

Forgiveness, Secular and Religious: A Reply to My Critics

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I am deeply grateful to James Marsh and Bernard Prusak for their insightful and thoughtful comments on my *Forgiveness: a Philosophical Exploration*. I know well how much time and effort is involved in such an enterprise, and can do no more but say thank you: I am honored by the seriousness with which they have taken my work and joined in reflection about the issues.¹

As anyone who has reflected on this topic knows, the terrain is surprisingly complicated. I believe that I will best contribute to the present discussion first by commenting on my book's argumentative strategy. Along the way, I'll try to clear up what I think are some misunderstandings.² Then, in part II, I'll tackle what Prusak characterizes as his main question, whether my "analysis of forgiveness does justice to the ways that people speak of and practice forgiveness" (288). In part III, I will discuss what both Marsh and Prusak see as a major (and related) query: the connection between secular and religious analyses of the topic. Prusak wants to say that a religious view may be a prime example of how people speak of and practice forgiveness. Does my theory allow for such a view?

I

First, one of my key contentions is that forgiveness is a concept that is governed by norms or conditions. This point is argued for at length. It is puzzling, then, to find Prusak quoting from my prologue where I state that I shall be arguing against "unconditional" forgiveness, and remarking that I affirm "without argumentation" the reciprocal relation between offender and victim (289).

Second, I argued that forgiveness must be distinguished from excuse and condonation. And in order to maintain those distinctions, we need criteria or conditions. At first, it seems that Prusak disagrees, but well into his comments (291) he concedes that he does "not want to deny that forgiveness 'that requires *nothing* of the offender' may collapse into condonation, excuse, or rationalization," and rightly cites the abused-spouse problem. So we actually agree that some conditions must be met, and the only question should be "which conditions?" I would press Prusak to spell out the basis for his own contention that the "forgiveness" offered

by the abused wife is not in fact forgiveness, as I believe that doing so will force him over to my side of the fence. In any case, his concession should lead us to stop talking about “unconditional forgiveness,” as there are conditions that any and every defensible account is going to have to set. The focus should be on the conditions in question, and secondly, on what I called *unilateral* forgiveness (I grant that in the book I too spoke of unconditional forgiveness; I did so because that phrase permeates the literature on the subject). *Unilateral* forgiveness is the true target of this part of Prusak’s critique as well as of part of Marsh’s concluding questions.

Now, my position on that depends on a third premise. I attempted to understand the model or paradigm case of forgiveness, articulating its conditions, its status as a moral notion (I argued that it should be understood as a virtue), and the moral ideals that underlie it. The idea was that if we could get clear about what perfected or accomplished forgiveness would be—putting aside for a moment the question of how difficult it would be to achieve it—we would have a standard by which both to measure imperfect candidates for the honor as well as to distinguish forgiveness (whether perfectly achieved or not) from related notions.

The distinction between the paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic case allows the latter to count as forgiveness. The five such cases I mentioned are: (i) forgiving wrongs done to others (including victims no longer living), i.e., “third-party forgiveness”; (ii) forgiving the dead or unrepentant; (iii) self-forgiveness; (iv) God’s forgiveness; and perhaps even (v) forgiving God. It is an important claim of the book that such cases are *lacking* or imperfect relative to the paradigm, in the sense that were it possible for all of the conditions pertaining to the paradigm to be fulfilled, we would wish for them to be so. For example, in (iv) the party from whom one requests forgiveness (God) may be conceived as immune to injury; which raises the puzzling possibility that (iv) is a case of third-party forgiveness (we ask God to forgive us the wrongs we have done to *others*, and thus on behalf of others).

