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Charles Griswold, FORGIVENESS: A PHILOSOPHICAL EXPLORATION and Nick Smith, I WAS WRONG: THE MEANINGS OF APOLOGIES

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BOOK REVIEWS

Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration, by Charles Griswold. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. xxxvi + 242. ISBN 978-0-521-87882-1 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-521-70351-2 (paperback). $83.99 (hardback), $21.99(paperback).

I Was Wrong: The Meanings of Apologies, by Nick Smith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. xi + 298. ISBN 978-0-521-86552-4 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-521-68423-1 (paperback). $99.00 (hardback), $24.99 (paperback).

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Both Griswold and Smith acknowledge that the concept respectively under examination is not susceptible of strict philosophical definition, though both philosophers specify a paradigm type of case, from which less paradigmatic cases deviate in various ways and with reference to which the less paradigmatic cases can be conceptually clarified. The books are also structurally similar. Griswold devotes the first two thirds of his book to analyzing individual-to-individual forgiveness, and the last third to political apology, an action analogous to asking for forgiveness, and acceptance of such apology, which is analogous to forgiving; while Smith devotes the first three-fifths of his book to individuals' apologies, and the last two-fifths to collective apologies. Each author takes the political kind of case to be much more complicated and ethically problematic, as well as conceptually murkier, than the individual kind. With one notable exception, both books illustrate their points with abundant, excellent examples, both historical and (especially in Smith's case) imagined. I will start with an evaluation of Griswold's book.

The first chapter divides into two historical discussions, the first of forgiveness in the ancient world, and the second of Joseph Butler's account of forgiveness in two of his *Fifteen Sermons*. Griswold disagrees with Hannah Arendt's claim that "the discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of Nazareth." He claims that ancient pagan conceptions of forgiveness existed, but offers no examples and spends most of the discussion of forgiveness in the ancient world showing that

the philosophers, notably Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, did not regard forgiveness as a good thing. The explanation is that they were all "perfectionists" who therefore held nothing less than perfection to be really good. Forgiveness is a response to injury, and the perfected person cannot be, or almost cannot be, injured, nor does he injure; so the best human life offers no occasion for forgiveness. Furthermore, forgiveness, as distinguished from excuse or equitable clemency, would seem to be a compromise of strict justice; and justice certainly *is* a good thing. Given Griswold's care in distinguishing forgiving from such neighboring concepts as excusing, condoning, pardoning, showing mercy, and compassion, when he claims that forgiveness is a notion current in ancient paganism, he must be using the word carefully. It would have been helpful to have some examples.

The second chapter, "Forgiveness at Its Best," expounds what Griswold takes to be forgiveness in the paradigm case. He has told us, in chapter 1, that he is going to treat forgiveness as a virtue, and that he means "virtue" to have the sense it has in Aristotle. This would seem to suggest that he is going to treat forgiveness as a personal trait, and he comments that a more precise term for the trait would be "forgivingness," where forgiveness "is what a forgiving person's virtue of forgivingness gives rise to" (p. 17; see also pp. 72, 92, 130).

The distinction between forgiveness as a process, transaction, exchange, or action, on the one hand, and forgivingness as a virtue on the other, seems to me a useful one that might even enter into the resolution of some of the puzzles that arise in connection with forgiveness. Griswold briefly discusses this distinction, saying, "the admirable trait of being disposed to forgiveness (in the right way, on the right occasion, and such, as determined by practical reason)—the quality predicated of a forgiving person's character—is 'forgivingness,' on analogy, say, with 'courageousness'" (ibid.). The analogy seems odd, since not "courageousness," but "courage," is the usual word for the trait. And while there is a verb "to forgive" to go with the adjective "forgiving" and the trait name "forgivingness," there is no verb "to cour" to go with the adjective "courageous" and the trait name "courage." To get a verb, one needs a phrase formed from the adjective or the noun, such as "act courageously" or "perform an act of courage." In the case of courage, then, the virtue seems to have linguistic primacy, while in the case of forgiveness, the action, process, response, exchange, attitude, or whatever forgiveness is, gets linguistic priority, and for the virtue one needs some such expression as "being a forgiving person" or the rather quaint "forgivingness." I should think that nobody in modern English thinks that "forgiveness" names a virtue—which is not to deny that many people think forgiveness virtuous.

