Ambivalence About Forgiveness

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Abstract
Our ideas about forgiveness seem to oscillate between idealization and scepticism. How should we make sense of this apparent conflict? This paper argues that we should learn something from each, seeing these views as representing opposing moments in a perennial and well-grounded moral ambivalence towards forgiveness. Once we are correctly positioned, we shall see an aspect of forgiveness that recommends precisely this ambivalence. For what will come into view will be certain key psychological mechanisms of moral-epistemic influence – other-addressed and self-addressed mechanisms of moral social construction – that enable forgiveness to function well when it is well-functioning, but which are also *intrinsically prone* to deterioration into one or another form of bad faith. Thus forgiveness is revealed as necessarily containing seeds of its own corruption, showing ambivalence to be a generically appropriate attitude. Moreover, it is emphasized that where forgiver and forgiven are relating to one another in the context of asymmetries of social power, the practice of forgiveness is likely to be further compromised, notably increasing the risk of negative influence on the moral-epistemic states of either the forgiver or the forgiven, or both.

> *…We will only shout with joy, and keep saying, 'It's all over! It's all over!' Listen to me, Nora. You don't seem to realise that it is all over. What is this? – such a cold, set face! My poor little Nora, I quite understand; you don't feel as if you could believe that I have forgiven you. But it is true, Nora, I swear it; I have forgiven you everything.* (Torvald Helmer to his wife Nora, in *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen.)

Our interpersonal practices of forgiveness are fragile and peculiarly prone to deformation of various kinds. Given this fragility, it is not surprising that in philosophy, as in moral thinking generally, we are somewhat prone to mixed attitudes towards forgiveness, being inclined now to idealize it as essential to moral life, and now to mistrust it as involving an inherently dishonest subterfuge. On the one hand we find philosophical accounts that carefully specify ideal forms of forgiveness as a strictly reasoned interpersonal moral justice or (in an alternative ideal) as a special magnanimity of a gracious heart;[1] yet on

[1] For the first ideal, see for example Charles Griswold's paradigm of forgiveness in his *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); for the second, see for example Glen

doi:10.1017/S1358246118000590 ©The Royal Institute of Philosophy and the contributors 2018

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000590 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the other hand there are also significant contemporary exponents of a Nietzschean pessimistic view that denigrates the whole business as a dishonest subterfuge, as one or another form of veiled, possibly self-deceived, interpersonal attack. In this latter connection, witness Martha Nussbaum's recent unqualified excoriation:

> [T]he forgiveness process itself is violent toward the self. Forgiveness is an elusive and usually quite temporary prize held out at the end of a traumatic and profoundly intrusive process of self-denigration. To engage in it with another person (playing, in effect, the role of the confessor) intrudes into that person's inner world in a way that is both controlling and potentially prurient, and does potential violence to the other person's self.[2]

In short, it seems that when it comes to forgiveness we move between admiration and suspicion. What should we make of this conflict? It could of course simply be a matter of one side being plain wrong, or of both sides talking past each other. However, I suspect that these views are best construed as opposing moments in a perennial moral *ambivalence* about forgiveness – an ambivalence that is well grounded. At any rate, I aim to locate a philosophical angle on forgiveness that brings into plain view what is right about each of these opposing perspectives. Once we are correctly positioned, we shall see an aspect of interpersonal forgiveness – considered as a change of heart that is normally though not necessarily communicated to the wrongdoer – which precisely recommends just such an attitude of ambivalence. For what will come into view will be certain key psychological mechanisms of moral influence – both other-addressed and self-addressed – that enable forgiveness to function well when it is well-functioning, but which are also *intrinsically prone* to deterioration into one or another form of bad faith. In particular I hope to highlight that under circumstances of inequality forgiveness can all too easily descend into moral domination – a moral-epistemic wrong whereby one party has undue moral-epistemic influence over the other, steering them into seeing the situation according to the dominator's one-sided moral perspective. A dominating forgiver, moreover, will often do this in a manner that is peculiarly

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Pettigrove's notion of 'grace' in his *Forgiveness and Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[2] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 72–3.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000590 Published online by Cambridge University Press

hard to recognize at the time, because it is in the very nature of forgiving someone that the emotional effort tends to suppress both parties' awareness of the power dynamic, as we shall see – the mechanisms of moral influence on which I shall be focussing are such as to cover their own tracks. To anticipate, the key psychological mechanism in question will emerge as an interpersonal *social constructive* power that is exerted (actively or passively; sometimes knowingly sometimes not; sometimes verbally, sometimes not) by the forgiver who communicates forgiveness to the wrongdoer. Granted that the forgiver is generally responding from a place of moral wounding, the social constructive powers operating as part of the communicative process of forgiveness have a tendency for deterioration, even corruption, so that it becomes compromised, and sometimes badly deformed. If we add into this interpersonal picture a social background such that people are responding to one another's moral claims in the context of unequal social power (like Nora and Torvald, the nineteenth-century bourgeois husband and wife protagonists of Ibsen's famous play), then this significantly increases the risk that the forgiveness expressed (whether verbally or in some other way) will result in moral-epistemic domination. Power inequalities tend to magnify the risks of degeneration that I shall be depicting as already intrinsic to our practices of interpersonal forgiveness. I shall pay some attention to this example by way of illustration as things progress, but my core argument will not depend on issues of the contingent social inequalities between forgiver and forgiven, for my main claim will be a more functional one about some characteristic features *intrinsic* to central forms of forgiveness itself: that the reason why a certain ambivalence towards forgiveness is permanently in order is that the very business of forgiving is intrinsically susceptible to deterioration into manipulative and/or self-deceived forms. While forgiveness plays a profoundly important role in moral life, and remains not only psychologically possible but perhaps all the more precious for its vulnerabilities; still an important fact about the key aspects of forgiveness I shall be bringing under scrutiny here is that they constitute respects in which the relevant kinds of forgiveness necessarily contain the seeds of their own corruption.

Social Constructive Powers Operating in Blame: A 'Proleptic Mechanism'

In order to bring into view the particular psychological mechanism internal to communicated forgiveness that is chiefly relevant to our

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purpose, I must first introduce the mechanism by way of its incarnation within blame. Communicating moral blame to a wrongdoer – understood as a matter of letting her know that you find moral fault with her, thereby effectively urging her, at least provisionally, to see matters more from your point of view – can serve as a fundamental means through which we either shore up existing shared moral understandings, or productively generate new ones. I believe that blame of this kind is crucial to how we maintain and grow shared moral consciousness.[3] But whatever one may think about this idea in relation to how best to theorize blame in general, all may accept that some such communicative practice of blame is capable of reaffirming existing shared moral meanings. This role can hardly be far from the surface of any communicated blame: I wrong you, and you communicate blame to me for it, thereby (at the very least) reminding me of any shared values I have transgressed. That communicated blame is at least sometimes capable of achieving this will not be controversial.