The imperfect cases of forgiveness are nonetheless cases of forgiveness if they rise above the three threshold conditions summarized by Marsh. My argument is that only when all three are jointly met does forgiveness come off at all. The threshold conditions are interpersonal in that they involve both parties. Below the threshold may lie excuse, condonation, or explanation, or any of a number of psychological strategies from rationalization to amnesia. Above the threshold lie a spectrum of possibilities for forgiveness, up to accomplished forgiveness. When presented with the chance that all rather than some of the conditions for forgiveness be met, we would wish for them to be so, indeed insist that they be so. That is one way in which we recognize that there *is* a spectrum containing more and less accomplished cases. “Forgive” behaves a bit like “rebut”: one has not rebutted an argument if one waves one’s hands or utters magic spells or throws something at one’s opponent. Having met the threshold conditions for rebutting, however, one may or may not succeed, or may succeed in various degrees, in that which rebuttal aims for: refutation. Refutation is the *telos* of rebuttal. Similarly, the *telos* of non-paradigmatic “forgiveness” is paradigmatic or model forgiveness. So, on my account it is possible for the unrepentant to be forgiven, contrary to Prusak’s allegation (290, 291). At the

same time, that would not be the model case, for one would wish that the offender apologize, among other things.

Prusak grants that I am “right that ‘forgive’ is a ‘success word’ that comes with what one might call threshold conditions” (291). We are in agreement on that important point. So even on his theory, *some* uses of “forgiveness” are illegitimate, however ensconced they may be in popular discourse—which uses, it would be interesting to learn! In his footnote, we learn which of the conditions I argue for are not acceptable; are the remaining ones acceptable? Once again, we are back to the salient question: what are the conditions of forgiveness? Prusak doesn’t seem to object to my threshold conditions; however, he does to (some of?) the remaining conditions that constitute what I am calling the paradigm case.

I don’t think, then, that either of today’s commentators is rejecting that part of my argumentative strategy in principle, so much as raising questions about what gets built into the notion of paradigmatic forgiveness. One of the advantages of my strategy is that it preserves the common intuition that were it possible that certain presently unfulfilled conditions fulfilled, one would wish for them to be so. For example, a victim would surely prefer that the offender apologize rather than not, even if the offender is forgivable either way. My theory is inclusive in this manner, maximally preserving our intuitions about what counts as forgiveness, while trying to articulate those conditions we’d wish to be fulfilled. That wish, in turn, reflects acceptance of various moral ideals.

In yet another way, my view again preserves what I take to be considered convictions: I distinguish between “perfect tense” and “present participle” senses of forgiveness, in recognition that we meaningfully speak of having forgiven someone even though we feel lingering resentment (which would be the “present participle” sense). My theory allows for that, so long as the resentment does eventually disappear (it’s a matter of judgment, again, as to its appropriate duration). If it *never* disappears, then forgiveness has been defeated. And that too, I think, is well within the scope of our considered convictions.

In the interpersonal scene that provides my touchstone, the offender has injured a specific individual, and the victim’s resentment is normally provoked by a person’s action, but is properly focused on the person for doing the deed. Taking my cue from both Butler and Strawson, I see the victim’s moral anger as a reactive sentiment that responds to and therefore is tied to the offender. We forgive the agent, not the deed (even though we forgive the agent for doing the deed).

These seemingly banal characteristics of the primal scene I attempted to explain have profound consequences for the norms or criteria that define the asking for and receiving of forgiveness. They specify the irremediably *social* character of the process and, as a consequence, the moral interdependence of the two parties in question. In my view, the original interpersonal character of the transaction (the original scene of the wrong-doing) is inherited by efforts to respond to that context, both conceptually and affectively, for forgiveness is an effort to respond *to it*. And this is why it is widely felt desirable that the offender take certain steps to warrant forgiveness. But “social” does not mean that society can itself do the moral work, at least not in the way the

paradigmatic scene calls for (this changes in non-paradigmatic contexts). The two individuals are the fundamental moral units here; unless that is granted, forgiveness collapses into something quite different—say, a socially mandated process for peace-making. We are assuming that the offender bears responsibility for the injury, that the injury really does matter ethically because it is a wrong to the victim, and therefore that in the paradigmatic case the victim alone owns the moral right to forgiveness.