An instructive analogy is Aristotle's comment on friendship at the beginning of *NE* book 8. In the second sentence he says, "For friendship is a virtue," and then qualifies himself, "or like a virtue" (*met' aretês*). Friendship is not really a virtue, Aristotle seems to be saying, not a trait that an individual may have, but a kind of ongoing relationship between two

persons that *requires* virtues. In resemblance to virtues, forgiveness can perhaps be a state of a person—the state of *having forgiven* an offender, or of *having been forgiven* by one's victim. But forgiveness as a state is a state of relationship between one person and another, and not a trait of individual character. As a necessarily dispositional relationship, friendship is more like a virtue than is what we often call forgiveness, which has more the character of a process or event or action or transaction. Griswold himself attests to this fact, for despite saying that he is expounding forgiveness as a virtue (pp. 17, 31, 47, 49, 130), he characterizes it variously as an ethical response (p. 39), a process (pp. 48, 98, 212), an act or action (p. 50), an exchange (p. 53n12), a communicative or bilateral act (p. 64), a "reciprocal moral exchange" (p. 127), and a "dyadic exchange" (p. 140). When he calls it the "end result" [of a process] (p. 98), something that can be perfectly (or imperfectly) "accomplished" (pp. 113–117), he seems to be classifying it as what I above called a "state." In this last case, the half of the state on the victim's side would be the victim's dispositional attitude toward the wrongdoer and will be more closely analogous to friendship and virtue. But it still wouldn't be the trait of being (more generally) a forgiving person. Below I will propose that forgiveness is, most basically, such an attitude.

I think we see two strands in Griswold's discussion of forgiveness as a "virtue," which sit uneasily together: on the one hand, he acknowledges the difference between forgivingness as a virtue and forgiveness as a possible exemplification of the virtue in an act or process of forgiving, but he hardly discusses forgivingness as a trait; instead, on the other hand, the first two-thirds of his book is about a transaction or moral exchange that he calls forgiveness, but he persists in calling it a virtue. One suspects that in the latter kind of case, "virtue" does not have the sense of excellent personal trait, as in Aristotle, but simply means something morally good. That is what the ancient philosophers denied, and what Griswold affirms.

"Forgiveness at Its Best," then, is about the structure of a paradigm case of the moral transaction that Griswold calls forgiveness. ". . . forgiveness is fundamentally an interpersonal process whose success requires actions from both parties" (p. 212). Forgiveness is not a "gift" that a victim of moral injury bestows on the perpetrator of the injury, but a transaction or exchange between the two persons requiring each of them to fulfill certain conditions.

The core of Griswold's presentation of the "virtue" of forgiveness is the specification of thirteen conditions that must be met in the paradigm case. Forgiveness is a two-party transaction, and each of the parties must meet six conditions. The thirteenth condition is that the offense must be forgivable.

Conditions the offender must meet are:

Take responsibility for the wrong

Repudiate her action as wrong

Experience and express regret for the action

Commit herself to "becoming the sort of person who does not inflict injury" and show this commitment in deeds as well as words

Show that she understands, from the victim's perspective, the damage she has done

Present a narrative of the wrong, of herself as agent of the wrong, and of her resolve to change, that shows the victim a way of reframing her that warrants his granting her forgiveness (pp. 49–51)

Conditions the victim must meet are:

Forswear revenge

Moderate his resentment

Commit to letting the resentment go altogether

Change his belief that the wrongdoer is simply a "bad person"

Drop any presumption of his moral superiority to the wrong-doer, or that his own identity is defined as someone injured by the wrong-doer

Address the wrongdoer and declare that he grants her forgiveness (pp. 54–58)

It seems to me that Griswold's analysis of forgiveness would be improved by some clear and systematic distinctions between and among (1) forgiveness as an act and (2) as a state (on the part of the offender, forgiveness as a state is the state of being forgiven, which is not a psychological state; on the part of the victim, forgiveness as a state is psychological, namely an attitude toward the offender), (3) the ideal dyadic exchange between victim and offender, which we might call the repentance-forgiveness exchange, (4) forgivingness as the trait of character that disposes its possessor to forgiveness as an act or state, and (5) forgiveness as a cultural institution.