What is less obvious is that communicated blame can involve a mechanism of social construction that belongs to the genus *causal social construction*: in treating X as if it (already) has feature F, one can thereby cause X to come to have feature F (at least to some degree). This is a broad phenomenon, and often discussed in connection with negative cases. Self-fulfilling stereotypes function this way, for instance. If, for example, a portion of the population is treated as if they are financially irresponsible (perhaps the usual terms of bank loans and credit cards are not made available to them), then they are liable to start acting in ways characteristic of the financially irresponsible.[4] The causal power may operate in a way that is mediated attitudinally, or else it may operate more superficially and directly

[3] Elsewhere I argue for this view in relation to what I call Communicative Blame – blame communicated in a manner suitable to elicit remorseful moral understanding on the part of the wrongdoer. See Fricker, 'What's the Point of Blame? A Paradigm Based Explanation', *Noûs* **50**.1 (2014), 165–183.

[4] See Peter P. Swire, 'Equality of Opportunity and Investment in Creditworthiness', *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, **143**.5 (1995), 1533–1559: 'a person may reasonably decide not to bother participating in a lending market that seems discriminatory. And, if a person is in fact approved for a loan in such a market, greater incentives exist to take the money and run, or at least not to strive so valiantly to pay on time' (1534–5). I thank Boudewijn de Bruin for directing me to this work. For a virtue-based account of the broader issues, see de Bruin *Ethics and the Global Financial Crisis: Why Incompetence is Worse than Greed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

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on behaviour, without any psychological mediation. Thus group members may respond to their financial exclusion with an attitude of defiant short-termism ('Let's just spend it while we've got it – the whole system's stacked against us anyway'); or they may have no such change of attitude, but simply be forced by circumstance into unfavourable practical options such as borrowing from loan sharks whose escalating interest rates make the loans impossible to re-pay, sending the borrowers into a spiral of debt. Either way, whether psychologically mediated or not, what we see in the behaviour is the effect of the self-fulfilling prophecy that is causal social construction. One way or the other the group is caused to go in for financially irresponsible behaviour – behaviour that infuriatingly provides an apparent retrospective justification for the original belief and treatment. Such scenarios are obviously highly negative for the group in question. More happily, however, there can also be positive self-fulfilling prophecies. In some circumstances, if you treat another person (not yet trustworthy) as if she were already trustworthy, then she may thereby be caused to become trustworthy. Indeed some have persuasively argued this is a general feature of trusting another person: other things equal, the fact that one has placed one's trust in them, thereby creating common knowledge that one is depending on them, gives the trusted party an added reason and motive to live up to that trust.[5] When this happens, a morally useful piece of causal social construction has taken place interpersonally.

Such interpersonal operations of causal social construction can occur in other areas of ethical life too. Following Bernard Williams' lead, I have elsewhere argued that communicated blame can effect just this kind of morally useful interpersonal social construction.[6] In Williams's exposition we encounter the idea that blame's expression can sometimes have a salutary effect even on a relatively hard-case culprit by way of a 'proleptic mechanism'. And I have argued that we should recognize this mechanism as a fundamental means

[5] See Richard Holton, 'Deciding to Trust, Coming to Believe', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* **72** (1994), 63–76; Paul Faulkner 'Norms of Trust', in A. Haddock, A. Millar, and D. Pritchard (eds.) *Social Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Karen Jones 'Trust as an Affective Attitude', *Ethics* **107**.1 (1996), 4–25.

[6] See Fricker, 'What's the Point of Blame? A Paradigm Based Explanation'; and Bernard Williams, 'Internal Reasons and The Obscurity of Blame', in *Making Sense of Humanity and other philosophical papers 1982–1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

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by which we actively generate new shared moral understandings. When a proleptic mechanism functions within blame, the blamer treats the wrongdoer *as if* he already recognizes a reason (which he does not yet recognize), thereby causing him to come to recognize it.[7] Of course, this proleptic mechanism will only work given the wrongdoer has sufficient basic respect for the blamer to be moved by his admonishments; but so long as that more basic respect is in place, then we see that the proleptic blamer is (possibly unwittingly) exercising a power of *interpersonal moral social construction*. Communicated blame operating proleptically, then, involves an exertion of moral influence that can work to bring the wrongdoer's moral understanding into alignment with that of the wronged party. It is of course contingent how well this works in any given instance, but it surely must work much of the time, for otherwise it is hard to imagine how a genuinely shared moral culture could develop and stabilize itself interpersonally – without its powers to change people, blame communicated to those who do not already share the relevant values would have merely expressive or cathartic value at best.[8] Of

[7] See Williams 'Internal Reasons and The Obscurity of Blame', 40–43. Williams does not use the term 'recognize' of course, which is a term of art on my part. In relation to practical reasons Williams generally used the verb 'have', since his commitment to the doctrine of internal reasons pictures reasons as relativized to a semi-idealized set of motivational states in the agent (her 'S'). From this it follows that the proper description of any case in which a proleptic mechanism has any real work to do must be given in terms of the wrongdoer actually *lacking* a reason the blamer might however cause him to *acquire*. (In Williams's idiom, the bad thing about really bad people is that they really lack moral reasons.) No doubt proleptic mechanisms can cause some other things in this general vicinity: realizing I have a reason I didn't know I had, for instance, because the requisite motive was either already in my motivational set but concealed from me, or because it should have been there but, owing to an error of fact or reasoning on my part, wasn't.

