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FORGIVENESS: A CHRISTIAN MODEL¹

Marilyn McCord Adams

Recent literature on the topic of forgiveness explores the question whether, in the field of secular ethics, forgiveness is not a flower but a weed. After analyzing approaches by A. Kolnai, P. Twambley, J. Murphy, and H. Morris, I sketch a theological point of view and offer my own characterization of forgiveness, contending that the latter is "at home" within the former. My methodological moral is that, given the differential adaptability of forgiveness to (at least some) secular and religious value theories, Christian philosophers risk distortion when they fail to integrate their ethical reflections with their theological commitments.

Introduction:

When I was an undergraduate philosophy major, the professor of our "History of Ethics" course spent the first lecture defending the viability of Ethics as a subject distinct and independent from religion. Reviewing the syllabus (which included Aristotle, Hobbes, Hume, Kant, and Mill), he allowed as how the medieval period, which we were skipping, was the most fascinating in the history of ethics. But, as if further to enforce his division, he concluded with the warning that we could not bring God into any of our ethical reasoning in that class, unless we had a rational proof of His existence. Although agnostic at the time, I had been raised in the "Bible Belt," where God and oughts are inseparably connected. After two courses, I found myself unable to comprehend what secular ethics was about. So I abandoned all study of it in favor of metaphysics and epistemology.

Having entered into my own "medieval period," I regret my youthful haste and feel drawn to re-examine my teacher's curious ambivalence. Looking back, I suppose he found himself in the position of many philosophers: unable to accept the ontological commitments of traditional religion, yet drawn to many of its values. So he joined the effort to preserve the latter by fencing off a new field, clear of dubious entities, in which to transplant them. The verdict on the success of this general project is not yet in; certainly the popularity of non-cognitivist and relativist approaches makes one wonder whether the old values have really been preserved. Contrasts between consequentialist and deontological theories repeat the question, when the foundations are shifted, can the surface stay the same?

Happily, my present focus is much narrower, on the value of forgiveness



and the series of recent articles asking whether in the field of secular ethics it is not a flower but a weed. In what follows, I shall survey the stumbling blocks, uncovered by Aurel Kolnai and Jeffrie G. Murphy, to the moral propriety of forgiveness within a non-religious framework. After considering alternative diagnoses and suggestions from P. Twambley and Herbert Morris, I shall sketch a Christian model of forgiveness which avoids these obstacles, while (to paraphrase Murphy) mining the secular discussion for nuggets of religious value.²

The moral of my story will be likewise limited. I shall *not* argue the negative thesis—that the value of forgiveness cannot be successfully transplanted in the field of secular ethics. For, as we shall see, Kolnai's and Murphy's worries can be traced to a distinctive point of view; Twambley alludes to another. And it would take another paper to examine how the value of forgiveness fares within a secular Aristotelian framework. Instead, I shall defend the *positive* thesis—that forgiveness is a value that is particularly "at home" within a Christian framework. The contrast between my model and that of Kolnai or Murphy constitutes a weak "moral" argument for Christian metaphysics: to the extent that one is drawn to a value best made sense of within a given theoretical framework, one has some reason, however defeasible, to accept it. The differential adaptability of forgiveness to (at least some) secular and religious value theories also illustrates the dangers for Christian philosophers in not integrating ethical reflections with theological commitments.

I. Kolnai's Paradox of Forgiveness

Aurel Kolnai's bold and blunt agenda is to reclaim the subject of forgiveness for ethics by disentangling it from its context in the Christian religion. His intended method, "'rigorous' logical analysis"; his procedure, to sketch the concept of forgiveness and formulate a paradox—that forgiveness, so understood, is logically impossible—which he then tries to dissolve by more subtle analysis.³

(1.1) *Delimitation of the Concept*

Kolnai attempts, not so much a *definition*, but a preliminary characterization of forgiveness, which may be summarized in the following points: (i) Forgiveness *primordially* refers to a context of interpersonal relationships, in the narrow sense of relations between two parties on an equal footing (the intended contrast apparently being with theological, political, or judicial contexts, in which one person has authority and jurisdiction over another).⁴ (ii) Forgiveness presupposes an affront, injury, trespass, or offense committed by one person against another.⁵ (iii) Forgiveness "digs deep into its object" in the sense that (a) the offense is recognized as such and imputed to the of-

fender, and (b) the recognition and imputation of the offense is at first accompanied by indignation and a retributive attitude.⁶ (iv) One can forgive only offenses *against oneself*, but not the wrongs done to others.⁷ (v) Forgiveness involves an “explicit,” “intentional,” “conscious decisional” act, not just a “fading out” of emotional, cognitive, or attitudinal states about the offensive incident.⁸ In particular, (vi) forgiveness involves (a) giving up or “nullifying” the retributive attitude (b) without revising the judgment whereby one imputes the offense.⁹ Finally, Kolnai is inclined to see (vii) reconciliation as a possible *result* based on, but not the essence of forgiveness.¹⁰

Conditions (i)-(vii) differentiate forgiveness from a variety of responses to wrongdoing. But Kolnai is especially eager to contrast *forgiveness* with what he calls “*condonation*”: (let *A* be the offender and *B* the offended party) *B* condones *A*’s offense when (viii) *B* is clearly aware of *A*’s offense, (ix) *B* *per se* disapproves of such offense, but (x) *B* deliberately refrains from any retributive response to *A*’s action. Where forgiveness presupposes and then nullifies “the original retributive position” condonation “acquiesces in the offense,” whether out of tolerance for weakness or prudence.¹¹

(1.2) Kolnai’s Aporetic Argument

Given this outline of what forgiveness involves, Kolnai proposes to argue for the startling conclusion that

Forgiveness is logically impossible,

because only morally appropriate acts could genuinely count as forgiveness (as opposed, e.g., to condonation) and yet no morally appropriate occasion for forgiveness could arise. He regards this result as paradoxical, apparently because we ordinarily assume that forgiveness is not merely a logically possible and morally appropriate, but also a virtuous response to wrongs against ourselves.

Kolnai’s reasoning begins from what purports to be a moral maxim “self-sufficient for interpersonal conduct”:

- MP1: (a) Respond to value wholeheartedly, condemn and shun disvalue;
 (b) be grateful for kindness done to you and reciprocate it; retaliate (within the appropriate limits, without overstepping your rights and lapsing into vindictiveness, without disproportionate hostility) for malicious wrong suffered.¹²

MP1(a) pertains to value and disvalue generally; *MP1(b)* to actions. Normally, the moral responsibility of an agent for an act welds agent-evaluation to action-evaluation in such a way that *caeteris paribus* a pro-attitude towards the act dictates a pro-attitude towards the agent; a con-attitude towards the act dictates a con-attitude towards the agent (and reasoning in reverse, a pro-attitude towards the agent would presuppose a non-con-attitude towards

the act; a con-attitude towards the agent, a non-pro-attitude towards the act). But, Kolnai seems to assume, this link can be dissolved by another exercise of moral responsibility by the agent, e.g. in repentance.

Consider a case in which an agent morally wrongs someone. Forgiveness of the offense would involve (by condition (iii) above) a continuing con-attitude towards the offense, continued imputation of the offense (by condition (vib)), along with a non-con-attitude towards the agent (by condition (via)). Given *MPI* as construed above, Kolnai's argument takes the form of a dilemma, which can be reconstructed as follows.¹³ Either the link between the agent and his/her offensive action is broken or it is not. If it is not, then agent-evaluation is determined by action-evaluation, and a non-con-attitude towards the agent would presuppose a non-con-attitude (whether a pro-attitude or indifference) towards his action, contrary to condition (iii)—which would amount to condonation (by condition (x)) rather than forgiveness. On the other hand, if the link between the agent and his/her offensive action is broken, then it is already morally inappropriate to evaluate the agent from *that* act, and so forgiveness (which would function to split off agent- from act-evaluation) would be redundant.