Following these distinctions, forgiveness itself (as we might call it) would be roughly captured by the conditions that Griswold says the *victim* must meet. The victim is the one who "does" the forgiving (just as, alternatively, he might be the one who excuses, condones, takes revenge, feeds on his resentment, or demonizes his offender). By no stretch of English is what the offender contributes to the interaction forgiveness. In the ideal dyadic exchange, the offender contributes repentance. So forgiveness is clearly distinct from the ideal dyadic transaction that consists of the interaction of the offender's contrition with the victim's forgiveness.

Forgiveness "itself" (as we might say) is most fundamentally an *attitude* of a victim toward the offender, in light of the offense. The attitude is benevolent rather than vengeful towards the offender, despite clear recognition of the negative moral status of the offense. Thus it is an attitude that presupposes an appreciation of the moral wrongness of the offense. (One can be a forgiver only if one has a sense of justice.)

Forgiveness as an attitude is distinct from forgiveness as an act of communicating one's attitude to the offender. Often, forgiveness as an attitude precedes the victim's act of communicating his attitude to the offender—of "offering" or explicitly conferring forgiveness. In other cases, the act of conferring forgiveness is an important part of the process of moving towards a forgiving attitude.

On p. 64 Griswold criticizes unconditional forgiveness, saying, "as a communicative or bilateral act, 'forgiveness' that requires nothing of the offender . . . does communicate to her, as well as to everyone else, that she is not being held accountable." But if we distinguish between forgiveness as an attitude and the act of communicating that attitude to the offender, then it would not follow that forgiveness communicates anything at all. One might forgive and remain completely silent about it, if that seemed the wise course. And perhaps it *would* be the wise course, in case the offender would take the communication as condoning her delinquency. But, contrary to Griswold's claim, that is not the only kind of case. Sometimes a pre-emptive communication of forgiveness (either in explicit words, or in demeanor) elicits repentance. To me it makes more sense to talk of actions or attitudes of the offender as conditions warranting the *communication* of forgiveness, rather than as warranting forgiveness itself. And such warrants are not universally required, but required in only some of the cases, as practical wisdom must be left to adjudicate. (Forgiveness as communication of forgiveness is one sense of "act of forgiveness"; another is forgiveness as the resolution or effort or undertaking to take, or begin to take, a forgiving attitude.)

One factor influencing the offender's construal of the victim's communication of forgiveness is the offender's knowledge or sense of the victim's moral character. If the victim has the virtue of forgivingness, then the offender's knowledge may include that the victim is nobody's fool or doormat, that she has strong self-respect, a strong sense of justice, and is likely to appreciate better than the offender the moral significance of the offender's offense. (Without a strong sense of justice, a person does not have the virtue of forgivingness; that is what keeps her from being a condoner.) Here we see the relevance of the definite concept of virtue, and of forgivingness in particular, to the ideal dyadic exchange.

Thus, I would distinguish the victim's forgiveness of the offender from the victim's character trait of readiness or disposition to forgive offenders. Forgivingness is an affective/cognitive constitution of personality or character trait that amounts to a readiness or disposition and capacity to forgive. Perhaps paradigmatically, but not necessarily, forgiveness would be a response to the offender's meeting some or all of the conditions that Griswold requires of her. The conditions that Griswold thinks the offender must satisfy are some of the points of sensitivity of the forgiving person; they are the kinds of considerations that a forgiving person finds especially compelling. Forgivingness will involve a set of deeply appropriated moral and/or theological concepts and a set of collateral virtues (justice,

humility, compassion, generosity, self-control, practical wisdom). It will be the result of moral education within a worldview. Griswold points out that forgiveness belongs in moral outlooks that acknowledge the ongoing imperfection of human beings in a world fraught with injustices (p. 113), and that Christianity is one such outlook. He points out the lack of fit between forgiveness and most if not all of the moral outlooks represented by the ancient philosophers. Griswold explicitly eschews discussion of theological matters, but looking at the more particular ways in which people belonging to a moral outlook understand themselves, their human fellows, and the nature of the universe (including a conception of God, if any) would be required for a fine-grained understanding of the virtue of forgivingness. The cognitive-affective structure of virtues will vary with such world-view differences.