[8] Benjamin Bagley discusses these issues in a way that envisions blame's proleptic action as a matter of retrospectively rendering determinate some patch of the culprit's normative psychology presumed to have previously been less than fully determinate. (See Benjamin Bagley, 'Properly Proleptic Blame', *Ethics* **127** (2017): 852–882. While I would agree that increasing psychological determinacy is indeed one *modus operandi* of prolepsis, and an important one to emphasize, still I do not regard it as the only one. In my view (and I believe in Williams's conception) being blamed is one kind of experience that stands a chance of *changing* one's outlook or sensibility, adding or subtracting an item in one's S, or shifting the order of priority among existing items so as to produce new sound deliberative routes and

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course communicated blame is not the only resource for this purpose, but still without the spontaneous moral reactions of those we wrong, how would we learn the first-order moral significances of our actions in their vivid human colour? It is an important feature of well-functioning blame of this kind ('Communicative Blame' as I call it)[9] that it is not morally dogmatic. The attempt to get the person who has wronged you to see things more from your point of view is the natural means of getting them *to acknowledge the moral significance of what they've done*. But the proper practice of this kind of blame carries no arrogant or narcissistic presumption on the part of the wronged party that her interpretation is unassailable – she is only human and may be over-reacting, or unaware of other aspects of the situation that put a different gloss on things. So the kind of blame appropriate to the morally constructive task will be communicated in a manner that is open to dialogue with the wrongdoer, on pain of moral dogmatism or manipulation. Victoria McGeer has discussed this issue in terms of a potential worry about blame's 'regulatory' role, and she proposes a helpful test in this regard:

> To be respectful of you qua believer is to be respectful of you qua reasoning agent. But in order to be respectful of you in this way, it does not matter that I explicitly aim at getting you to change your beliefs; what matters is that I choose a means whereby your own rational faculties are the proximate cause of the change in your beliefs. That is to say I must offer you argument and/or evidence in favor of *p*… One significant and important test of this fact is that you not only have the power to withhold your belief, but you have the power to challenge my arguments and my evidence, thereby exposing me to the very same process and possibilities to which I expose you – specifically the possibility of changing *my* mind as to the truth of *p* in light of your argumentative response.[10]

Provided we can allow that an argumentatively inexplicit moral-emotional exchange can count as the relevant sort of 'argument' or 'evidence' that is required here, so that for instance your telling me (or

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thus new reasons for the agent. New experiences sometimes change us; new morally relevant experiences sometimes change us morally.

[9] Fricker, 'What's the Point of Blame? A Paradigm Based Explanation'.

[10] Victoria McGeer, 'Civilizing Blame', in D. Justin Coates and Neil A. Tognazzini (eds.), *Blame: Its Nature and Norms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 179.

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perhaps merely showing me) that I hurt and offended you when I made some thoughtless quip is enough to count as your moral argument, and my feeling sorry and ashamed when I see how my stupid remark has upset you can count as sufficient for my own rational faculties being the proximate cause of the change in my beliefs, then McGeer's proposed test strikes me as exactly right.[11] It makes precise what is achieved in the more general condition of blame's being open to dialogue and potential push-back on the part of the blamed party.

So far so good: blame communicated with a view to getting the wrongdoer to appreciate the moral significance of what she's done need not be disrespectful, dogmatic, or bullying. But still, what of its pitfalls? It is generally fairly close to the surface of any communicated blame that it is prone to deteriorated formations: excessive anger, retributive impulse, high-handedness, moralism, *ressentiment*, and so forth. We are on the whole only too aware of these risks in everyday moral interaction; hence the popular suspicion of blame as a moral response. However, the present focus is not on the merits or demerits of this or that kind of blame, but rather on blame's sheer capacity to operate proleptically by way of an interpersonal psychological mechanism whose generic form I have suggested we should recognize as that of causal social construction, and the inherent riskiness that this introduces – riskiness as regards the likelihood that any given blamer, coming from a place of moral wounding, will step over the mark and be less open to dialogue than they should be. Proleptic blame, in virtue of its ambition to *change* the other party, is a highly valuable moral response to wrongdoing; and yet the very power in which its special value inheres runs a special risk that the wounded party may bully the wrongdoer into a one-sided view of the putative wrong done, and thus effect a moment of moral-epistemic domination.

This proleptic mode of blame and its attendant risk indicates where we should look for our desired angle on forgiveness: Might forgiveness sometimes involve a proleptic mechanism too? If it does, or inasmuch as it does, then I think we may locate the position from which to view forgiveness so that the two conflicting perspectives on it – now

[11] Insisting on more explicitly articulate moral argumentation would seem intellectualist, and not in the spirit of McGeer's general Strawsonian approach; so I take myself, I hope correctly, to be presenting McGeer's self-same view when I stretch the notions of 'argumentation', 'evidence' and own 'proximal reasons' to encompass the rational sensitivities that are expressed in an exchange of spontaneous moral reactive attitudes and feelings.

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admiration, even idealization; now mistrust, even cynicism – are resolved into one complex image of an essential human response to wrongdoing whose second-personal communication normally involves, consciously or not, an operation of moral influence on the other party. Ambivalence will prove to be in order because, as with most exercises of power, however benignly intended or plain unwitting, there is a built-in risk of tipping over into morally problematic forms such as moral-epistemic domination. Let me now explore the different proleptic moments in our practices of forgiving, so that we may be led to some answers about what forms of bad faith are perpetually in the offing when we forgive.

Proleptic Moral Powers Implicit in Forgiveness

Now we have introduced the idea of a significant power of other-directed moral-social construction that can operate in communicated blame, we have a lens that will help us discern similar proleptic moments secreted in the structures forgiveness. What might these be? Let us scrutinize what I take to be the two main kinds of forgiveness, both of which essentially involve an attitudinal change towards the wrongdoer that may or may not be communicated. First, a 'conditional' kind according to which the forgiveness is earned or justified through remorse and/or apology on the culprit's part;[12] and an essentially 'unconditional', or 'elective' kind where the forgiveness is precisely un-earned or 'unmerited', its distinctive moral value consisting largely in this fact.[13] I trust I can take these two broad types as understood and recognizable from everyday life as well as from the philosophical literature that details their possible contours. At any rate,

[12] For some recent views of this kind see Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*; Pamela Hieronymi, 'Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, **62**.3 (2001), 529–555; Jeffrie Murphy in Jean Hampton and Jeffrie Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge University Press, 1998); Christopher Bennett, 'Personal and Redemptive Forgiveness', *European Journal of Philosophy* **11**.2 (2003), 127–144; among many others.

[13] For some recent views of this kind see Pettigrove, *Forgiveness and Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Lucy Allais 'Wiping the Slate Clean: The Heart of Forgiveness', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* **36**.1 (2008), 33-68; and 'Elective Forgiveness', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* **21**.5 (2013), 637–653; and Eve Garrard and David McNaughton, 'In Defence of Unconditional Forgiveness', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, **103**.1 (2004), 39–60.