(1.3) *Complications as Solutions*

A resolution of the paradox must envision a way of divorcing agent and action so that a non-con-attitude towards the agent and a con-attitude towards his/her action is (a) morally appropriate and both (b) logically and (c) psychologically possible (*First Horn*) without lapsing into redundancy (*Second Horn*). Put otherwise, both horns of the dilemma can be averted only if it can be morally permissible to take a non-con- or pro-attitude towards a subsistent guilt.¹⁴ For Kolnai, the key lies in the fact that agent-evaluation is more complex than his paradoxical reasoning lets on. For one thing, an agent may be *metaphysically* the same as the person who committed the offense, and yet *morally* distance him/herself by having different attitudes in the present than in the past towards the act of wrongdoing. And in general, agent-evaluation must be done against a wider context than that provided by a single act. Metaphysical sameness justifies continued imputation (in accordance with condition (vi.b) and so satisfies the demand for subsistent guilt), while a changed attitude in the offender makes room for a change on the part of the victim (as specified by condition (vi.a)) that does not betray the latter's commitment to value. Kolnai identifies actual, probable, and even merely possible repentance as the principal grounds for justifying the differentiated response to agent and act, respectively.¹⁵

(1.4) *Notabilia*

Several salient features of Kolnai's approach deserve highlighting here.

(1.4.1) *Forgiveness without Religion?*

Ironically, although Kolnai offers much that is interesting and provocative, he fails in his aim to extricate the concept of forgiveness from religion, succeeding at most in transplanting it from one religion (Christianity) to another (Morality). For his “negative,” aporetic argument appeals to *MPI* as the “First and Great Commandment,” enjoining whole-hearted love of Value and hatred of Disvalue. And his “positive” attempt to clear sizable ground in which forgiveness could permissibly and even admirably grow, appeals to a sacrificial commitment that demotes “concern about Certitude and Safety in favour of a boldly, venturesomely aspiring and active pursuit of Value,” one which “expresses that attitude of *trust* in the world, which...may be looked upon...as perhaps the epitome and culmination of morality.”¹⁶ Thus, Kolnai would not morally fault those moral saints who risk forgiveness even of hardened wrongdoers on the mere possibility that the latter might repent.¹⁷

(1.4.2) *Judicial versus Medical Models*

Kolnai initially scorns (although he later rehabilitates) “St. Augustine’s famous dictum ‘Hate the sin, love the sinner’” as postulating “a neat separability between the sin and the sinner, which is fictitious, and insinuates a wholly misleading analogy between wrongdoing and illness.” This medical model is mistaken, according to Kolnai, because the connection between the agent and wrongdoing (unlike that of the patient and his/her illness) is one of moral responsibility. Kolnai finds the medical model pernicious, because it allegedly encourages condonation.¹⁸ Yet, despite his announced intention to eschew judicial contexts as paradigmatic for forgiveness, as P. Twambley points out,¹⁹ judicial analogues infect his analyses of egalitarian, non-institutional, interpersonal situations. The moral agent who would react wholeheartedly and appropriately to Value and Disvalue is thrust into the role of judge, insofar as s/he must evaluate objects, actions, and persons. For such a judge, bound to render findings according to *MPI*, people are either unworthy of forgiveness on the one hand or too worthy to need it on the other. The judicial model at first seems to combine with the moral meritarianism to leave no room for forgiveness. Moreover, even when Kolnai thinks he has broken the back of the paradox, his instinct is to measure the propriety of forgiveness against the standard of obligation: although forgiveness is not a strict duty like promise-keeping,²⁰ yet “a credible change of heart” on the offender’s part can make forgiveness into a “*quasi-obligation*.”²¹ There may be some cases in which forgiveness is entirely optional, but there are others in which it would be proscribed as unwise and/or blended with immorality.²²

(1.4.3) *Moral Responsibility*

Kolnai’s treatment places moral responsibility, of offender and forgiver

alike, front and center. As just noted, Kolnai insists against Augustine's dictum that agent-evaluation follows act-evaluation through the link of moral responsibility. As Twambley points out, Kolnai feels most comfortable with forgiveness when he can identify some way in which the offender has *earned* it, by a further exercise of moral responsibility. On the other hand, forgiveness itself is a "conscious decisional" act for which the victim must render moral account.²³

(1.4.4) *Forgiveness and the Emotions*

By contrast, Kolnai's treatment does not spotlight the emotions. Although his preliminary sketch mentions indignation and a retributive attitude (in condition (iii)) as appropriate first responses to wrongdoing, Kolnai does not pursue the issue of whether or how indignation should be overcome. Nor does he expand on what is involved in the retributive attitude. His focus is on intentional acts and "judicial" judgments or findings.

(1.4.5) *Forgiveness and Relationships*

Since condition (i) specifies forgiveness as a move in the context of an interpersonal relationship, it is bound to be *constitutive* of some change in the relationship. Kolnai's treatment is less than clear about the kind of change. On the one hand, he says that reconciliation is a possible result of forgiveness, but not its essence (see condition (vii) above). On the other, he cites possible prudential reasons for persevering in cool and distant relations as a reason for thinking that forgiveness is not always even *quasi-obligatory*, as if closer personal relationships were partially constitutive of, or at least a *necessary* result of forgiveness after all.²⁴

II. *Twambley's Twist:*

Twambley does not fault Kolnai's ambition to plant the topic of forgiveness in the field of ethics. It is rather Kolnai's particular view of morality, its apparent "obsession with duty and obligation,"²⁵ that, in Twambley's opinion, distorts the true character of forgiveness.

(2.1) *The Civil Court Model*

Having exposed the implicit judicial models in Kolnai's treatment, Twambley diagnoses the mistake, not in "going to court" for an understanding of forgiveness, but in appealing "to the wrong"—that is to say, the *criminal*—"court."²⁶ In the criminal court, the judge assumes a legal obligation to render findings in accordance with the criminal code; cases of putative leniency resolve into complex situations upon which many principles of the legal code must be brought to bear, and in terms of which the less harsh punishment must be legally justified.²⁷

Twambley proposes the *civil* court as a more adequate model: the paradigm is one of a plaintiff having a right over a defendant; forgiveness is analogous

to the plaintiff's waiving that right and releasing the defendant from obligation.²⁸ Other things being equal, the plaintiff in a civil suit has no (moral or legal) obligation to press his/her claim, and no (moral or legal) obligation to waive it. His/her doing one thing rather than another is a (morally and legally) "free" act. Similarly, while agreeing with Kolnai that (v) forgiveness is an explicit, conscious decisional act, Twambley insists, forgiveness is *gratuitous*. It may be motivated by diverse reasons. One may forgive "for old time's sake," or in hope of future reconciliation, or from reasoning by analogy out of a deep awareness of one's own liability to offend. But these do not have the status either of morally justifying or morally obliging reasons, but rather of explanatory motives.²⁹

(2.2) Twambley's Refocusing

Having cleared moral space for the generosity of forgiveness with his brilliant model-shift, Twambley nuances Kolnai's analysis in several further ways. (a) Following Bishop Butler, Twambley brings forgiveness into connection with the *emotions*, when he construes *forgiveness* as the opposite number of *resentment*. Applying his civil court analogy, Twambley explains,

"...by offending you a man, as it were, incurs a debt (hence we talk of owing recompense, reparation, and apology). You are within your rights to resent his action. In forgiving him, you relinquish that right, you readjust your relationship to one of equality."³⁰

(b) Twambley notes how his account meets Kolnai's conditions (iii) and (vi); for, on the civil court analogy, a right may be waived without the plaintiff's changing his/her evaluation of the defendant's past act or ceasing to impute that act to the defendant. It is the liability or obligation to compensate from which the defendant is set free (Twambley's analogue of letting go of the retributive attitude). (c) Moreover, reflecting on his civil court model, Twambley insists that forgiveness is *performative* in character—one does not simply treat the offender *as if* s/he did not "owe," one *releases* him/her from that debt—which Kolnai's phrase "letting go of the retributive attitude" obscures. (d) While his model preserves Kolnai's original intuition (i) that the primordial context for forgiveness is interpersonal relationships among equals, Twambley broadens the *scope* of forgiveness with the contention (iv') that one may forgive (just as one may bring civil suit with regard to) not only offenses against oneself, but also wrongs done to those *with whom one identifies*.³¹ (e) Finally, like Kolnai, Twambley could be clearer about what kind of effect forgiveness has on which sorts of relationships. His civil court model suggests that forgiveness *constitutes* (by virtue of its performative character) a formal change in the relationship between two parties: it restores "equality" in the sense that, other things being equal, now neither party "owes" the other. Other comments—such as that forgiveness bears the other no grudge, refuses to let the action be an impediment to relationship,

and may be tendered for old time's sake and out of a desire for future unity—suggest contexts of close personal interaction.³²

III. *Murphy's Metamorphosis:*

Jeffrie Murphy's lively and provocative discussion interweaves themes from both Kolnai and Twambley with concerns of his own.