If we ask why the offender who has satisfied all of the conditions for being-forgiven should wait for the victim to forgive, the answer ultimately lies in the points just made. First, the original context which gives rise to the issue is interpersonal or social, and that carries forward to the moral action of forgiveness whose purpose is to address that context. The dyadic character of the process permeates it from start to finish. And second, pre-empting the victim's privilege to forgive would reiterate the disrespect implicit in the original wrong-doing.

The conception of forgiveness I've articulated rests on certain moral ideals, or on a vision of human excellence (to borrow Prusak's wording, 292). These include the ideals of responsibility, accountability, self-governance. They underwrite a conception of the moral social order as well as the moral status of persons. As I state in the Epilogue, I have not argued for them here—one can't do everything in a single book!—but if one grants them, then my insistence on the dyadic character of paradigmatic forgiveness should make more sense. In requiring the offender to meet certain conditions to be forgiven, I am standing for these ideals. One might even say that my theory holds the offender to his or her best self, attempting in what is almost a spirit of generosity to help the offender become a better person. In insisting on the offender's accountability (moral, not legal), I'm accomplishing several things simultaneously: stepping in for that person's better self; sticking up for norms that make a decent society possible; and also both respecting warranted anger and making anger responsive to reasons—that too is a form of self-governance.

One last point: among the moral ideals at stake is what one might call the possibility of self-transformation or, metaphorically, re-birth. Some such notion is at the heart of forgiveness, and this is a point I now wish I had brought out more clearly in the book. To see forgiveness as dyadic is to stand for that ideal as well. The victim who wishes for the offender to meet certain criteria in order to be forgiven is wishing for the offender to take on the project of self-emendation.

A fourth prong of my argumentative strategy was to distinguish interpersonal forgiveness from a number of notions within the same conceptual family, notions which are not imperfect cases of one another. Marsh has nicely summarized them. The only member of this extended family which I examined in the book concerns political apology.

One of the things that makes the discussion of the topic frustrating is not just that it is inherently complex, but that there are so many differing conceptions of forgiveness being offered, not just today, but historically. I said a little about the historical meanings of the term in the book, but solely with an eye to setting out the conceptual backdrop against which forgiveness is a virtue (the discussion of the perfectionist views of various Greek philosophers, and of Nietzsche, is meant

to accomplish that relatively modest aim). So far as I know, a systematic historical study of the topic has not been undertaken, certainly not by a philosopher. I'll be taking another step with respect to the broader historical issues in a volume (under contract with Cambridge University Press) I am co-editing with David Konstan; the contributors will look at Greek and Roman notions of forgiveness and related ideas. We today are the inheritors of differing and sometimes rival views about the subject, some found within "the Christian tradition," some within the Judaic, some between them, and some in pagan sources. Viewed historically (and limiting ourselves to the West), it's a massive and confusing hodge-podge. The situation might perhaps be compared to that famously described by Alasdair MacIntyre at the start of *After Virtue*. Perhaps that helps to explain the confusions prevalent in the contemporary discussion, and the remarkable amount of talking-past-one-another that goes on in both academic and non-academic discourse about the topic.

In this light I would note that Prusak is mostly mistaken in remarking that the anthropology I assume is "more biblical than it is Greek, closer to Jerusalem than it is to Athens" (287). This assumes, *inter alia*, that there is a "Biblical" anthropology, and more importantly for my account, that the perfectionist Greek philosophers speak for Greek literature, law, and mores altogether. I certainly don't think that the latter is the case; non- or anti-perfectionist views may be found in many places in pagan antiquity, as also in post-Christian philosophy. Furthermore, views that are perfectionist in some sense may be found in the history of Christianity.³ And importantly, it is not at all clear to me that forgiveness in the sense that contemporary Christians often espouse is univocally supported by the tradition. I will come back to that issue in part III below. I do want to acknowledge that the element of self-transformation—of rebirth, of becoming a new self—may have received an important impetus from the Christian tradition, and in that sense our contemporary notion of forgiveness may be indebted to that tradition. However, the idea is not absent from pagan antiquity. It seems to have been present in Greek mystery religions, and may be found in Plato's *Phaedrus* (249c–250c) and *Republic* (515c–516e), *inter alia*. In any case, it does not follow that the idea could not be understood apart from the Christian tradition, even though it may have come to prominence in the Christian tradition, any more than, say, the notion of the moral equality of human beings cannot be understood in secular terms, even though it received an important impetus from the Christian tradition.