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for a theoretically minimal working model of the first kind – the earned kind of forgiveness that waits for (something approximating) remorseful apology – let us rely on P. F. Strawson's characterization of the 'reactive attitude and feeling' of forgiveness. He characterises it as essentially involving the forgiver's *forswearing* of (what I shall neutrally gloss as) blame-feelings towards the wrongdoer once the wrongdoer has offered a *repudiation* of the wrong done:

> To ask to be forgiven is in part to acknowledge that the attitude displayed in our actions was such as might properly be resented and in part to repudiate that attitude for the future…; and *to forgive is to accept the repudiation and to forswear the resentment*.[14]

This kind of forgiveness, let us notice in passing, might be seen to carry a risk that the demanding attitude it waits on becomes excessive or controlling ('Let's hear that repudiation loud and clear – tell me just how wicked you've been!'). This is the corruption that Nussbaum rightly draws critical attention to. It has nothing to do with proleptic mechanisms, but rather the tendency for conditional forgiveness to become blame-ridden, so that the forgiveness invisibly straightens into another stick to beat the wrongdoer with. Later we shall see that this tendency to become blame-ridden is in fact a risk that adheres to *any* kind of forgiveness that is spoken, but for the time being let us note that the particular form of corruption that Nussbaum highlights is less a corruption of the forgiveness itself but rather of the *blame* that is its condition and precursor. For as soon as the proper business of forgiving – namely the forswearing of blame-feeling – is under way, the intrusive excess that Nussbaum characterizes as potentially involving a kind of psychological violence is by definition already over. But even if we allow that the blamer's demand is also part and parcel of the forgiver's stance, which perhaps it is, still I see no reason to agree with her blanket view that all kinds of forgiveness require the fulfilment of demands that are intrusive or moralistic, let alone psychologically violent. There is no reason to lose faith in the possibility of gentler, generous, and non-excessively demanding forms of conditional forgiveness; though we certainly do well to heed her warning about the risks.

This much I find to be somewhat on the surface of our practices and not concealed – largely for the reason just mentioned, namely that the corruptions of conditional forgiveness as regards what it

[14] P. F. Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment', in *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1974), 6 (italics added).

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does to the wrongdoer are really corruptions internal to the communicated blame that precedes it, and we are generally alive to the likely corruptions of blame. What is more opaque, I believe, is how the second kind of forgiveness – an unconditional kind of forgiveness I shall call Gifted Forgiveness[15] – may itself be prone to deterioration into forms of moral dogmatism and manipulation. It looks rather unlikely on the surface, because the whole point about any unconditional forgiveness is that its distinctive feature is its *non-demandingness* towards the culprit. The gifting forgiver demands no repudiation of the wrong. Rather he abstains from the normal entitlements of the wounded party in relation to a wrongdoer, and forgives anyway, even though the normal conditions of forgiveness are not satisfied. For this reason some aptly describe this kind of forgiveness as involving an 'unmerited' act of grace.[16] So if the gifting forgiver just lets the culprit go free in this way, without moral demand, then it seems obscure how such a practice would have any features that render it intrinsically prone to descend into any kind of moral-epistemic bullying. But I believe our newly acquired awareness of the subtle operation of proleptic mechanisms in moral relations promises to shine some light on this relative obscurity.

In Gifted Forgiveness the distinctive feature, as we have just remarked, is that the wronged party forgives *for free*; that is, without demanding any prior repudiation of the wrong. Thus Gifted Forgiveness is given as an arrestingly generous, because normatively transgressive, moral gratuity. Now, what we have not yet observed about this phenomenon is that this norm-busting moral gratuity tends to induce a certain effect in the forgiven party: the gift-forgiven wrongdoer, in recognizing the transgressively generous nature of the gift, may be jolted after the fact into the humility that ushers in remorseful recognition of her wrongdoing. Gifted Forgiveness, exploiting as it does a background common knowledge that some sort of repudiation is the normal condition on appropriate forgiveness, is structured perfectly to exert a power of moral-social construction: if we look carefully we can discern that the structure of this interpersonal moral exchange is the already familiar one of *prolepsis*. In this case the proleptic mechanism is as follows: the gifting forgiver effectively treats the wrongdoer *as if she already* satisfied the normal

[15] See Miranda Fricker, 'Forgiveness: An Ordered Pluralism', *Australian Philosophical Review* (forthcoming).

[16] Glen Pettigrove, *Forgiveness and Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), chapter 7.

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condition on appropriate forgiveness, thereby causing her (if the mechanism achieves its end) to fulfil that very condition after all.

The *gift* in Gifted Forgiveness is not merely the commitment to direct no (further) blame-feelings towards the wrongdoer for what they have done, though that is surely part of it. Rather the gift more importantly includes a commitment to a morally optimistic perception of the wrongdoer, as someone who 'knows better' or 'knows better *really*', and who is therefore capable of repudiating the wrong they have done and perhaps acting differently in the future. Proleptic forgiveness directly addresses itself to the wrongdoer's better nature. Moreover the gifting forgiver's cart-before-horse forswearing of blame-feeling affirms the possibility, perhaps the hope, that the wrongdoer's better nature may soon *actually* come to the fore, somewhat precipitated by the very fact of having been forgiven in this normatively transgressive, un-earned manner. I trust this underlines the fact that the kind of power exercised by the gifting forgiver (whether he knows it or not, intends it or not) is indeed a power of *causal moral-social construction*: in treating the wrongdoer as if they already fulfilled the condition of conditional forgiveness he causes them to fulfil it (if they do) after the fact. Here we discern the generally morally progressive proleptic mechanism detected in the very structure of Gifted Forgiveness.

Before we move on to the ways in which this mechanism creates a risk of deterioration into moral domination, let me emphasize two points regarding what is meant by the idea of the proleptic mechanism being 'built in' to the practice. First, a practice having a proleptic power built into its structure does not entail that it always, or even ordinarily, achieves its point. The aim built into the structure of solo card games of 'solitaire' or 'patience' is to get all the suits to work out in sequence; but that only actually happens about half the time, if that. Or consider another ethical practice, briefly mentioned earlier: trusting someone to do something. One's trust will certainly not always have the effect that the practice aims at, but still the rationale of the practice depends on the idea that it is well designed to have the effect, other things equal. So it is, I am suggesting, with Gifted Forgiveness. Just like trusting someone to do something, gift forgiving will *tend*, other things equal, to bring about a certain morally desirable psychological effect. There are limits to the analogy of course. I would not wish to insist, for instance, that the act of Gifted Forgiveness provides the wrongdoer with an added moral reason to repudiate her wrongs (though it surely might in some contexts); but certainly the analogy holds in that the act of Gifted Forgiving, like the act of trusting, is apt to move the forgiven party

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in the morally desirable direction. It is not guaranteed – far from it – but the practice is culturally evolved to tend towards this effect. Indeed, as Glen Pettigrove has argued, there is some empirical evidence for a fairly high estimation of the 'transformative power' of this kind of forgiveness (which he conceives as involving an act of grace, understood as an act of unmerited favour).[17]