(3.1) *Forgiveness in a Secular World?*

Like Kolnai, Murphy wishes to assess the nature and propriety of forgiveness in a non-religious context for the straight-forward reason that it is important to guide one's life against a realistic picture of the world, whereas metaphysical claims of transcendent reality are, he is convinced, false.³³ For Murphy as for Kolnai, morality takes the place of religion, commanding our ultimate allegiance and loyalty. Moreover, although Murphy adopts Twambley's civil (or private) law model in a recent discussion of mercy,³⁴ Murphy retains Kolnai's implicit criminal law model of morality, with its focus on obligation and duties (see section II above). Following Butler, Murphy summarizes our fundamental obligations in terms of (*MP2*) respect for self and others as moral agents, and respect for moral principles.³⁵

Murphy is concerned lest the aura of approval enjoyed by forgiveness within the religious context be unreasonably and unconsciously imported into a secular world view. Bringing matters out into the open, his explicit challenge is whether some alternatives to forgiveness are not morally permissible or even morally required.³⁶

(3.2) *Forgiveness and Feelings*

Like Butler and Twambley, Murphy opposes forgiveness to resentment, and in the end defines 'forgiveness' as the (i) "overcoming"³⁷ or (ii) "foreswearing"³⁸ of resentment towards or (iii) the "ceasing to resent"³⁹ another who has done one moral injury or harm (e.g. violated one's rights)⁴⁰ (iv) for moral reasons.⁴¹ And he insists that, "Forgiveness is primarily a matter of how I feel about you (not how I treat you)."⁴² Murphy's point requires some clarification here. If resentment is, on Murphy's construal, a form of anger or hatred, and thus a feeling or emotion,⁴³ Murphy does not really understand forgiveness to be a contrasting feeling or emotion. While (iii) ceasing might be an event that simply happens to one, (i) "overcoming" generally,⁴⁴ and "overcoming...for moral reasons" in particular, suggest agent effort, while (ii) "foreswearing" sounds like a deliberate act, on the model of legal oath-taking. Murphy's picture is that forgiveness itself either is or at least involves some of what Kolnai terms "conscious decisional acts," but these acts are directed primarily at changing one's feelings or emotions, rather than one's behavior. Murphy's move is significant, because it imitates Butler's in mak-

ing the propriety and function of certain feelings central to the issue of the moral propriety of forgiveness.

(3.3) *Symbolic Communications of Respect*

Murphy recognizes that both actions and feelings or emotions have symbolic content; in particular, many assert or express respect/disrespect for persons and moral principles. Connecting the issue of respect/disrespect for persons with the notion of relative status, Murphy maintains that intentional acts of wrongdoing

“are ways a wrongdoer has of saying to us ‘I count and you do not,’ ‘I can use you for my purposes,’ or ‘I am here up high and you are there down below’”

and so are insults, which express lack of respect and attempt to degrade us.⁴⁵ Likewise, feelings of indignation or resentment at perceived wrongdoing may express or signify respect for the person wronged and for the moral principles violated; failure to experience such feelings might thus be symptomatic of lack of morally obligatory respect.⁴⁶ Murphy contends that even retributive hatred, which he identifies as the desire to see someone hurt in order to restore the proper moral balance of whatever goods are in question, expresses respect for the victim and principles of justice.⁴⁷ It is the symbolic content and expressive power of such feelings that makes them subject to moral evaluation.

(3.4) *The Moral Permissibility of Forgiveness*

Suppose *A* wrongs *B* by committing an offense of type *K*. On Murphy’s view, Kolnai’s First Horn threatens again: for how can *B* forgive *A* without failing to show the proper respect for “the moral value incarnate,” in him/herself and/or for the moral principle forbidding acts of type *K*? It will be possible for *B* to forgive *A* without condoning *A*’s *K*-ing, only if there is some moral reason to differentiate the response to *A* from that to *A*’s act of *K*-ing. Like Kolnai, Murphy finds the best grounds in reasons for divorcing *A* from his/her action: (i) *A* distances him/herself from his/her act of *K*-ing through sincere or credible change of heart; (ii) *B* may forgive *A* “for old time’s sake” thereby identifying *A* more with past “person-stages” than with the “person-stage” that committed the action; (iii) it may be that *A* meant well and therefore did not really intend the insult symbolically expressed by the action. Murphy also subsumes under the rubric of divorce the considerations (iv) that *A* has undergone humiliation (perhaps the ritual humiliation of an apology), or (v) that *A* has suffered enough (whether through physical pain or some other loss). But while apology does count as ritual repentance, (iv) would seem to make forgiveness compatible with *B*’s self-respect, because humiliation may cancel the message symbolically expressed by *A*’s wrongdoing—that *A* is above *B*; likewise (v) deep suffering shows that *A* is not above the human condition the way his/her wrong-doing claimed.⁴⁸

Examining two other putative grounds, Murphy concedes it might be compatible with self-respect (vi) for *B* to forgive *A* in order to reform *A*, looking as it would towards a future divorce between *A* and his/her wrong action; but, depending on the circumstances, such forgiveness might be paternalistic, manipulative, or condescending, and so incompatible with *B*'s respect for *A*.⁴⁹ Finally, he considers whether one might not legitimately forgive (vii) by appeal to the (Kantian) Golden Rule, recognizing that we ourselves need to be forgiven. Murphy concludes that

“Only a person so arrogant as to believe that he will never wrong others or need to be forgiven by them could (in Kantian language) consistently will membership in a world without forgiveness.”⁵⁰

Hence, we will all have the obligation to cultivate “at least the willingness to be open to the possibility of forgiveness with some hope and trust.”⁵¹

Thus, Murphy is willing to recognize that forgiveness on grounds (i)-(v) could be compatible with (*MP2*) respect for self and others as moral agents, and respect for moral principles, and so would *not* be *morally inappropriate*. Nevertheless, he hastens to add, it would *not* be *morally obligatory* either.⁵²

(3.5) *Forgiveness, Retribution, and Relationship*

For Murphy, the way to recognizing the compossibility of forgiveness with self-respect is cleared in part by his more limited estimate of its implications. (a) If Kolnai speaks of forgiveness in terms of letting go of “the retributive attitude,” and Twambley compares forgiveness to a plaintiff’s waiving his/her right to damages and thereby releasing the defendant from indebtedness, Murphy insists that forgiveness may be “quite compatible with still demanding certain harsh public consequences for the wrongdoer”—e.g., that the embezzler repay the stolen funds or even suffer “just legal punishment” for his/her crime.⁵³ Moreover, (b) although Murphy says that forgiveness does alter the relationship between offender and victim in the sense of restoring “moral equality” (although Murphy does not explain what he means by this), (c) he insists that it need not involve the victim’s *trusting* the offender (e.g., the embezzler with more money).⁵⁴ For Murphy, forgiveness essentially alters some formal aspect of the relationship between the two parties, but does not essentially involve renewed personal intimacy.

(3.6) *The Moral Legitimacy of Retributive Emotions*

We have already noted Murphy’s view that indignation and resentment are not only morally legitimate, but perhaps often even morally required as first or early responses to wrongdoing. For such emotions express respect for the injured parties and for the moral principles violated. As Murphy sees it, even where forgiveness is morally permissible, continued resentment will also be

morally allowable; it is only the disposition never to forgive that is proscribed by the Kantian Golden Rule.