II

With this in mind, let me address the worry which Prusak presents by means of the examples of the Amish and of the Rwandan victim of brutality. These are supposed to be counterexamples to my theory, because in each case the forgiveness is "unconditional," and in neither case "condonation." These examples are supposed to motivate Prusak's central concern of whether my "analysis of forgiveness does justice to the ways that people speak of and practice forgiveness" (288).

In reply, let me first suggest that *any* theoretical attempt to make our intuitions consistent will have to revise some of them, and every moral philosophy has done so. Not only do people speak of and practice forgiveness in ways inconsistent with each other, they normally belong to internally inconsistent sets or clusters of views, in part because of what I have called the hodge-podge of our historical inheritance on the matter. Considered convictions do not, and cannot, leave all convictions in place. I would add, incidentally, that religiously based moral views also revise, sometimes drastically, what one would think of as the tenets of ordinary life. So the objection would presumably apply to them as well.

All that said, I have already suggested in part I that my theory does honor at least some of our most important convictions, and is maximally inclusive. The issue is best pursued by looking further at Prusak's main target, viz. my argument that perfect forgiveness requires that the offender take a number of steps, for he thinks *that* requirement is at odds with the ways people speak of and practice forgiveness. Let us turn to his example of the Amish. As I understand the facts from media reports, they include the following: on an October day of 2006, Amish children in a small community in Pennsylvania were gathered in their one-room school house. When they had finished singing their morning hymn, a local milk truck driver, Charles Roberts, entered the schoolhouse and soon after began to execute each of the ten girls. As the police arrived, he shot himself dead. His suicide note evidently stated that he was angry at God for allowing the death of their first born daughter nine years earlier. With stupefying speed—I believe it was within 24 to 48 hours—the families of the murdered schoolgirls announced that they had forgiven the killer. Several Amish men went to the house of the shooter's family to console them hours after burying their own children; they attended the burial of the killer; they set up a charitable fund for the family in the name of the murderer; and in other ways too signaled that the crime was forgiven. They subsequently razed the schoolhouse itself to the ground. This is as close to instant forgiveness and "moving on" as one could possibly imagine.

And it raises a lot of questions. To begin with, what of the problem of condoning—through instant "forgiving"—so evil a deed? As I noted in my book, to condone is to collaborate in the lack of censure of an action, and perhaps to enable further wrongdoing by the offender. One may condone in the sense of accepting while not disapproving (by not holding the wrongdoing against its author), or in the sense of tolerating while disapproving (a sort of "look the other way" or "putting up with it" strategy).⁴ Prusak's response to this sort of point seems to attribute to me the reduction of condonation to apparent condonation (291). I certainly made no such conflation. On the contrary, I argued that the criteria for forgiveness I set out guaranteed that forgiveness could not collapse into condonation, no matter what the perception of the matter. Prusak cites, as though it were a counter-example, what he takes to be the Amish demand that the murderer be "put behind bars" (had he lived). But as I also argue that the spheres of forgiveness and of the administration of justice are distinct, any such demand is quite irrelevant to the condonation/forgiveness distinction.⁵

Further, what of the place of self-righteous anger and sympathetic resentment on behalf of the murdered children? Is it truly virtuous to bracket all such anger? We might go even further: how *could* this be forgiveness, if forgiveness has *any* tie to the forswearing of resentment? It would seem that the Amish ideal is the proleptic, universal, and unilateral forswearing of anger altogether, such that not only all past evil but all future evil is forgiven. The goal is apparently a life entirely free from moral anger no matter what. But then this seems not be a case of forgiveness at all, so much as of moving past it, or forgetting, or of not-feeling moral hatred, or excusing. If we're to "forgive" on the ground that we're all fallible, erring creatures, who know not what they do, then forgiveness does collapse into comprehensive, across the board, unconditional, excusing. Perhaps that is a defensible response to wrong-doing; but it's not forgiveness.