The second point concerns the forgiver's moral motivations. Also like trust, while Gifted Forgiveness may be practised entirely non-strategically and guilelessly as regards the proleptic power it contains, still there need be nothing manipulative or ungenerous, let alone bullying, about a clear-eyed forgiver who did engage in the practice in full consciousness of its implicit rationale, or even who employed it as a deliberate moral strategy. Such a clear-eyed gift forgiver might simply see that gifting the forgiveness is the best-bet response in a case where anything else is only going to entrench moral hostilities. Forgiveness can be somewhat strategic without thereby being manipulative, for having a moral strategy in how to deal with a difficult situation – for instance one in which someone has wronged you but is only likely to get more hostile if you confront them about it – is manifestly an instance of moral wisdom. A good deal of our moral lives is a matter of coping with each other's moral limitations, including our own, so the everyday strategies – ethical common sense, one might say – about how best to handle this or that situation of wrongdoing, hurt feelings, on-going vulnerabilities and resistances is part and parcel of wise moral response. The bottom line, as with blame, is that provided the Gifted Forgiveness prompts the wrongdoer to an appropriate remorseful moral understanding of which a proximal cause is her own moral sensibility (which might simply be a matter of her coming to feel truly sorry as a result of the blamer's bringing her to a more realistic and vivid perception of the hurt she'd caused him), then there need be nothing manipulative or ungenerous about the proleptic purpose.

This completes the case for the claim that Gifted Forgiveness inherently operates a proleptic mechanism, whether actively employed by a savvy forgiver whose pity for the wrongdoer contains the knowledge that nothing else can help him now but the gratuitous generosity of the person wronged, or merely passively operative through a forgiver who is entirely focussed on a personal ethical ideal of a wilfully open heart. As ever, the particular moral-cultural formation of Gifted Forgiveness is highly contingent, capable of manifesting itself in a religious form, or in a secular one; perhaps a formation that is primarily

[17] Pettigrove, *Forgiveness and Love*, 126, and see also 140 nn. 57, 58.

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focussed on the moral health of the forgiver, or alternatively on that of the wrongdoer, or of course both. Either way, this kind of communicated Gifted Forgiveness is invested with a power of *causal moral-epistemic social construction* that is apt to prompt the wrongdoer to repudiate her bad action after the fact. I have argued that this prompting depends upon the wrongdoer being moved by the norm-busting generosity displayed by the forgiver who does not demand repudiation up front but rather forgives as a matter of moral gratuity; and I have argued that it need not be manipulative, even when it is part of a self-conscious moral strategy. However, with the potency of this psychological dynamic put before us, I hope we are now better positioned to see how this kind of forgiveness is nonetheless intrinsically susceptible to deterioration into something that *is* manipulative, and potentially a form of moral-epistemic domination.

Corruptions of Proleptic Powers

Let us start with the obvious point that Gifted Forgiveness is a special kind of gift giving. The general comparison is instructive, for the giving of gifts needs to be done in the right spirit. Quite what the right spirit requires will vary from context to context. But, for example, in contexts where there is a general background presumption of reciprocation other things equal, giving something in the right spirit will depend on achieving a certain delicate balance between simple generosity (it's for *them*) and a perfectly proper background awareness that this sort of thing is generally reciprocal (maybe if they never gave you a present in return, you might stop bothering to get them one – that'd be fair enough; and anyway it might be socially ill-judged, even mildly coercive, to persist). The giving of birthday presents can be like this in a given circle of friends. But too much motivational focus on the prospect of receiving something in return instrumentalizes generosity, and your gift is rendered a travesty. In other contexts, the expectation of like-for-like reciprocation may not be at issue, but rather some other kind of obliquely expected goal that is lodged in the rationale of the practice. In Gifted Forgiveness the relevant expectation will concern the forgiven party's potential prompting into a repudiation of her bad action. Here the 'right spirit' requires maintaining a balance between forgiving out of generosity but in the context of a (perhaps not-so-background) awareness that this may prompt a change in the wrongdoer. As regards the aim of successfully pricking the conscience of the wrongdoer, quite how much motivational prominence

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can be tolerated in a given context without spoiling the proper spirit of moral generosity will surely vary with the situation and relationship. (There are some contexts in which the only non-spoiling answer to the question 'Why did you forgive me?' would be 'Because you're my friend'. Others in which it would be perfectly fine to say 'Because I could see that nothing else was going to get us anywhere'.[18]) However we can say that in any given case, too much motivational emphasis on the aim of changing the wrongdoer risks over-instrumentalizing the forgiveness and thereby spoiling the spirit of moral generosity of which, at its best, it is the open-hearted expression: too much trying to change others descends into manipulation and even an attempt at moral-epistemic domination. The spirit of even the savviest, most influence-aware gifting forgiver is not one of pulling the strings of puppet wrongdoers. And relatedly, as in the case of communicated blame, the well-functioning practice of communicated Gifted Forgiving gives no shelter to moral dogmatism. Rather it remains open to dialogue and pushback from the wrongdoer. So the balance of generosity and attempted moral influence that is inherent in any Gifted Forgiving is a delicate one. Maintaining the right spirit involves resisting two closely related deteriorations: the over-instrumentalization that would cast one's forgiveness too much as a mere means of securing the desired moral response from the wrongdoer; and the closedness to dialogue that amounts to moral dogmatism as regards the content of the moral-epistemic perspective one hopes to bring them to take up. The attitude behind well-functioning Gifted Forgiving might often be one of hopefulness (that the wrongdoer will come around), and even moral confidence about one's interpretation of events; yet, as in the case of communicative blaming, that confidence is partly earned through a continued *openness to dialogue* (as regards the moral content of the claim of wrongdoing), and a willingness to revise one's interpretation of events where countervailing responses are forthcoming.[19]

These balanced attitudes are difficult to maintain interpersonally at the best of times. If we add to this the fact that the forgiver will always be coming from a place of some moral wounding, then we see all the more clearly how easily the proleptic power implicit in Gifted Forgiveness can descend into attempted moral domination. Let us imagine a situation in which the Gifting Forgiver is forgiving a

[18] I thank David Enoch for a helpful discussion of these issues.

[19] Here, as earlier, I am indebted to McGeer's discussion of the 'regulation' worry in relation to blame (McGeer, 'Civilizing Blame').