In a later essay, Murphy considers whether retributive hatred, which he identifies as (i) the desire to see someone hurt (ii) in order that s/he may receive his/her just deserts, is not sometimes morally permitted, indeed even institutionalized in the criminal code.⁵⁵ To give this idea a fair chance, Murphy urges, we must consider central cases

“where hatred appears at its best and most prima facie justified—examples where a person (i) has in fact been treated very immorally, (ii) has been hurt badly by the immoral treatment, (iii) reasonably believes the wrongdoer is totally unrepentant of the wrongdoing and (iv) is in fact living a life of freedom and contentment, and—given all that—hates the wrongdoer and desires that the wrongdoer suffer.”⁵⁶

He instances the Camelback rapist, who, in Murphy’s estimate, “utterly trashed the lives” of the women he raped.⁵⁷ Murphy argues that given a Retributive Theory of Punishment, according to which some people deserve to suffer, retributive hatred on the part of the victim could be at once an expression of self-respect and of his/her loyalty to moral principles; its acting out, part of a strategy for seeing to it that justice is done.⁵⁸ As such, Murphy finds, it would be “neither irrational nor immoral”⁵⁹ but rather “in principle vindicated as a permissible, if not mandatory, response of a victim to wrongdoing.”⁶⁰

Murphy softens this startling conclusion by noting several Kantian cautions against having, acting out, and/or making a habit of such hatred. For even if retributive hatred were in principle justifiable in certain cases, to know where it was justified, one would have to adopt the position of judge; to act it out, the role of rightful punisher. But continuing the criminal court model, Kant challenges our authority to judge another: as guilty, we lack moral standing to accuse another⁶¹; as unable to penetrate human hearts and know people’s true maxims, we are too ignorant.⁶² Moreover, as noted above, our guilt combines with the Kantian Golden Rule to give us reason to wish that the manager of the universe is forgiving of ourselves and others.⁶³ Murphy sees some force in the first, but is not utterly convinced by the second of these points. Having conceded (see section 3.4 above) that we could not reasonably will a world free from forgiveness, Murphy insists that we should not want a world utterly devoid of retributive hatred either, because such passion serves as an instrument of justice.⁶⁴

IV. Herbert Morris’ Critique of Murphy:

Herbert Morris is puzzled about Murphy’s definition of “forgiveness” as “foreswearing/overcoming resentment for moral reasons.”

(4.1) “Conscious Decisional Act”?

Murphy has followed Kolnai in treating forgiveness as if it were, or essen-

tially involved, “conscious decisional acts” which are subject, like other such acts, to moral evaluation, and—given the putative moral considerations in favor of resentment—require moral justification.

(4.1.1) *Not Entirely Voluntary*

Morris suspects that forgiveness is a process, like growing flowers, in which there are acts that we can take to “till the soil and sow the seed” and that there are other acts which will almost certainly interfere with forgiveness; but in order for forgiveness to “burst into bloom” there must be other causes at work, “the sun and the rain if you will.”⁶⁵ “Beyond our action,” Morris is drawn to the idea of “transcendence” or “grace” and “mystery” at the heart of forgiveness.

(4.1.2) *Moral Reasons?*

On the one hand, Morris wonders how Murphy’s “moral reasons” operate as motivators to explain forgiveness, since it involves a process that is not entirely within our voluntary control.⁶⁶ I myself agree with Murphy’s rejoinder. If forgiveness does involve the doing of or refraining from some conscious voluntary acts, “moral reasons” will act or not to motivate them in the ordinary way that moral reasons are supposed to motivate: in part by convincing the person that the action is morally justifiable and/or more so than its alternatives.⁶⁷ On the other hand, Morris suggests that conscious decisional acts involved in the process of forgiveness could and do legitimately have other motives:

“...If one remains sensitive to the wrong done one and is forgiving, I am not persuaded that self-respect or respect for others need be diminished by the heart’s capacity for generosity in the absence of moral reasons. One can retain one’s self-respect and respect for others when the predominant explanation for forgiving is love....”⁶⁸

A moral reason is not, therefore, necessary.

(4.2) *Letting Go of What?*

Without denying that forgiveness involves relinquishing resentment, Morris suspects that often, at the deepest levels, what must be let go of is *a particular concept of oneself*. Citing Stendahl and Weil, Morris notes the phenomenon of projecting onto other people images of persons we would “feel glory in being connected with,” relationship with whom would “feed our need to believe in our own importance.”⁶⁹ When others act in ways that contradict these expectations, relinquishing resentment involves accepting the disappointment of lessened self-esteem. Morris thinks this sort of psychological mechanism explains the close connection between forgiveness and issues of status: to forgive will mean sacrificing the false pride involved in such projections.⁷⁰

Even if we agree with Murphy that resentment of the Camelback rapist by his victims need not be a matter of undue self-preoccupation born of false

pride and self-flattering projections,⁷¹ Morris' attention to such putatively non-central cases leads him to a further insight—the “*non-egoistic*” nature of forgiveness. True forgiveness, Morris believes, must issue from *purity of heart*. To the extent that forgiveness is motivated in part by the self-aggrandizing picture of oneself as saintly, Morris contends, it is still contaminated by an admixture of false pride. Given the tenacity and subtlety of this vice, Morris counsels “humility” and “forbearing from too ready a certitude about our ever truly forgiving another.”⁷²

(4.3) *Forgiveness as Welcome*

Nor, according to Morris, is properly motivated overcoming of resentment *sufficient* for forgiveness. For Morris regards a relationship ingredient—“something like a welcoming back with open arms”—as an essential constituent of forgiveness. His paradigm is not that of merely formal relationship changes (analogous to changes in legal relationships of indebtedness), but of transformed personal intimacy between cohabitants of the same house.⁷³

(4.4) *Religious Dimensions*

Morris concludes that an understanding of forgiveness calls one to take at least a short step into the realm of mystery, because its occurrence is “a grace of fate,” what some call “the hand of God.”⁷⁴ Without contesting Murphy’s denial of God’s existence, Morris invites him to see religious dimensions in the phenomenon of forgiveness itself:

“...First, forgiveness is *a mark of a benign universe*, for it is a virtue that benefits both the giver and the receiver, liberating both and capable of promoting a state of exaltation.

Second, forgiveness embodies *generosity of spirit* and is possible only *through over-coming our contingent connection with and investment in ourselves*. It is, in this respect, *close to the divine*, involving as it does some detachment from self in circumstances where the pull runs deep in the opposite direction.

But finally, this good that reveals something we might fairly view *as beyond the merely human in us* is importantly *beyond the operation of our will*. Many the case where the heart has remained hardened despite intense desire, strenuous efforts and in the presence of good reason for it to be elsewhere. The concept of grace, something that makes for the good that transcends what is within our will’s compass, allows for capturing this mystery....⁷⁵

For his part, Morris is not so much fearful as grateful for the possibility and occasional reality of forgiveness, hailing it “a mysterious and beautiful aspect of who we are.”⁷⁶

V. *Taking Stock: Optimism versus Pessimism:*

Kolnai and Murphy stake out common ground, as follows: (I) Both transplant the discussion of forgiveness from a religious to a religion-neu-

tral context, in which the metaphysical commitments of religion are not allowed to play a decisive role. (II) Both assume that Morality identifies what is or ought to be the arena of a human being's most fundamental commitments. (III) Both are attracted to a moral rigorism, which construes morality primarily in terms of duty and obligation, and urges a response to values, actions, and people, *according to their moral deserts*. Twambley aptly traces Kolnai's intuition to an underlying *criminal court model*, in which departures from prima facie duties must be justified by appeal to the complexity of the situation and appeal to other prima facie duties. This Kolnai-Murphy approach makes any form of generosity morally problematic. And yet, forgiveness seems essentially to be the sort of thing to which no one has a right.