Finally, I submit that the example actually works against Prusak's objection to my view; for many voices spoke against the propriety of the Amish's words and deeds (as he himself notes), and in a way that tends to support my own theory. Is not the Amish reaction—suspending judgment for a moment about the forgiveness/excuse issue—itself massively revisionist of our considered convictions? If the Amish are moral exemplars, then the conception of perfect forgiveness they embody is going to require a more extreme revision of the moral sentiments than anything suggested by my theory (and these would be nearly universal and cross-cultural sentiments about the propriety of anger and of wanting contrition on the part of the offender). So on grounds of appeal to "the ways that people speak of and practice forgiveness," perhaps the Amish view should be the first to go. And that would hold even if their view were entirely secular.

How "dramatic" or unusual are some of my conditions for forgiveness, how rare is it for these to be relevant? Perhaps we have a deep difference about the phenomenology. Let me simply say that the most common point of contact many of us in the West have with forgiveness arises in the context of interpersonal, often domestic, relations. And that especially in this age of high divorce rates, as well as of dissolution of friendships and love affairs, the prevalence of truly bitter, vengeful, enraged stories of betrayal is astounding. Such stories of personal moral anger are *everywhere*, and very frequently involve torn lives, the welfare of children, the disposition of property, not to mention the toxic effects of resentment. Add in the victims of various sorts of neglect, crime, political abuse, and war, and you have a tidal wave of moral hatred and resentment. Interest in forgiveness is correspondingly vast. But so too is the demand that the offenders meet minimal conditions—say, apologize—and the wish that they meet all of them. Even in a quotidian domestic context, the injured party often does want apology and some sort of narrative—it might take all of a few sentences—along with the other steps I've indicated. So while there are cases of heroic if not super-human forswearing of revenge and anger, they seem to me to have relatively little to do with our ordinary this-worldly conception of and hopes for forgiveness—even assuming that those cases do qualify as forgiveness.

III

Let me turn in this last section of my remarks to the question of the relation between religious and secular views of the topic, raised by Marsh as well as Prusak. This is a deeply interesting issue which I would very much like to learn more about. There are several different questions in the air. Let me distinguish between and address five of them.

To begin with, is unilateral, pre-emptive forgiving traditionally Christian? I am no scholar of Christian doctrine, so in my extremely brief remarks on this point I have relied on correspondence with several who are, in particular my colleague Jennifer Knust (a specialist in early Christian thought and literature at Boston University) and Ilaria Ramelli (a specialist in Patristic philosophy and early Christianity at the Catholic University of Milan). Both are contributors to the aforementioned forthcoming volume on ancient notions of forgiveness. Prusak cites the famous passage from Luke, and states that the Amish see themselves as instructed by Christ's utterance on the cross: forgive them Father, for they know not what they do. First, let us recall that that bit of the text from Luke is unstable: some of the MSS have it, some not. Second, as Jeffrie Murphy pointed out some time ago, Christ's plea on the cross does not offer universal forgiveness. Indeed, Christ cites a reason that effectively turns forgiveness into excuse.⁶ Third, Christ himself doesn't do the forgiving, God the father is supposed to; and we don't know from that text whether or not God is to forgive unilaterally.

A quick glance at several other Gospel passages also make one wonder. Consider Luke 17:3–4: "If your brother wrongs you, reprove him; and if he repents, forgive him. Even if he wrongs you seven times in a day and comes back to you seven times saying, 'I am sorry', you are to forgive him."⁷ So far as I know, Jesus does not say in Luke that the offended person should forgive if the offender does not repent. Consider also that the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 does include the son's admission of wrong and repentance before his father forgives. I note that the prodigal son is characterized as reborn by this process.

