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Glen Pettigrove, *Forgiveness and Love*

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Hannah Arendt famously called forgiveness ‘redemption from the predicament of irreversibility—of being unable to undo what one has done’ (*The Human Condition*, p. 212). Because right action is not always easy to discern, and when discerned not always easy to enact, we are all likely to be repeatedly in need of forgiveness—of extending it and receiving it. Forgiveness, then, would seem to play an enormously important role in sustaining relations among people, at both the individual and the societal levels—a truth reflected in recent philosophical interest in the concept, and in attempts to bring forgiveness to bear in the political realm (e.g. South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission). In this helpful volume, Glen Pettigrove, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Auckland, carefully elucidates ‘the nature of forgiveness, the conditions that make it possible, and the norms by which it is governed’ (p. xiii). In doing so, he makes a compelling case that forgiveness is a more diverse concept than

is typically acknowledged in philosophical literature, and, therefore, can be an appropriate action in a wider range of circumstances than is sometimes allowed.

Pettigrove seeks a preliminary definition of forgiveness by examining a paradigm case: namely, when ‘one person sincerely says, “I forgive you,” to another’ (p. 1). Pettigrove distinguishes three common ways of considering such a statement. According to the first (‘disclosing forgiveness’), the statement discloses the emotional state of the speaker. In particular, it communicates the removal or reduction of negative ‘hostile reactive attitudes’ (p. 7) toward the wrongdoer, and their replacement by ‘some positive regard’ (p. 8)—a ‘change of heart’, if you will. Critics of this view charge that it occludes the fact that forgiveness is something we *do*. According to a second position (‘declarative forgiveness’), which takes its cue from acts of economic debt forgiveness or judicial pardoning, forgiveness involves a ‘declaration’—a performative speech-act that brings about what it declares to be true. According to Pettigrove, this way of understanding forgiveness ‘is too focused on the wrongdoer’s guilt’, such that the ‘speaker nearly drops out of view’ (p. 12). Declarative forgiveness, he seems to suggest, entails ‘absolution’ of the wrong done, and ‘most of us aren’t in the absolution business’ (p. 12). More helpful, for Pettigrove, is the third view (‘commissive forgiveness’), according to which the statement ‘I forgive you’ can be taken as a promise, a commitment, to act toward the forgiven person in a certain way in the future. In commissive forgiveness ‘the speaker forswears hostile reactive attitudes and retaliation, and commits himself to the other’s well-being’ (p. 15), thereby making a new beginning possible. Which of these three is correct, according to Pettigrove? That depends. If one is seeking a ‘lowest common denominator’ account, then either disclosing or commissive forgiveness is sufficient. According to a ‘highest manifestation’ account, however, both are needed. Hence forgiveness consists in ‘both a disclosure of current feelings and a benevolent commitment’ to the well-being of the wrongdoer (p. 19). We might note that, given this particular paradigm case of forgiveness (a statement), it is puzzling that Pettigrove does not include an element of ‘declarative forgiveness’ in his final formulation. This decision does much work throughout the book, allowing Pettigrove to widen the scope of potential forgivers and appropriate circumstances of forgiveness. Given its importance, however, this rejection deserves a bit more attention than it receives in this chapter. Is the verbal expression of forgiveness to the wrongdoer really as dispensable as Pettigrove suggests? Does not the ‘forgiveness for which we hope’ (i.e. the highest manifestation account) entail something like absolution from guilt?

In chapter 2, Pettigrove considers who has the standing to forgive, noting that the standard answer given by philosophers is that only the victim of a wrong may forgive the wrongdoer. Sometimes, such a position is defended by virtue of an analogy between forgiving a wrongdoer and cancelling a debt. Other times it is defended by claiming that the emotions forsworn in forgiveness only rightly belong to the victim. Finally, it is sometimes claimed that only the victim may determine when a broken relationship may rightly be reconciled. Pettigrove investigates each of these three claims in turn. He notes that the first treats all people primarily as ‘moral bookkeepers’ and overplays the ‘finality’ (p. 22) of forgiveness, much in the same way that declarative forgiveness does. The second position ignores the fact that hostile reactive feelings (e.g. resentment, anger, blame etc.) can legitimately be evoked in third-party observers—and this is not simply because they feel they have been wronged ‘indirectly’. The third position confuses

forgiveness with reconciliation. The force of these distinctions, according to Pettigrove, is to expand the class of potential forgivers; it may be possible for me to forgive you for what you did to another person. This is reinforced, in chapter 3, by highlighting the relationship between character and forgiveness. According to Pettigrove, 'it is a mistake to insist that the initiating condition [for forgiveness] must be an act ... [for] traits of character ... [are] among the blameworthy things to which our negative hostile attitudes might respond' (p. 41). If I cannot forgive you for a *wrong* you did to me, I may at least forgive you for the character trait revealed by your act. Nevertheless, Pettigrove is careful to urge that norms governing forgiveness by a third party are distinct from those governing forgiveness by the victim (e.g. there are *prima facie* reasons for the observer's forgiveness not to precede the victim's).