We could also helpfully distinguish an institution or practice of forgiveness, which would be something like Griswold's paradigm scenario functioning as a set of guidelines governing procedure in cases of interpersonal moral injury, but would also include the moral and religious beliefs that make sense of the procedure. Christians have a theology of forgiveness, including such doctrines as the fallenness of human nature, the love and forgiving nature of God as well as his capacity for wrath, the redeeming power of the cross of Christ, and the commandment that we should forgive one another as God has forgiven us. A secular philosophy of forgiveness will include a doctrine of morally flawed human nature, and perhaps a utilitarian justification for the practice, in light of flawed human nature and the devastating consequences typical of unmitigated anger and cycles of revenge.

The notion of forgiveness as an institution could help with deciding whether forgiveness existed in ancient paganism. We might allow that Achilles' compassionate relaxation of his anger at the house of Priam and his granting of Priam's wish to give his son Hector a fitting funeral (*Iliad* 24) is an *instance* of ancient pagan forgiveness (Griswold says it isn't, 77), while holding that the *institution* of forgiveness arose first with the teaching and life of Jesus of Nazareth. Even in the Old Testament, the few instances of inter-human forgiveness (Esau of Jacob [Genesis 33], Joseph of his brothers [Genesis 45]) are far less in doubt than that there was an institution of inter-human forgiveness. The ancient Hebrew world-view was hospitable to a concept of forgiveness in ways that Greek philosophy was not; but conceptual readiness for a practice is not the same as actually having it.

Forgiveness as an attitude excludes anger and resentment towards the offender, but I don't think it is necessary that there be a stage at which the victim felt anger or resentment, and then another stage at which he overcame it or got over it. This may be the typical scenario, but it is not the only one, and the forgiveness may be all the more impressive morally if the victim does not get angry at the offense. When the boy Ilyusha unjustly bites Alyosha Karamazov's finger to the bone, Alyosha does not react in

anger, but in compassion for the boy, whom he supposes to be suffering in some way unknown to Alyosha. We are justified in thinking Alyosha forgives Ilyusha, rather than condones or excuses, because we know he recognizes that he has been injured, appreciates the moral gravity of the injury, and yet is not vindictive but benevolent toward the malefactor. And part of our reason for thinking so is our knowledge of his character. By this time in the story we know Alyosha well enough to read the scenario as depicting a forgiving attitude rather than abject condoning or exculpatory excusing. He does not undergo a process of forgiveness, and he does not perform an act of forgiveness, either of declaring his forgiveness of Ilyusha or of actively renouncing anger and revenge; but he does take a forgiving attitude toward the boy.

Griswold's third chapter, entitled "Imperfect Forgiveness," is devoted to cases in which the interpersonal exchange that Griswold calls forgiveness fails to meet some of the thirteen conditions. The main deviant types are third-party forgiveness, unilateral forgiveness, and self-forgiveness. I will comment on the first two of these.

In third-party forgiveness, someone other than the victim forgives the offender, thus violating an apparent rule that only the victim has standing to forgive. Although Griswold does not make standing a distinct condition for the victim to forgive the offender, the condition seems implicit in his status as victim and the justness of his resentment. The need to make room for third-party forgiveness arises from cases in which the offender has fulfilled all the repentance-conditions, but the victim has died without forgiving, or simply refuses to forgive. On a Christian understanding, the counterintuitiveness of this situation is considerably mitigated by the fact that God, as the primary victim in every case, always has standing to forgive (though it is still sad not to have been forgiven by one's human victim, if one is deeply repentant). Griswold's secular solution is to give a kind of secondary standing to a third party who is justifiably indignant about the wrong and sufficiently identified with the victim through caring for her and knowing her, as well as knowing about the offender's offense and repentance (p. 119). But to legitimate his standing in as proxy-forgiver, the third party must have some historical justification for thinking that, under different circumstances, the victim would have been willing to grant forgiveness.