Does Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* III q. 86 article 2 sanction unilateral forgiveness? So far as I can tell the text is either ambiguous or does not support unilateral forgiveness. Thomas starts with his Reply by asserting "[i]t is impossible for a mortal actual sin to be pardoned without penance," and ends the paragraph by restating the very same point.⁸ That God does not forgive unilaterally seems clear: as is also indicated by the quotation from Jeremiah that precedes his Reply, not to mention by Thomas's explicit statement: "for the pardon of this offense against God, it is necessary for man's will to be so changed as to turn to God and to renounce having turned to something else in the aforesaid manner, together with a purpose of amendment" (45). And in the Reply to the First Objection, he emphasizes that "in the case of an adult, in whom there are actual sins, which consist in an actual disorder of the will, there is no remission of sins, even in Baptism, without an actual change of the will, which is the effect of Penance" (45). Thomas seems to be referring here to forgiveness by God.

Thomas says that human forgiveness always “presupposes true or apparent goodness in him who is graced” (44; I assume that “graced” means “forgiven”). In private correspondence, Ramelli suggests to me that this may mean that in order to forgive, the offended human being must think that the offender has repented and improved, although one cannot actually know whether this is really the case since only God knows the secret of our hearts and minds, and only God’s forgiveness causes (and not only presupposes) a change and improvement in the offender’s will. In order to forgive, a human being always needs to think, clearly on the basis of some sign, that the other has repented, even though this may not be the case and this repentance may be only “apparent.” I acknowledge, however, that I am far from certain as to the meaning of this part of Thomas’s Reply.

Yet all this suffices to lead me to query whether contemporary views about what counts as “the Christian view”—viz., one recommending unilateral forgiveness—are in fact sanctioned, at least unequivocally, by the Christian tradition, not to mention the Judaic (Maimonides’ discussion of forgiveness explicitly requires steps by the offender; see the opening four chapters of Treatise 5 of *The Book of Knowledge*, Book 1 of his *Mishneh Torah*). One might then ask, if this general interpretive line about the Christian tradition is correct, why so many today—perhaps even the Amish—think that unilateral forgiveness is Christian. I don’t know the answer to that question, but I would guess that in part it reflects the confluence of the self-help literature and Christian thinking that post-dates Bishop Butler.

Duly cautioned about the complexities of enlisting Christianity in support of the position that forgiveness is unconditional or unilateral, let us put these interpretive issues to one side, and turn to a second question. My analysis is framed as secular: that is, I suspend judgment about the truth of any religious framework and simply don’t look very far into how the logic of the concept of forgiveness would work out in that framework. Is this illegitimate? I certainly don’t see why. And if it is, then why doesn’t the point hold for *any* similar topic in moral philosophy (say, the nature of justice)?

To this it could be responded, thirdly, that in singling out as “paradigmatic” the conception of forgiveness I put forward, I have already demoted a religious view. Now, I don’t think that is *necessarily* the case—it depends on the specifics of the religious view in question. If that view holds that God can forgive one’s offenders at will, so to speak, then divine forgiveness is a species of third-party forgiveness and that, I argued, would be “imperfect” or non-paradigmatic in the sense that one would wish for it to be the case that the victim have the first right of forgiveness.

If it is possible in the given religion to be forgiven by God for offenses against God, and if God is immune to injury, then I have to say we are simply talking about different things. For the very phenomenon I am trying to understand—the starting point of most people’s analysis—is that of a person harming another, and the victim responding by forswearing revenge and anger for the right reasons. If no harm is in fact felt, then the response cannot be forgiveness, but might be something else that falls within the same family of concepts.