In chapter 4, Pettigrove investigates the relationship between understanding and forgiving. Is empathetic understanding of the wrongdoer a necessary component of forgiveness? Pettigrove argues that it is not. Rather, '... understanding is better conceived as *promoting* forgiveness in some, but perhaps not all, cases' (p. 57). Sometimes 'coming to understand inexcusable wrongdoing seems likely to exacerbate our anger rather than promote forgiveness, because we have come to see how awful the wrongdoer's actions really were' (p. 62). Much will hinge on what we mean when we say 'understanding'. Pettigrove suggests that, if by 'understanding' we mean being able to find an act 'intelligible', it is possible for understanding to promote forgiveness by mitigating the wrongness of the deed. We may come to 'identify with' (p. 70) the wrongdoer, or learn to envision a way in which we can remain in community with her.

The next three chapters constitute what I take to be the heart of Pettigrove's argument. Having outlined much of the conceptual framework, he turns to the relationship between forgiveness and love (chapter 5), repentance (chapter 6) and grace (chapter 7). Chapter 5 begins with a provisional, non-comprehensive account of three dimensions of love (affective, cognitive and volitional). There is no single affect associated with love, but each of the affections is 'a way of valuing the beloved'—of saying 'it is good that you exist!' (pp. 76–77). This 'perceiving as good' is central to love's cognitive dimension—a point repeatedly sounded by 'cognitivist' moral philosophers like Martha Nussbaum. Love's volitional dimension draws attention to the fact that we often speak of love as 'something we do' (p. 86). Here Pettigrove highlights 'both the inclination and the commitment to promote the beloved's well-being' (p. 87) for her own sake. How does forgiveness, then, relate to love? The central *cognitive* function of love ('perceiving value') is also a key part of the 'pro-quality' toward the wrongdoer which is a central part of forgiveness. Likewise, *volitionally*, love and forgiveness both feature a commitment to the well-being of the other (though, for love this is for the other's sake; for forgiveness, it need not be). Finally, the relation between the *affective* dimensions of love and forgiveness are far more complicated and messy than philosophers typically allow—a point that plays a role in the final two chapters.

In chapter 6, Pettigrove argues that a repentant apology is not a necessary precondition for forgiveness of a wrongdoer. He argues against, in turn, those who claim that forgiving the unapologetic wrongdoer glosses over a breach of trust necessary for reconciliation, those who hold that that implicitly condones the wrong done, and those who say that it amounts to a failure of self-respect. On the contrary, Pettigrove asserts (very

cleverly, we might add) that forgiveness can fulfil the same three essential functions performed by both punishment and apology. Like these, forgiveness can communicate condemnation of the wrong (for if there were no wrong, what is there to forgive?), can affirm the victim's moral standing, and can serve to release or reduce hostile reactive attitudes. In chapter 7, Pettigrove pushes this argument further, addressing the related question of whether forgiveness has to be earned. Through a prolonged explication of Seneca's *On Favours*, he shows that both acts of grace and the character trait of graciousness 'play an important and beneficial role in our everyday lives' (p. 136), and that forgiveness is a 'common manifestation of grace' (p. 138). As exemplars like Jesus, Stephen, Lincoln, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. show, forgiveness is not something earned or merited but freely bestowed. This does not mean, however, that Pettigrove urges 'unconditional forgiveness'. In his final chapter (8), Pettigrove warns that advocates of 'unconditional forgiveness' tend to neglect important consideration of context. 'In the context of a particular agent's life it may be more desirable for an agent to refuse to forgive (at least for a season) than to forgive' (p. 153). Further, advocating an ideal of forgiveness does not entail a claim that one ought to pressure another to forgive.

With wit, clarity and common sense, Pettigrove provides a lucid and compelling account of forgiveness. He gives close attention to the phenomenology of everyday occurrences—such as apologies, grudges, inadvertent slights, etc.—and provides numerous illustrations and examples to clarify his argument at every point. There are, however, times when Pettigrove asserts a central point without adequately arguing for it (as noted above with reference to the rejection of declarative forgiveness). A similar impression arises when Pettigrove maintains there is a close connection between character and forgiveness—another move that allows him to enlarge the scope of potential forgivers. According to Pettigrove, 'a failure of character need not be manifested in action directed against oneself—or indeed against anyone—before one may deem it blameworthy' (p. 52). Perhaps, but the reader may wonder how one could possibly *deem* it to be blameworthy without its being *manifested* through some act, even an act as inconspicuous as a sideways glance or hesitation to help.

Still, these are not major problems. In all, Pettigrove has provided an important contribution to a significant, if understudied, issue in moral philosophy. His account rings true to the reader insofar as it more accurately describes the phenomenology of forgiveness than other philosophical accounts (e.g. the way we might say 'I forgive you for what you did to my friend', or 'I can finally forgive my deceased father for the way he treated my sisters and me'). His text would make a useful addition to an introductory course in moral philosophy or ethics. Christian ethicists, in particular, may want to put this book in conversation with another, more explicitly theological account—perhaps Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Justice in Love*, or Timothy Jackson's *The Priority of Love*, or both. One could also imagine an undergraduate ethics class reading *Forgiveness and Love* along with Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower* in order to determine whether it would be appropriate for the Jewish narrator to 'forgive' the dying Nazi officer with a guilty conscience, or along with *Les Misérables* in order to contemplate 'the transformative potential of gracious forgiveness' (p. 140). In these and other ways Pettigrove's is a useful and creative contribution that incorporates central theological themes of love and grace into a philosophical exploration of forgiveness.