The Murphy-Morris interchange hints at another correlation, between one's attitude towards forgiveness and the Optimism or Pessimism of one's World View. Optimists can reasonably see forgiveness as good and valuable, because they see the world as a "benign" place, where Value ultimately triumphs over Disvalue, where persons will—at least on the whole and in the end—be valued and appreciated, where loving and harmonious relationships are possible. In such a world, wrongdoing and even serious injury are not desperate matters, because they will be defeated in the big picture, both cosmically and within each individual's life.

On the other hand, if one's worldview affords no guarantees or even reason to believe that Good will triumph over Evil, then grave and injurious offenses are more threatening. Protection against them falls to human arrangements. Society enshrines the values it wants protected in its version of legal rights and duties. Murphy espouses this picture when he approves Judge Stephen's claim that criminal law institutionalizes retributive emotions. Moral rigorism in ethics, and insistence on the moral legitimacy and quasi-obligatory status of retribution, are unsurprising concomitants of an outlook according to which personal safety is in real jeopardy.⁷⁷

VI. *Theological Assumptions:*

Christian commendation of forgiveness takes for granted a realistic optimism about the world and the possibilities for Divine-human collaboration within it. Fundamentally, it deems forgiveness possible and good, because the Creator, Governor, and Redeemer of the world is not a value-rigorous (à la Kolnai, see section I above) but generous, gracious, and loving (as the experience of forgiveness intimates to Morris, see section IV above).

(6.1) *The Nature of God*

The version of Christianity I am sketching goes beyond the common-place philosophical conception of God, as necessarily existent, omnipotent, and

omniscient, to affirm that God is a Trinity of persons, eternally connected by identity-conferring relationships of self-giving love. The love of the Divine persons for one another is so rich and so fertile that it issues in a will to create a universe to manifest its wonders, more persons with whom to share their love. Of all creatures, persons are metaphysically the best, because they are made in God's image, able to become beings who can love creatively and sacrificially the way God does.

(6.2) *The Worth of Created Persons*

Nevertheless, from a metaphysical point of view, creatures are "almost nothing" when compared to God. Thus, although created persons have great metaphysical worth compared to creatures of other kinds, and equal value in relation to one another, their principal and incommensurate source of worth is Divine love and generosity. The infinite and eternal God takes overwhelming delight in each created person. Scriptures tell us that He has eagerly anticipated the actuality of each one from eternity, before the foundations of the world. Not only does Divine love graciously confer immeasurable value on each created person, God expressed His high regard for humans by identifying with our condition in the Incarnation, the persistence of that love in the passion Christ Who would have been willing to suffer it even for one. With Divine love as the fundamental standard of human worth, it follows trivially that the principal source of human worth is not to be found in any competitive merits (metaphysical, moral, intellectual, athletic, musical, etc.) humans have in relation to one another, or in the regard other humans have and/or express for them. For any disvalue in the latter two categories is engulfed⁷⁸ by the positive value conferred by the former.

(6.3) *The Well-Being of Created Persons*

Likewise, the well-being of created persons finds its alpha and omega in Divine love and power. On the version of Christianity I am developing here, God is both willing and able to defeat⁷⁹ evil utterly, not only at the cosmic level, but also within the context of each individual life.⁸⁰ Said otherwise, God has the competence and has made the commitment to see to it that each created person has a life which is a great good to him/her on the whole, and that contains no suffering that is both horrendous and meaningless.

For each created person, the primary source of meaning and satisfaction will be found in his/her intimate personal relationship with God. This relationship will also be the context in which a created person can be best convinced of his/her worth, because it is the place where God's love for the individual is most vividly and intimately experienced.⁸¹ Christians naturally see it as to everyone's advantage to enter into this relationship as deeply as one can in this world, as soon as possible. Talk of "beatific vision" advertises

the conviction that the Blessed Trinity and growth into relationship with them, will keep us fascinated and challenged forever in the life to come.

(6.4) *Fundamental Commitments*

Persons to Persons: According to Christians, a created person's primary commitment should be to God, to love God above all else and for His own sake. Thus, a Christian's most fundamental commitment is *personal*—through Christ, to a relationship of loving intimacy with the Blessed Trinity—and not to MORALITY, its principles or ideals. This is important, because impersonal principles or ideals cannot love you back (or in advance), and (as we have seen in sections I, II, and V) they have only the limited power of final causes to protect. By contrast, commitment to transcendent value is linked, via Divine generosity, with a guaranteed source of personal well-being and affirmation. This does not mean, however, that a Christian will lack any commitment to the wide extension of what his secular colleagues regard as moral values; it is rather that such loyalty will be derivative from or at best partially constitutive of his/her commitment to God. For the Christian's personal intimacy with God will involve a sharing of view-points. His/her love of God will bring a dedication to learning, as nearly as possible, to see as God sees and loving as God loves, or at least as God wants and enables one to see and love.

VII. *A Christian Model of Forgiveness:*

I would like now to show how this picture of our place in the scheme of Divine generosity makes sense of the Dominical injunction to forgive. My model-making, like that of other recent authors, involves some genre conflation: my attempts to *characterize* forgiveness from a Christian perspective, and to quarrel with points made by others, may contain the makings of but do not (as they stand) constitute an *analysis* of forgiveness. Moreover, my argument will involve sketching a *process* through which such forgiveness might occur. I do not say genuine Christian forgiveness could not deviate from this route, or that other Christian models could not be fashioned by those who agree, as by others who disagree, with my theological assumptions. What I do claim is that my optimistic theological picture and my model cohere in such a way as to exhibit Christian forgiveness as an expression of, not alien to good and fundamental commitments.

(7.1) *Contextual Preliminaries*

I wish to restrict my attention to the forgiveness of one created person by another. Since I wish to characterize Christian forgiveness, I will assume that the offended party is a Christian; the offender may or may not be. With Kolnai, I think it best to begin with contexts of legal and political equality

in which one person does not wield legal authority over another (as with a judge over the defendants, or a king over his subjects). My first point is that for a Christian, (i) the interpersonal context of forgiveness includes not only the human parties to the dispute, but God who created and loves each and both, the One to whom the Christian is most fundamentally committed.

What people undertake to forgive is offense—real or apparent. Although I agree with Murphy that all wrongs symbolically signify (and sometimes actually communicate) a falsehood about the victim's worth, I do not think it right to reduce the category of injury to a sub-division of insult. Great physical pain is a harm, its infliction in certain circumstances a wrong, quite apart from its character as insult. Perhaps the same can be said for the state of powerlessness.⁸²

Offense can be considered two ways—from the side of the “victim” and from the side of the “offender.” The authors discussed above all concur that (ii) one has *genuine* occasion for forgiveness, only where there has been *real* offense, injury, or trespass. Ordinary usage is vaguer. People often speak as if their *feeling* of being offended were enough. To my mind, it doesn't much matter how we adjudicate the linguistic issue, because forgiveness involves a series of re-evaluations of the situation (see section 7.2 below). Things may be better than they seem and/or worse than they seem, but they will always be more complicated than at first they seem.⁸³

Considering offense from the side of the offender, I disagree with Kolnai that forgiveness can only be of “responsible wrongdoing,” if the latter category is exhausted by what he calls “conscious decisional acts,” or if it implies that the harms suffered or insults tendered to the victim were all fully and consciously intentional. My Christian model recognizes that some of the deepest wounds are inflicted on their victims by agents who in important senses “know not what they do.” Racism and sexism are pernicious because they involve patterns of unconscious motivation, by which, amidst their “conscious decisional acts” and consciously intended effects, the racist or sexist person perpetrates many other harms intentionality for which s/he would deny. Parents, too, consciously intending to benefit their offspring, unconsciously “act out” their own inefficient adaptational strategies, contributing to deep problems in their children. Often it is these latter harms, more than fully intentional ones, that adults work so hard in courses of psychotherapy and spiritual direction to get over. Christian usage takes its cue from Jesus just before His crucifixion, in regarding these harms and offenses stemming from unconscious motivation as likewise forgivable.