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genuine wrong done in a context of social equality. Perhaps we can imagine two friends, whose relationship is not characterized by any notable inequalities of social power, where one has betrayed the other in some way, and the wronged party aims to forgive her friend even though Friend (let us call her) does not seem to be fully acknowledging what she has done, and indeed there is some question in the mind of the forgiver as to whether Friend is in some denial about its moral seriousness. In a situation like this, the forgiver may hope that Friend, in being gift forgiven, might be prompted to acknowledge the full significance of the betrayal. So far so all right. And yet it is not difficult to see how this could easily descend into something less well-balanced and more controlling, as our forgiver might be frustrated by what she sees as Friend's under-estimation of the wrong, and repeatedly communicates her magnanimous gesture of forgiveness as a means to prompt Friend into some sort of moral realization that matches the forgiver's perception of things. What begins as a legitimate hopeful effort of moral influence can all too easily intensify, when insufficiently dialogically open, into an excessive emphasis on the goal of prompting a preconceived desired change in the moral-epistemic states of the wrongdoer. Where there is interpersonal moral dogmatism there is manipulation, and in some cases to a degree that merits description as moral-epistemic domination.

This is especially so if we take seriously the possibility that Friend, considered by the hurt party to be under-estimating the moral seriousness of her conduct, may not be so much in denial as in a state of some genuine disagreement about the moral significance of her behaviour. The moral meanings of our actions are often contested and up for negotiation. ('I admit that what I did was pretty thoughtless, but to say it was a "betrayal of our friendship" is melodramatic… But now I don't even have the chance to discuss it, because apparently I am "already forgiven".') How does our supposedly generously fast-tracked forgiveness look now that we see it in this light? Its would-be generous one-sidedness seems to have deteriorated into a technique of silencing the other party and imposing a one-sided moral interpretation. Here the wrongdoer is paying a price for the very absence of moral demand – demand for upfront repudiation and therefore the opportunity for dialogue – that the practice frames as an act of generosity towards her. In such a case, the Gifted Forgiveness may be entirely well-intentioned and yet it is facilitating an inadvertent act of moral-epistemic domination. (We can easily imagine cases that are less well-intentioned and less inadvertent too of course.) The ever-present risk in the great one-sided emotional efforts of the Gifting

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Forgiver is that she simply by-passes the opportunity for moral dialogue and contestation that communicated blame is likely to openly inspire.[20] Thus we see how Gifted Forgiveness can be employed, whether innocently or strategically, to pre-empt dialogue and thereby to impose the hurt party's moral interpretation in a way that renders it somewhat immune to challenge. The purported wrongdoer who might have gladly taken up an opportunity to challenge the forgiver's moral-epistemic perspective is effectively pre-empted, wrong-footed, perhaps altogether silenced.

Interestingly this kind of moral-epistemic domination through pre-emptive Gift Forgiving can occur even in cases where the Gifted Forgiveness is not communicated to them. Imagine someone with something of a martyr complex privately Gift Forgiving another who they feel has wronged them; yet where the best interpretation of their magnanimous one-sided and secret gift is that they are thereby protecting themselves from any dialogue that might challenge the idea that they have been wronged. The purported wrongdoer in this scenario may not even be aware that she is regarded as having done something wrong, and yet she is already forgiven for it – the nature of her alleged moral crime thus self-servingly fixed in the psychology of the forgiver.

Even between two subjects of roughly equal social power and status, this much flows all too naturally from the very nature of Gifted Forgiveness as a one-sided fast-tracked form of forgiveness that speeds past the usual stage of communicated blame and the dialogue it invites. Add into this cocktail a twist of social inequality between the two parties, and things are likely to deteriorate further. In situations of greater social power on the part of the forgiver, his communication of Gifted Forgiveness will wield *undue moral-epistemic influence* on the alleged wrongdoer because, let's imagine, we are in bourgeois circles in a nineteenth-century Norwegian town and the forgiver is the 'husband' who is master in his home and the wrongdoer his 'wife'. In Torvald and Nora's case, as quoted in my epigraph, he is forgiving her for something authentically culpable – she committed a significant crime (fraud) that exposed them to blackmail. Happily the blackmail threat swiftly abated, though not before Torvald had been decidedly foul to Nora so that the scales fell from her eyes as regards the meaning of their marriage and of her imposed infantilized existence. As the master of the house, Torvald exercises an unduly inflated authority in general, and this looks ready to spill over into their moral exchange. For much of the play

[20] I thank Antony Duff and Christel Fricke for discussion of this point.

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one might find both Torvald and Nora pretty insufferable, but even if they had both already been feminists of their time there would be limits to how far they could expunge the patriarchy from their relationship, for it is delivered in the gendered identities they are lumbered with, and in the institution of marriage that rigidifies and incentivizes them. (One recalls John Stuart Mill's statement in which he repudiated the 'odious powers' conferred on him in marrying Harriet Taylor and lamented the impossibility of legally divesting himself of them.) Even when the parties dissent, the social statuses in which one is operating still tend to insinuate themselves through the passive operation of identity power.[21] Despite best efforts, the very relationships we stand in can unbalance the everyday forms of moral influence that would otherwise (in a situation of equality) be more straightforward and candid. Even if you are critically aware of those unequal social statuses, still the forgiveness that may flow between you and another is likely to be compromised in some measure. Perhaps you presume too easily that if someone does not repudiate their action then they are surely in denial, or plain wrong; or perhaps you presume too much as regards the credentials of your moral interpretations, and wind up imposing them on others who are not enabled to challenge you effectively. At any rate, the point is simply that whatever risk of descent into moral manipulation already inheres in the proleptic mechanism as wielded by someone who has been morally wounded, it is likely to become heightened if for reasons of social power the forgiver exercises an asymmetrical moral authority.

Let us stay with Torvald and Nora for a moment longer to see what else we may observe regarding this subject of Gifted Forgiveness's deterioration into a tool of moral-epistemic domination when operating in a context of unequal power. Here we find them at the moment when Torvald has discovered they are released from the threat of blackmail to which Nora's crime had exposed them:

> Torvald: …We will only shout with joy, and keep saying, 'It's all over! It's all over!' Listen to me, Nora. You don't seem to realise that it is all over. What is this? – such a cold, set face! My poor little Nora, I quite understand; you don't feel as if you could believe that I have forgiven you. But it is true, Nora, I swear it; I have forgiven you everything. I know that what you did, you did out of love for me.

[21] I set out the idea of 'identity power' in chapter 1 of *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

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> Nora: That is true.
>
> Torvald: You have loved me as a wife ought to love her husband. Only you had not sufficient knowledge to judge of the means you used. But do you suppose you are any the less dear to me, because you don't understand how to act on your own responsibility? No, no; only lean on me; I will advise you and direct you. I should not be a man if this womanly helplessness did not just give you a double attractiveness in my eyes. You must not think anymore about the hard things I said in my first moment of consternation, when I thought everything was going to overwhelm me. I have forgiven you, Nora; I swear to you I have forgiven you.

