, according to Ketcham, Buddhism offers a different perspective of how to think of wrongdoing, forgiveness, and the goal of moral enlightenment.

As witnessed in these summaries, there is a lot of philosophical ground to cover. So with the task ahead in mind, I will bring my portion to an end and let the reader begin her or his own exploration of the chapters contained within.

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