Christian emphasis on persons' (divine or human) identifying with one another, particularly in their sufferings, would hold with Twambley (iii) that it is conceptually possible, and may be morally legitimate to forgive not only

harms or wrongs to oneself, but also offenses against those with whom one identifies. For example, in an ordinary case, one might forgive an offender for wrongs committed against one's family or close friends.⁸⁴

Moreover, the one who forgives (iv) must view the offense as an offense and (v) impute it to the person forgiven, at least in the sense of seeing it as an action whose harmful effects issue from the agent's conscious *or unconscious* motivation.

Finally, our review of the literature suggests a distinction between two modalities of forgiveness, which I shall label "*performative forgiveness*" and "*forgiveness from the heart*." (a) Twambley's reference (in section 2.2 above) to the performative character of forgiveness reminds us that we have a social/religious institution of forgiving. Like promising, performative forgiveness is a "conscious, decisional act," paradigmatically, a favorable response to an official or formal apology. More restricted than promising, the institution of performative forgiveness is relevant to cases in which a civil suit could be pressed but is legally and officially waived (as would be predictable from Twambley's model). It also comes up in the routine, conventional, and public acceptance of apologies for small injuries (as in the "I'm sorry"/"That's ok" interchange between strangers who accidentally collide or step on one another's toes in a crowd). Performative forgiveness contrasts with the victim's merely failing or deciding not to press his/her rights, in that it must be publicly declared, whether to the offender or to some appropriate official personage. Our institution of performative forgiveness focuses on externals (material compensations or behavior) and the formal structure of relationships, not on inner attitudes or feelings. After all, my verbal utterance may constitute an acceptance of your apology, but it cannot thereby effect an immediate change in my psychological dispositions. In public exchanges between strangers, performative forgiveness usually carries no concomitant commitment to try to change attitudes or feelings (e.g., towards the uninsured motorist who dented your fender or the stranger who stepped on your toe).⁸⁵ But when the institution is transferred to contexts of personal intimacy or religious contexts, where persons have broader feeling- and attitude-commitments (as between husband and wife, or God and humans), there is a moral or religious obligation that performative forgiveness be accompanied by a commitment to (try to) (b) forgive from the heart.⁸⁶

(7.2) *Forgiveness from the Heart: A Process*

Christian forgiveness will be imbedded in prayer, because it involves a *process* of letting go of one's own point of view (regarding the situation, one's self and/or the victim, and the offender) and entering into God's point of view. Typically, this shift in perspective will involve many changes in feelings, attitudes, judg-

ments, and desires, and will require many spiritual exercises. Usually, it will involve the would-be forgiver in choosing many things that s/he knows not to be within his/her voluntary control, with a prayer for God's help. To the Christian (as to Morris), actual forgiveness is a manifold miracle.

(7.2.1) *Role Release*

It is natural to feel that (real or apparent) victimhood uniquely qualifies one for the roles of *judge*, *jury*, and *executioner*. Surely being wronged puts one in the right relative to the offender; the suffered loss makes one uniquely informed of how bad what s/he has done is and what commensurate suffering would be his/her due. Psychologically, of course, this is a half-truth, because retributive emotions can cloud as much as experience informs. At any rate, Christian forgiveness requires of the victim an initial and oft repeated *choice to relinquish these roles to God*.

In fact, the Sermon on the Mount forbids these roles to Christians for good reason. (i) First, no human being is *competent* to evaluate another human person, or even him/herself. The throes of victimhood encourage one to evaluate the agent from his/her offensive act alone (as Kolnai's initial paradox assumes appropriate), when in fact there is so much more to the value of a person: e.g., his/her other actions and his/her character, his/her metaphysical value as a human being. Also relevant are the life difficulties over against which the offender has had to develop as a person. From a Christian standpoint, only God can see deeply enough into the human heart to evaluate a person. Moreover, God alone is able to reckon the implications of the immeasurable worth conferred on each person by His love. God is not interested in the death of the sinner but that s/he should turn and live. He alone knows enough and loves enough to calculate the best pedagogical response to the offender's action. (ii) Second, the more a human person insists on judging out of the narrow strictures of his/her knowledge and sympathies, the more s/he is blinded to the wideness of Divine generosity (e.g., those who judge others harshly, are often harsh judges of themselves, and find it hard to believe God is otherwise). Entrenchment in these roles becomes an obstacle to intimacy and collaboration with God, to deepening the relationship which is/should be the primary locus of personal assurance and satisfaction.

(7.2.2) *Radical Honesty*

So far from being an exercise in psychic denial, Christian forgiveness requires the victim to be radically honest at every stage about his/her reactions to the offense and the offender. As Kolnai puts it, the forgiveness must "dig deeply into its object" (see section 1.1 above). All of the pain and humiliation, all of the retributive and vindictive feelings and attitudes, will be put out on the table between the victim and God in prayer. Psychologically,

such venting is cathartic and healthy, as Murphy suggests.⁸⁷ Spiritually, such candor is only part and parcel of the believer's fundamental commitment to personal intimacy with God.

(7.2.3) *Entering into God's Point of View*

Personal intimacy is a two-way street, however. God invites the believer to an *exchange* of viewpoints: First, the believer shares with God exactly how things look to him/her. Then the believer prays to see how things (in particular, the victim, the offense, and the offender) look to God. Usually, the victim's attempt to enter God's point of view will involve shifting from a one-dimensional picture of the offender qua offender to a more complex characterization, which recognizes him/her (i) as a person with problems, (ii) in response to which s/he has deployed inefficient adaptational strategies, (iii) resulting in behavior harmful to him/herself and others. The victim will also acquire deeper insight into how God sees him/herself, sometimes (but not always) as a person with similar problems and comparable faults. Offering the latter for Divine healing and correction leaves the victim with a more vivid sense of *God's power* to heal and/or redeem any injury and to "educate" one out of bad adaptational strategies. Moreover, the victim's prayerful exchange with God will bring him/her to a deeper realization of *God's love* for him/her and the overwhelming worth conferred on him/her thereby. At the same time, such spiritual education at God's hand will bring the victim to let go of the inappropriate projections and self-aggrandizing outlooks identified by Morris, for the double reason that s/he will see him/herself from God's point of view, and that her/his experience of God in the interchange will make vivid for him/her how small s/he is in comparison to God. Such appropriations of Divine power and love to him/herself free the victim to appreciate and enter into God's love for the offender and the overwhelming worth thus conferred on him/her, and God's power to heal, redeem, and educate him/her. Naturally, our human entry into God's perspective is always incomplete due to our limited cognitive and emotional capacities for sympathetic identification. Moreover, relationships come in degrees; with collegial or more distant associations, our status as victims does not entitle us to detailed analytical insight into the offender's personality and motives. We may expect God to protect their privacy, out of His love for them, and to call us to entrust the offender to Him under the more abstract description of 'another beloved child of God for whom Christ died.'⁸⁸ Thus, my model does not press (as Murphy fears) the victim to acquiesce in the estimate of his/her worth conveyed by the offense. Rather it sees the latter contradicted and compensated by the healing power of Divine love, whose omnipresent care builds a foundation for the transcendent, non-egoistic character of forgiveness noticed by Morris.

(7.2.4) *Release of Retributive Emotions and Attitudes*

Insofar as the Christian forgiver aims at turning the offender over to God's loving dealing, s/he also *chooses to let go of* and prays to *overcome various retributive feelings and attitudes*, contrary to Murphy but in agreement with Kolnai. On the one hand, this will be included in the victim's prayer to love as God loves; for, given my theological assumptions, God is not interested in retribution, but in reform. Granted, such emotions symbolically assert a truth about the victim's worth and thereby contradict the false assertion made by the offense. When wounds are fresh, hatred and resentment, anger and indignation may even be the best way in which we are capable of participating in God's negative judgment on the offensive deed. Nevertheless, the more the Christian forgiver enters into the Divine point of view, the more s/he will see that s/he does not need them. For such false claims are decisively refuted for the victim now by his/her experience of Divine love.⁸⁹ The victim's experience of God as completely trustworthy convinces him/her that God, who is as committed to Truth as He is to generosity, will eventually make these evaluative facts plain to everyone. On the other hand, when we take matters into our own hands, and/or even see it as our responsibility *to do all we can* to make sure that offenders get exactly what they deserve by inflicting what we regard as comparable suffering, we push ourselves to the brink of cruelty, handicap ourselves for divine collaboration, and even find ourselves opposing God. Nevertheless, endorsing this aspect of my model in no way commends, as Murphy fears, disrespectful or insensitive treatment of others who respond to grave injury with retributive emotions and attitudes (e.g., the victims of the Camelback rapist).⁹⁰ From a Christian point of view, the endurance of extreme suffering commands respect on its own; we do not withdraw respect when the victim deploys less than ideal coping strategies (at least those that do not seriously injure other comparatively innocent people), because it is impressive that a human being can deal with such suffering at all. After all, Christ paid horrendous suffering the ultimate compliment, by identifying Himself with it on the cross.