Something that is very noticeable here is that Torvald is operating with a rigid presumption that he knows exactly what has gone on morally, showing zero interest in anything Nora might have to say on the subject. He prattles on, presuming she has nothing to contribute besides perhaps contrition and gratitude. Torvald's spontaneous forgiveness (I don't say it's exactly Gifted Forgiveness – he may or may not be presuming she is remorseful as he pays so little heed to the idea of her as a moral agent) pre-empts the possibility of achieving any genuinely shared moral understanding of what has gone on between him and his wife. Instead he is only interested in his own understanding, and just assumes Nora will see things his way. That is what he is used to doing in every other area of their life, and so it is presumed here. Of course we know that Nora ultimately refuses all this, and the only way she can communicate it is by leaving with the famous final door slam. What is somewhat on display in this passage, I would suggest, is the closedness to dialogue that we have identified as signifying moral-epistemic domination. *Chez* Torvald and Nora this stems largely from the social institutions of gender and marriage, and the way in which he has all along constructed her as barely responsible or able to think for herself – a performance of gender ideology in which she has so far actively colluded. These contemporary kinds of unequal social identity positions – 'husband' who is master and protector, 'wife' who is obedient and protected – play directly into the hands of the intrinsic tendencies for corruption already identified in the very psychological mechanisms of Gifted Forgiving. Those intrinsic tendencies chart twin patterns of deterioration: what may start as a candid attempt at respectful moral influence descends into manipulation, even moral-epistemic domination; and what starts with a generous sparing of the wrongdoer from the travails of condemnation deteriorates into the silencing of potential moral contestation.

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Other Intrinsic Tendencies Toward Deteriorated Forgiving – Blame's Return

I have so far been focusing exclusively on the likely corruptions that come from something special to Gifted Forgiveness, namely the *other-directed* proleptic mechanism that is internal to it. I would like in this last section to broaden our purview a little and look for other tendencies towards deterioration that may be either essential or at least normal features of forgiveness in general – that is, conditional forgiveness as well as the central kind of unconditional forgiveness that is Gifted Forgiving. The first point I shall discuss was briefly flagged at the outset in relation to all communicated forgiving and does not depend on any prolepsis. Instead it stems from an observation about the power of *presupposition* – specifically here its power to render expressions of forgiveness surreptitiously blame-ridden. The second point will return us to proleptic mechanisms, but not of the familiar *other-directed* kind, but rather to a kind that is intriguingly *self-directed* – a moment of reflexive causal moral-social construction that is often involved in the forswearing of blame-feelings, whether expressed or kept private.

First, the power of presupposition. Forgiveness in general presupposes that the person to be forgiven is *blameworthy*. Though possibly not an absolutely universal rule, it would be a rare scenario in which one would be in a position to forgive someone who was not at fault and so blameworthy for their actions.[22] So the presupposition of blameworthiness is generally apt – part of the generic logic of forgiveness. But presuppositions can be unruly – noisier than they are intended or pretended to be, and insidiously influential. Rae Langton discusses the introduction of presuppositions into conversational contexts in terms of 'back-door testimony'.[23] Her particular interest is in how back-door testimony of an objectionable kind – it might be prejudiced

[22] Espen Gamlund has argued that we can make sense of forgiving someone even for a wrong that was wholly excused (see Gamlund 'Forgiveness Without Blame' in Christel Fricke (ed.), *The Ethics of Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 2011). And Nicolas Cornell has argued that one can forgive someone pre-emptively, before they perpetrate the wrongdoing (Cornell, 'The Possibility of Pre-emptive Forgiving', *Philosophical Review* **126**.2 (2017), 241–272).

[23] Rae Langton, 'Blocking as Counter-Speech', in Daniel Harris, Daniel Fogal, and Matt Moss (eds.), *New Work on Speech Acts*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). Langton draws explicitly on David Lewis's notion of 'rules of accommodation' in 'Scorekeeping in a Language Game', *Journal of Philosophical Logic* **8** (1979): 339–359.

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speech, for instance – can be 'blocked'; and how if it isn't blocked then it winds up effectively 'accommodated'. Accommodation keeps the presupposition in play as something all parties to the conversation have at least passively allowed in. Back-door testimony takes a significant effort of conversational disruption to block, for one has to first make the presupposition explicit and then challenge it. This amounts to stopping the conversational action ('Cut!') and forcing something into shot whose presence was intended to be only obliquely sensed off-screen. Such challenges are not always easy; though they certainly can be made, as Langton illustrates:

> Attempts to block can be…mundane, like this light-hearted and high-decibel exchange I witnessed in 1990, at a Melbourne football game:
>
> St. Kilda supporter to sluggish player: 'Get on with it, Laurie, you great girl!'
>
> Alert bystander: 'Hey, what's wrong with a girl?'
>
> St. Kilda supporter: 'It's got no balls, that's what's wrong with it!'[24]

Langton analyses this 'great girl' speech act as doing at least two things – implicitly *testifying* that girls aren't up to much when it comes to football; and implicitly *legitimating* broader *norms* that give men a dominant role. And of course the bystander 'blocks' these things by challenging the presupposition. Langton goes on to present a mode of blocking that functions by explicitating and challenging the presupposition, thereby de-authorizing the speaker so that his/her speech act misfires. Unlike Langton's 'great girl' example, in which the objectionable nature of the presupposition is that it is false or at least condescending to women, so that de-authorizing it is an appropriate aim; in the case of forgiveness my point is not at all that there is anything wrong with the content of the presupposition. There isn't: forgiveness generally presupposes blameworthiness. My point is rather that the presupposition, and the implicit assertion of blameworthiness that it entails, can all too easily degenerate – especially given that the would-be forgiver is emerging from a moral wounding – into serving as a vehicle for back-door blaming. Under the surreptitious influence of the back-door assertion of blameworthiness, an initial attempt at forgiving can unfortunately deteriorate into a mere reassertion of the fact that they did wrong. Blame smuggles itself back on set, concealed in a cloak of forgiveness. Thus we can see how the presupposition of blameworthiness entails

[24] Langton, 'Blocking as Counter-Speech', 3.

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that when one communicates forgiveness one thereby implicitly expresses the view that the person is blameworthy. This is an aspect of forgiveness that calls for an active repression of the blaming attitude to keep it off-screen where it now belongs, if indeed you really are forswearing the blame-feelings it inspires. This brings me to the second point – the point about what is typically involved in any forgiver's internal self-disciplinary effort to forswear his blame-feelings.