Fourth, settling the question as to whether or to what extent unilateral forgiveness of one person by another makes sense as a concept doesn't seem to me to hinge on the religious/secular contrast, but on the logic of the matter. Similarly, the logic of the matter is going to determine the meaning of talk about God forgiving, let alone unilaterally—if, that is, we're doing philosophy, as indeed we are.

And this brings us to a final question. Both Marsh and Prusak ask whether it is not the case that humanly speaking, people sometimes need to call on God to help them forswear revenge and anger. Marsh's version of this is much stronger than I would be willing to accept: he writes "I cannot be adequately human without divine help" (Marsh, 301). But I acknowledge the profundity of the question about the limits of human self-sufficiency that leads up to Marsh's statement. I do agree that appeals to God to help one to forgive may under some conditions be indispensable for some victims. I don't think that what these victims then do necessarily fails to qualify as "forgiveness" on my account of the matter—it all depends. At the same time, I would want to insist that it is humanly possible for people to forgive great wrongs without appealing to God, or to the sort of God Marsh is referring to.

Let me conclude by noting that I don't think that forgiveness is a sort of magic bullet. Even if forgiveness is warranted, it may be impossible for a given individual to forgive, in which case help of many different sorts is in order. And if forgiveness is not warranted, it doesn't follow that the victim is doomed to live with toxic resentment and thoughts of revenge. There are other responses to being wronged than forgiveness, and it is a mistake of a lot of the contemporary self-help literature, and some of the religious literature, to suggest that it's forgiveness or nothing.

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Notes

1. I would also like to thank the Program Committee of the ACPA, and William Desmond, for so kindly arranging the panel on my book. The exchange took place on Nov. 1, 2008, at the annual meeting of the ACPA in Omaha, Neb.

2. There is overlap between both parts I and II and my reply to three colleagues who served as critics in an "author meets critics" session held at the Pacific Division meetings of the American Philosophical Association on March 20, 2008. Publication of the APA exchange in *Philosophia* is anticipated.

3. For a fine study of the history of perfectionism, see J. Passmore's *The Perfectionism of Man*, 3rd ed. (rpt. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000).

4. I owe this distinction to P. Hughes's "Moral Anger, Forgiving, and Condoning," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 26 (1995): 111–115. He characterizes these two views of condonation as "approving permissiveness" and "disapproving permissiveness" respectively. He insightfully comments: "Condoners 'treat' wrongdoers as if they have done nothing wrong, and this is surely the main reason condoning is thought to be morally objectionable" (114).

5. In an exchange with Father William Meninger, published in *Tikkun* (March/April 2008; archived at http://www.tikkun.org/article.php?story=forgiveness_articles), the issue of the distinction between condonation and forgiveness receives further attention. Father Meninger concludes his final contribution with this interesting remark: “Also, a word should be said about condoning, taken in the sense of making excuses for the perpetrator. To some degree, this may be necessary. I think that most of the harm people inflict upon one another is viewed quite differently by the perpetrator and by the victim. To the degree that the victim can be brought to see the action of the perpetrator from his point of view, the act of forgiveness can be seen as that much more reasonable—or even perhaps even unnecessary if no harm was intended. The harmful action lives on in the mind of the victim and grows and distorts itself until it sometimes becomes something quite different from what it was in actual fact. An effort to understand this might well lead to some form of condoning. Indeed, is not some form of condoning very explicitly included in the words, ‘Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.’”

6. See J. Murphy, *Getting Even: Forgiveness and its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 36. Murphy also expresses there his doubts that the Christian tradition unequivocally endorses unconditional forgiveness (cf. chap. 8). On the reason Christ gives as turning forgiveness into excuse, see Murphy’s remarks in *Forgiveness and Mercy*, ed. J. G. Murphy and J. Hampton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 20. For more detailed discussion, see A. Bash, *Forgiveness and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

7. In *The New English Bible*, various trans. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

8. I quote from *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas, Third Part*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, fourth number (London: Washbourne, LTD, 1917), 44. Further page references to this Article advert this translation and are included directly in my text.