I think we can see how a clear conception of forgivingness, as distinct from forgiving, is also relevant to third-party "forgiveness." Even if the third party is not qualified to forgive the offense in the sense of conferring or pronouncing forgiveness, as a forgiving person he will still have an attitude towards the offender, in light of the offense, that has much in common with forgiveness. He will value and sympathetically understand the offender's repentance and desire for forgiveness; he will appreciate his own moral fallibility in matters like that of the offense. His own indignation at the offender will be mitigated by compassion, and by the offender's repentance. This compassionate moral understanding by an involved

third party can have much the same effect on the offender's conscience as forgiveness proper might have.

By now it should be clear that I do not think that unilateral forgiveness is necessarily an imperfect kind of forgiveness. If we distinguish forgiveness from repentance, and from the ideal dyadic transaction of which forgiveness is one side, then forgiveness can be complete *as forgiveness* without the repentance of the offender, though of course in that case it has not been *properly received* by the offender, and has not been "completed" in the restoration of mutual good will, which I suppose to be the ultimate *telos* of forgiveness.

In the last third of his book, Griswold argues that forgiveness as he has expounded it is not applicable in political contexts, though there is place for a related transaction, that of political apology and its acceptance by the injured entity. Governments and other institutions apologize but do not properly ask forgiveness, and accept apologies but do not forgive. Political apology resembles the repentance-forgiveness exchange in supposing that a wrong has been done by some identifiable agent who can take responsibility for it and is not asking for mercy or clemency or that the wrong be forgotten, and that the success of the apology depends on truthfully stating the facts of the wrong. Still, political apology is not a request for forgiveness, and the acceptance of such apology is not forgiveness, for several reasons: (1) There are too many players, with too diverse agendas and points of view, on both sides of the interaction; the forgiveness exchange requires integrated personal agents on both sides. (2) This complexity makes it difficult and urgent to control the possible consequences of apologies, of which there are many such as legal liability and loss or gain of power, and which are not characteristic factors in cases of repentance and forgiveness. (3) Political apologies are delivered and accepted by representatives rather than by the actual wrongdoer and the actual victim, and thus bear a resemblance to third-party forgiveness transactions and have a symbolic character absent from forgiveness exchanges. (4) No particular sentiments analogous to contrition and resentment are required for successful political apologies.

Griswold usefully discusses several historical examples of public apology, including the University of Alabama's apology to the descendents of American slaves for the university's prospering from slavery, the U.S. Government's apology to Japanese Americans for interning them during WW II, Desmond Tutu's pronouncing forgiveness on the South African Dutch Reformed Church in response to a repentant plea by its representative for its complicity in apartheid, and King Hussein's apology to the parents of some Israeli girls murdered by a berserk Jordanian soldier. He also looks at two cases of culpable failure to apologize: Robert McNamara's for the mishandling of the Viet Nam War, and Richard Nixon's for the Watergate cover-up.

The last substantive chapter in the book is a meditation on the Vietnam War Memorial on the Mall in Washington, D.C. Griswold admires

the Memorial as architecturally brilliant but faults it morally, because it avoids the honest recognition of the injustice of the war that a public apology would have embodied. Instead, the Memorial invites *reflection* about the justice of the war, while honoring the courage of those who fought in it. Griswold detects in this evaluative compromise an untenable effort to separate the virtues. "Courage in the service of wrong is not a virtue, and thus no longer courage proper . . . . Would one call a child molester 'courageous' in light of his persisting in his activities at great personal risk?" (p. 208). An implication of Griswold's position here would seem to be that no acts of courage can have been performed in the course of the Viet Nam War. This seems to me an intolerable implication that casts doubt on Griswold's way of conceiving the inseparability of the virtues. At a minimum we should distinguish courageous but unjust actions performed by persons who are aware of the injustice they are doing from ones who believe their actions to be just. But I am inclined to think that even actions performed by people who know them to be unjust may satisfy the conditions for being courageous. Courage need not be conceived as a "moral" virtue in the same way that justice and compassion are.