(7.2.5) *Forgiveness and Reform*

Kolnai and Murphy see the reform of the offender as something distinct from, yet related to forgiveness. For them, the forgiver will express his commitment to Value or moral principles, his/her self-respect, by hoping or wishing for the offender's repentance and reform; likewise, such change of heart and ways by the offender constitutes a reason and/or a desirable consequence of forgiveness.

The Christian model I am proposing also sees forgiveness and reform as distinct but related. Since God aims at the *growth and reform of the offender* into a person who shares in His projects, the believer who forgives will also

desire and pray for the success of these goals. At the same time, s/he will see the offender's education, like his/her own, as fundamentally God's responsibility. For we human beings can become persons who love creatively and sacrificially as God does, only through a process that develops our freedom. But when we human beings set out *to do all we can* to reform someone else, we become overly manipulative, as Murphy notes, disrespectful of his/her freedom. Only Divine pedagogy has the power, the insight, and the love for its pupil required to combine success with respect.

(7.3) *Condonation versus Vocation?*

At this point, it may be objected that my model collapses Christian forgiveness into condonation, much as Kolnai and Murphy suspected. How does the required release of retributive emotions and attitudes fit with self-respect for the victim? Doesn't leaving the offender's reform to God amount to passive acquiescence in evil? Does not the Christian view prevent either from being compatible with respect for Value or Moral Principles?

I reject these charges. Although my model locates the Christian's primary commitment in his/her relationship to God (as opposed to impersonal and abstract Value or Moral Principles), it still makes Christian forgiveness compatible with appropriate regard for the values with which Kolnai and Murphy are most concerned. (i) The victim's *self-respect* and *sense of self-worth* will be assured by his/her renewed and deepened sense of God's love for him/her. (ii) Nor will Christian forgiveness require anyone to hold false beliefs about the worth of persons or the wrongness or harmfulness of the offense. On the contrary, the victim's divinely assisted attempts to enter deeply first into his/her own point of view and then to see things as God does, will leave him/her with a more nearly accurate, truthful understanding of the situation. The Christian leaves the definitive and universal revelation of evaluative facts to God, because He is the only one who fully understands them; Christ is the only Teacher whose pedagogy is wise enough to ensure that these truths will be understood by everyone.

(iii) Nor, contrary to Kolnai's and Murphy's fears, does such humility connive with evil via passive collaboration. For Christians see themselves as partners (albeit very junior) in God's creative and redemptive work, and God's intention to defeat evil with good is invincible. If the ultimate responsibility for success lies with Divine management, *Divine vocations* assign created co-workers varying and limited shares of the action. Although there will be some occasions when the call is to silent non-resistance (as "turn the other cheek" and "walk the second mile" suggest), more often the Christian will see him/herself called to a more active role in the public and private identification of and opposition to wrongs, in individual and collective moral education and reform. Bible stories and Christian history illustrate the varied

emphases of Christian vocation in proclaiming Good News and opposing evil.⁹¹ What is pernicious from a Christian point of view is not active opposition to evil and the promotion of reform, but the notion that “everything depends on us” with its correlative zeal for success that outruns human wisdom and power to insure it.

(7.4) *Relationships, How Restored?*

My model makes forgiveness a process within the context of a triangular relationship, among the victim, the offender, and God. As such, the victim’s (divinely assisted) moves towards forgiveness are formally constitutive of changes in that relationship. Does Christian forgiveness also require of the victim such trust of the offender as to “welcome him/her back with open arms” (à la Morris) into any close personal association they may have had? Does it at least involve a preparedness to do so should the offender be willing? Does hesitancy on the victim’s part to renew and restore relationship signal a limitation on his/her willingness to forgive?

The answer, I think, is “not necessarily.” To be sure, forgiveness is valued in no small measure for the fruit of relationship-renewal, for the way it makes life-together possible, tolerable, and rewarding among imperfect human beings. Yet, Christian forgiveness digs deeply enough into its object to recognize the roots of some offense and disharmony in the entrenched but inefficient adaptational strategies of created parties to the dispute. If the complete healing and transformation of any created person is too big for anyone but God, it is usually a long-term project, requiring no less than the creature’s earthly lifetime. God deals with each person according to a unique syllabus, with the result that two human beings may be “out of phase,” in such a way as to make close and fruitful interaction impossible. The victim may forgive and extend the olive branch of renewed friendship, only to be turned down by the offender. But equally, the offender may be eager to go back to the way things were before because s/he does not recognize him/herself as having done anything wrong (as is often the case with racist or sexist offenders) and be turned down by the victim, the latter’s forgiveness notwithstanding. Again, parties to a painful divorce may genuinely forgive one another, but realize that, given who each is at the moment, any sort of close personal interaction is inadvisable. Such realism is compatible with Christian forgiveness, which sincerely entrusts the offender to God’s loving dealing with him/her, and prays for the fulfillment of God’s Kingdom, when reconciliation will be complete. Put otherwise, reconciliation and renewed relationship are Christian ideals, ultimate responsibility for which rests with God; no created person can *make* them happen. The Christian who forgives is required to *trust* neither him/herself nor the offender, but God, and to view relationship-renewal in the context of vocation.

(7.5) *Christian Forgiveness, an Obligation*

Forgiveness is a peculiarly Christian obligation, for (i) it is one to which the offender has no correlative right, and (ii) one that the victim lacks sufficient resources to fulfill. For Kolnai and Murphy, (i) threatens to make forgiveness by the victim unreasonable and immoral; for Twambley and Morris, (i) identifies forgiveness as a “free” and “generous” act. For Morris, (ii) gives forgiveness a mysterious and transcendent dimension. For the Christian, the obligation to forgive arises out of his/her fundamental commitment to God, his/her call to see as God sees and love as God loves; it is an obligation to be generous as God is generous. Divine generosity meets the creature’s imitative effort with miraculous aid, enabling the victim to forgive. And so, at bottom, forgiveness is (as Morris suggests) a gift bestowed on victim and offender alike, a beautiful aspect of human life, a sign of a benign universe—Christians would say, an advertisement of its gracious Maker!

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NOTES

1. I have profited from discussions at the Department of Philosophy, Syracuse University, and at the 1988 Mid-Western Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers. I am especially grateful to Robert Merrihew Adams, William P. Alston, Linda Jenks, Edward Langerak, Warren Quinn, James Read, and Michael Stocker, for their insightful comments and criticisms.

2. Jeffrie G. Murphy, “Forgiveness and Resentment,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* VII (1982), p. 512.

3. Cf. Aurel Kolnai, “Forgiveness,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1973-74, pp. 91-106.

4. *Op. cit.*, pp. 91-92.

5. *Op. cit.*, p. 92.

6. *Op. cit.*, pp. 94, 96.

7. *Op. cit.*, p. 93.

8. *Op. cit.*, pp. 95, 96.

9. *Op. cit.*, p. 96.

10. *Op. cit.*, pp. 94-95.

11. *Op. cit.*, p. 96.

12. *Op. cit.*, p. 98.

13. *Op. cit.*, pp. 97-98. In my judgment, Kolnai’s presentation of the dilemma isn’t as clear as it might be.

14. *Op. cit.*, p. 100.

15. *Op. cit.*, pp. 100-5.