Now that we are sensitized to the operation of proleptic mechanisms we can look away from other-directed forms of causal social construction and turn our gaze inward to the first-personal aspect of forgiveness. What one does in forgiving, if I may continue to use Strawson's characterization (which I think is indeed apt for forgiveness in general) is *forswear* blame-feelings towards the wrongdoer for what she's done. That is, we commit to drastically reducing such feelings, and if possible relinquishing them altogether. So how do we achieve this? Sometimes it will be easy and spontaneous – the wrongdoer repudiates her action and we instantly feel the indignation, annoyance, or hurt simply evaporate without effort. In such cases, forgiveness comes upon one passively in the form of spontaneous relief from the burdens of blame-feeling. Sometimes, however, it is not at all easy and spontaneous. Often, and certainly in the case of more serious wrongdoing, or repeated wrongdoing that makes blame-feeing linger and grow from one occasion to the next like an intensifying allergic reaction, it is a serious job of work to follow through on the forswearing. What does a forgiver do who finds that his blame-feelings do not melt away swiftly but instead call for an enduring effort of forswearing? The answer is that he will typically, and quite properly, have recourse to a common behavioural technique: he will behave *as if* the blame-feelings have already subsided more than they have, largely as a means of causing them to further subside. That is to say he'll try to act normal as a means of helping him bring his emotions into line. Our earlier discussions of other-directed prolepsis equips us now to recognize this technique of emotional self-discipline as one of *self-directed prolepsis*: the forgiver behaves *as if* he already had feature F and, if successful, he thereby comes to have feature F.[25] Forswearing, when it is not easy and instead requires on-going

[25] This is very close to Agnes Callard's idea of self-addressed proleptic reasons that take the form of 'self-management reasons' (Callard, 'Proleptic Reasons', in Russ Shafer-Landau (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* **2** (2016); and also somewhat to David Velleman's idea that sometimes in order to embrace an ideal we must pretend to it (Velleman, 'Motivation

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emotional and attitudinal self-discipline, employs a strategy of reflexive causal moral-social construction. If you like, one *performs* a completed forgiveness on the outside in order to progress the requisite inward change of heart.[26]

This is on the whole a sound technique. But we can see how it too carries an inherent risk of descent into self-deception. Why? Because if I behave as if I have already relinquished blame-feeling towards another party, I am precisely *not attending* to the blame-feelings that do in fact persist. Non-attention to such residual feelings is part of the self-constructive technique. I need to ignore them in order that they may subside further, staying determinedly out of touch with those feelings *pro tem*, in order to push ahead with the business of forswearing them which involves some successful relinquishing of them.[27] This methodological denial is a proleptic technique we often rely on, and rightly so. But of course this very technique makes it likely that in the event that I cannot in fact rid myself of those significant blame-feelings towards the wrongdoer, then I am not well placed to see it. Indeed I may be the last to know, for the reason I cannot see it is that I'm too busy doing just what I was meant to be doing if only the technique had worked – looking the other way, and generally carrying on as if the blame-feelings were already in the past. So long as well-functioning forswearing of blame-feeling calls upon the would-be forgiver to actively ignore and cultivate a methodological denial about her continued blame-feelings, then it is obvious that the signature pitfall of this core aspect of any effortful forgiveness is self-deception; possibly accompanied by deception of others too, notably the wrongdoer, not to mention a likely pattern passive-aggressive reactions to them. What starts out as a sensible transitional technique – perhaps even an

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by Ideal', *Philosophical Explorations* **5**.2 (2002): 89–103). But in the case I am describing here, the forgiver already embraces the reason and motive to forgive; she is simply trying to get her continuing or residual blame-feelings to catch up.

[26] For the related idea that the justification of a speech act of forgiveness may precede the requisite change of heart, see Kathryn Norlock, *Forgiveness From A Feminist Perspective* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

[27] Charles Griswold suggests that a success condition of forswearing is that one has had at least a little success already at actually relinquishing the blame-feelings, and this seems right, on pain of the commitment being empty – forswearing is more than lip-service. See Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*.

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essential one – slows all too easily into a drawn-out performance of bad faith.

Conclusion

I started with the observation that our attitudes towards forgiveness seem to be conflicted, exhibiting a certain habit of idealization on the one hand, and a pessimistic scepticism on the other. I have argued, however, that the lesson we should take from these conflicting attitudes is that forgiveness rightly inspires ambivalence – an ambivalence that is grounded in deep interpersonal and intrapersonal features of what is often involved in forgiving someone. Firstly, Gifted Forgiveness involves an operation of proleptic moral influence – an *other-directed* social constructive power that is intrinsically prone to deterioration into manipulation, even moral-epistemic domination, especially under conditions of inequality. Second, I drew attention to the generic fact that blameworthiness is presupposed to forgiveness, so that any communication of forgiveness inevitably invokes the fact of blameworthiness, with the result that the forgiver may easily find herself inadvertently communicating not only forgiveness but also, and perhaps chiefly, *back-door blame*. And, finally, I turned our gaze inwards to the first-personal effort of forswearing blame-feelings that constitutes the emotional core of all forgiveness, and I observed that wherever the forswearing requires some effort it will tend to call upon another kind of prolepsis: a *self-directed* form of moral-social construction. This mechanism depends upon a certain methodological denial about one's persisting blame-feelings, and so renders the would-be forgiver notably vulnerable to self-deception as regards her level of success.

These three different kinds of deterioration in our quite genuine efforts to forgive tend towards one or another form of bad faith. Moreover they attend our efforts of forgiveness owing to intrinsic features of the practice, rather than accidental aspects of the social environment. In particular, I have hoped to make plain that the *other-directed* prolepsis operating within Gifted Forgiveness, and the *self-directed* prolepsis often involved in the effort of *forswearing* blame-feelings quite generally, together reveal the social constructive powers so often at work in forgiving. An increased awareness of power's integral role in these responses, and the specific psychological mechanisms by which it is exercised, may help us to watch out for its degenerative tendencies. It also indicates a philosophical conception of forgiveness as often involving delicately balanced

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moral powers to be exercised in relation to self and other – a conception that avoids both idealization and scepticism, and instead, learning something from each, stabilizes in a tender ambivalence.[28]

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[28] Earlier versions of this paper were given in a number of places including Sheffield, Oslo, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Princeton, Vanderbilt, NYU, The Graduate Center CUNY, and The Society for Applied Philosophy Annual Conference 2018. I am grateful to the many people who were present on these occasions for helpful discussion. I also thank the editors and an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments.

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