Nick Smith is a legal theorist, and his present book is a prolegomenon to a projected volume on apologies in the law. He writes in a lively fashion with engaging and sometimes amusing examples that compensate somewhat for his long wind and repetitions. He tries to maintain a healthy balance between, on the one hand, individual responsibility for wrongdoing and the importance of authentic contrition in apologizing and, on the other, the effect of institutional structures and the importance of pragmatic considerations in the pursuit of public wellbeing. In this I think he succeeds. He has a cursory chapter on the relation of apologies to forgiveness, but forgiveness is not a major concern of the book. He does not, to my memory, use the word "virtue."

To Griswold's paradigm of forgiveness corresponds Smith's categorical apology, thus the most thoroughly and purely apologetic kind of apology, "the most robust, painstaking, and formal of the varieties" (p. 140). Smithian categorical apology is unlike Griswoldian forgiveness in not being an exchange or transaction between offender and victim, but belongs decisively on the side of the offender; it is a "gesture" (p. 24) or a "ritual" (p. 26), perhaps a performance, directed *at* the victim. The categorical apology has the following twelve properties: The offender (1) states and corroborates the facts of the delinquency in question, rather than vaguely characterizing them ("I was wrong"); (2) declares that he is causally responsible for the offense and to be blamed for it (not just expressing regret at the offense or sympathy with the victim); (3) has standing to apologize for the harm; (4) distinguishes and identifies clearly each of the harms for which he is blameworthy (not, for example, apologizing merely for one of the minor harms he caused); (5) identifies the moral principles that his delinquency violates; (6) endorses those principles, presumably in agreement with the victim; (7) acknowledges the victim's status as moral

interlocutor with full human agency and dignity; (8) regrets his action or inaction "categorically," that is, not merely as a bad consequence of an appropriate action ("I am sorry that I dropped an atomic bomb on your country but it was the best available option"), but as an action that he now thoroughly repudiates; (9) articulates (communicates) 1–2, 4–8 *to the victim*; 10) reforms his life so as not to offend again in the way apologized for, again and again demonstrates his commitment to reform, accepts appropriate sanctions for his wrongdoing, and redresses the injury as far as he reasonably can; (11) intends his apology to serve not merely his own interests, but the wellbeing of the victim and the vindication of relevant values; (12) feels appropriate emotions, for example, guilt about his delinquency and sympathy for the victim.

Much of the burden of Smith's book is to show how far many (most) apologies fall short of being real apologies, by apologizing vaguely or about the wrong wrong, by not really taking responsibility, by expressing only sympathy or conditional regret, by only expressing agreement on the moral principles involved, or by not really intending to act differently in the future. Apologies are often deceitful, being efforts to convey "meaning" they do not actually have so as to avoid responsibility or the consequences of irresponsible behavior. Smith's book aims to make this eventuality less likely in the reader's case. Among non-categorical kinds of apologies, Smith discusses the Ambiguous Apology, Expression of Sympathy, the Value-Declaring Apology, the Conciliatory Apology, the Compensatory Apology, the Purely Instrumental Apology, the Coerced Apology, and the Proxy Apology.

Free Will: Sourcehood and Its Alternatives, by Kevin Timpe. London: Continuum, 2008. Pp. 155. $130.00 (hardcover).

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The problem of free will is one of those philosophical problems—perhaps they are all like this—that rewards those who take the time to revisit the basics. It is for this reason that I am always glad to see books like Kevin Timpe's *Free Will: Sourcehood and Its Alternatives*, which for the most part endeavors to furnish the last fifty years of debate over free will with a new and useful perspective. Timpe thus adds his own voice to the mix not only by arguing for a particular view about free will but also by simply telling its story.

Timpe's book is very readable and he displays an impressive command of what has become an almost unmanageably large literature. Indeed, Timpe tells his story so that, for the most part, readers need not have any background in free will (though I would wager that newcomers to the issues will nevertheless occasionally get lost in the intricate thicket that the Frankfurt-style counterexamples have become). The book's conclusion is