16. *Op. cit.*, p. 105.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Op. cit.*, pp. 97-98.
19. Cf. P. Twambley, "Mercy and Forgiveness," *Analysis* (1976), p. 88.
20. Kolnai, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
21. *Op. cit.*, p. 105.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Cf. Twambley, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
24. *Op. cit.*, pp. 101-2.
25. *Op. cit.*, p. 90.
26. Twambley presses this insight first against Alwynne Smart's account of mercy, and then makes the same diagnosis of Kolnai on forgiveness; *op. cit.*, pp. 85, 88.
27. Or so, Smart contends, and Twambley does not quarrel with her on these points; *op. cit.*, pp. 85-86.
28. *Op. cit.*, p. 85, 88.
29. *Op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.
30. *Op. cit.*, p. 89.
31. *Op. cit.*, p. 89.
32. *Op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.
33. "Forgiveness and Resentment," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* VII (1982), p. 512.
34. "Mercy and Legal Justice," *Social Philosophy and Policy*, IV.1, pp. 1-14.
35. Jeffrie G. Murphy, "Forgiveness and Resentment," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* VII (1982), pp. 505, 508.
36. In "Forgiveness and Resentment," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* VII (1982), pp. 503-15; and "Hatred: A Qualified Defense," *Forgiveness and Mercy* (with Jean Hampton), Cambridge University Press (1988), ch. 3, pp. 88-110.
37. "Forgiveness and Resentment," p. 504, 508. Cf. Murphy, "Mercy and Legal Justice," *Social Philosophy and Policy*, IV.1, p. 4.
38. "Forgiveness and Resentment," p. 504, 506, 508.
39. "Forgiveness and Resentment," p. 508.
40. "Forgiveness and Resentment," p. 506.
41. "Forgiveness and Resentment," p. 508. Cf. "Mercy and Legal Justice," p. 4.
42. "Forgiveness and Resentment," p. 506; cf. p. 504.
43. "Forgiveness and Resentment," p. 504.
44. Murphy seems to equate overcoming with ceasing to have, when he counter-examples the definition of forgiveness as "overcoming resentment" with cases in which the resentment goes away involuntarily; cf. "Forgiveness and Resentment," p. 507.
45. "Forgiveness and Resentment," p. 508.
46. "Forgiveness and Resentment," p. 505. Cf. Murphy's summary of Butler, "Forgiveness and Resentment," p. 507.

47. "Hatred: a qualified defense," pp. 94-95.
48. "Forgiveness and Resentment," pp. 508-10.
49. "Forgiveness and Resentment," p. 512.
50. "Forgiveness and Resentment," p. 512-13.
51. *Ibid.*
52. "Forgiveness and Resentment," pp. 510-11.
53. "Forgiveness and Resentment," pp. 506-7.
54. "Freedom and Resentment," p. 507.
55. "Hatred: A Qualified Defense," pp. 88-110. Cf. "Forgiveness, Mercy, and the Retributive Emotions," *Criminal Justice Ethics*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1988), pp. 3-5.
56. "Hatred: A Qualified Defense," p. 91.
57. "Hatred: A Qualified Defense," p. 92.
58. "Hatred: A Qualified Defense," pp. 94-95.
59. "Hatred: A Qualified Defense," p. 95.
60. "Hatred: A Qualified Defense," p. 95.
61. "Hatred: A Qualified Defense," pp. 98-101.
62. "Hatred: A Qualified Defense," pp. 98-100.
63. "Hatred: A Qualified Defense," p. 97.
64. "Hatred: A Qualified Defense," p. 108.
65. "Murphy on Forgiveness," *Criminal Justice Ethics*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1988), pp. 15-19; esp. p. 17.
66. *Op. cit.*, pp. 17, 18.
67. Murphy, "A Rejoinder to Morris," *Criminal Justice Ethics*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1988), pp. 21-22.
68. Morris, "Murphy on Forgiveness," p. 18.
69. *Op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.
70. *Ibid.*
71. Murphy, "A Rejoinder to Morris," pp. 20-21.
72. Morris, "Murphy on Forgiveness," pp. 18-19.
73. Morris, "Murphy on Forgiveness," p. 18.
74. "Murphy on Forgiveness," p. 19.
75. Morris, *ibid.*
76. Morris, *ibid.*
77. As Michael Stocker rightly observes, optimism doesn't necessarily beget a forgiving spirit; one might be cavalierly optimistic in one's belief that good relationships would come one's way without that effort. On the other hand, a noble and heroic pessimist might cultivate a disposition to forgive, as his contribution to making the best of a bad situation. Nevertheless, I believe, cosmic optimism is hospitable to forgiveness; pessimism makes reluctance to forgive understandable.

78. I take 'engulfed' in a sense analogous to Chisholm's sense of 'balancing off,' except that where the quantities are incommensurate there is no balancing, strictly speaking.

79. Once again, I appeal to Chisholm's distinction between "defeating" and "balancing off," where the latter is an additive relation, while the former is not but depends on a relation of "organic unity" between parts and the whole.

80. Best-of-All-Possible Worlds approaches to the problem of suffering, and Augustine's Free-Will-Approach in *On Free Choice of Will*, alike assume that evils are defeated by the good of the cosmic whole. More controversial is my claim, explicitly insisted upon in "Theodicy without Blame" (*Philosophical Topics*, Vol. XVI, No. 2 (1988), pp. 215-45) and less clearly suggested in "Problems of Evil: More Advice to Christian Philosophers" (*Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1988), pp. 121-43) that God is committed to defeating evil with good within the context of each and every individual life.

81. To be sure, it is not temporally first among loci of realized self-worth. If infants do not find such affirmation from the face of adult-caretakers between the ages of three to six months, it will impede their ego development later. Cf. James E. Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences*, Harper and Row (1981), pp. 165-70.

82. Psychologists point out that the sense of extreme helplessness produces despair and psychological withdrawal in children. I owe this point to Robert Merrihew Adams.

83. Discussions with Linda Petason, Edward Langerak, and James Read clarified these points for me.

84. Note how important it is to distinguish the issue of whether it is conceptually possible to forgive offenses against others, and whether one is morally or religiously in the clear in doing so in a given case. Felicia Ackerman has often raised the suspicion that one will be "softer" on crimes against others than offenses to oneself and cover this over through self-deception and hypocrisy.

85. Twambley seems to disagree, when he holds that in forgiving one of the things the victim waives is his/her right to resentment; whereas, I claim, the victim does not forswear his/her right to negative emotions, but only the right to act on them. Since Twambley does not distinguish between performative forgiveness and forgiveness from the heart, I am inclined to doubt whether he has this social/religious institution squarely in mind. And I agree that full and genuine forgiveness from the heart is "performative" in Twambley's sense that the victim does not merely treat the offender as if s/he didn't owe, but actually releases him/her from debt. On my account (see section 7.2 below), this is because the victim, as it were, switches legal systems or constitutions (living as s/he does in the Kingdom of God and not the kingdom of this world), in coming to calculate "entitlements" from the Divine rather than a human point of view.

86. I am indebted to William P. Alston for pressing this distinction; to him, as to Michael Stocker and Robert M. Adams for helpful discussion of it.

87. "Hatred: A Qualified Defense," pp. 103-4.

88. James Read persuaded me of this point.

89. Even Murphy concedes this in Jesus' case, commenting that He is supposed to have

had “a rather more impressive reference class from which to draw” his self-esteem (“Hatred: A Qualified Defense,” p. 94).

90. “Hatred: A Qualified Defense,” p. 92.

91. For example, Joseph, cast as a paradigm of wise leadership and occupying a position of authority in Egypt, accepts responsibility for the moral education of his brothers, using a syllabus of enigmatic actions to provoke them to repentance and reform, before announcing his forgiveness and extending his offer of reconciliation and reunion. Jesus and the apostles adopt a non-political, prophetic role, proclaiming the Good News in word and deed, with varying directness, but without insisting on driving the point home among recalcitrant audiences. Martin Luther King led a movement of non-violent resistance that resulted in his martyrdom and extensive change in civil rights legislation.