

Pettigrove, Glen. *Forgiveness and Love*.

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Glen Pettigrove's book joins the philosophical and analytical conversations about forgiveness 25 years after Jeffrie Murphy and Jean Hampton co-authored *Forgiveness and Mercy*. The intervening years have involved intensified philosophical interest in forgiveness, yet until now I could still claim to count the major monographs on my fingers. With the publication of *Forgiveness and Love*, Pettigrove dashes my handy counting system; it is no longer the case that philosophical work analyzing forgiveness is scarce. Still, this is a subfield just young enough that it is possible to master the rich literature. So Pettigrove faces a steep challenge, offering a monograph at this juncture. He must demonstrate attention to the robust conversation that philosophers of forgiveness have enjoyed in a compressed timeframe, clearly identify exactly where and how he fits into this conversation, and justify a distinctive contribution on his part which advances the study of forgiveness at a time when scholarship in it increases by leaps and bounds.

I am pleased to find that Pettigrove largely succeeds at all of these tasks, and enlarges my own thinking on forgiveness. In what follows, I argue for even more attention to some philosophical connections that I suggest he neglects. I do not always agree with his arguments even when they are well-contextualized. But it is undeniably the case that Pettigrove advances a new view of forgiveness, taking the results of his analysis of the utterance, "I forgive you," to inform a "broader definition that encompasses a wider range of experiences" than are accommodated by predominant conceptions of forgiveness as an emotional state (151). Philosophers interested in moral emotions and moral practices should read this book in order to have a fuller sense of the state of forgiveness studies and the possibilities for thinking about

forgiveness in its many manifestations. Philosophers who are already very familiar with the literature on forgiveness will find that Pettigrove takes up exceptionally detailed discussion of forgiveness as it relates to understanding, love, grace, gratitude, and desert.

Pettigrove's stated aim is "to shed light on the nature of forgiveness, the conditions that make it possible, and the norms by which it is governed" (xiii); he adds that "paying careful attention to everyday experiences of anger and forgiveness will be important for researchers who wish to analyse the nature of character traits and assess their significance for moral behavior and judgment" (159). I suggest that the second half of the monograph accomplishes more careful attention to experiences than the first half, but the entirety is informative and helpful; the goals of this book are largely accomplished, and the logical progression of the arguments in each chapter are absolutely crystalline. One is left in no doubt as to how Pettigrove proceeds or why he considers exactly the possibilities at issue. In what follows, I attend to some criticisms of the first five chapters at the expense of praising the last few chapters as much as I could. I won't do justice in this short review to the contributions Pettigrove makes to the study of forgiveness.

In his first chapter, "I Forgive You," Pettigrove suggests that the predominant account of forgiveness as the emotional state of a reduction in anger is just one possible "lowest common denominator" view of the nature of forgiveness, and not always the best one if we wish to consider functions of forgiveness in the absence of a requisite emotion (2). We may express forgiveness "(a) to disclose an emotional condition, (b) to declare a debt cancelled, or (c) to commit ourselves to a future course of action," and we may do so in response to a wrong act or a character failing (1). We may also experience forgiveness as an emotion and not an expression; Pettigrove accommodates the intuition that achieving a particular emotional state is sometimes the function of forgiveness. He suggests that it is sensible to hold a minimal "lowest common

denominator” view of forgiveness, say, as an utterance, or a commitment, or a possession of an affective state, along with a view of forgiveness which reflects the “higher manifestation,” the forgiveness that we hope for (19, 18). In other words, what we seek when we, ourselves, want to be forgiven reveals the limits of minimal accounts: “We want ‘I forgive you’ to be both a disclosure of current feelings and a benevolent commitment” (19).

I am not entirely persuaded by Pettigrove that the higher manifestation of forgiveness in its many aspects is *always* “the forgiveness for which we hope,” however, and perhaps the implication that the higher manifestation has greater value than minimal iterations of forgiveness gets in the way of my accepting Pettigrove’s point. I suggest that the sort of forgiveness described as “higher” may instead be aptly characterized as “multiply manifested” or “maximally manifested,” to be more parallel with the language of “minimal” forgiveness when only one aspect is present or offered. After all, Pettigrove and I agree, I think, that sometimes a form of “minimal” forgiveness is the most appropriate form to focus on or offer, depending on one’s aims and the context.

My reasons for uncertainty regarding the “higher” being “hoped for” may further reflect a bit of ongoing dissatisfaction with Pettigrove’s methodological approach in the first half of the book. The first four chapters tend to appeal to abstract and hypothetical thought-experiments in order to clarify the author’s commitments; this is effective most of the time but at some points elides complexities that really do result from the actualities of occasions for forgiveness. For example, on particular lived occasions I and others have hoped for forgiveness from those we’ve driven our car around badly and whom we’ll never see again, from the dead, from family or students who have moved away, from differently able people who may not have typical access to expected emotional states or verbal address. In concrete contexts, it is possible that the most we

hope for is something other than that which is maximally manifested in all possible ways by a hypothetical agent; I would go so far as to say that it is even *preferable* to hope for less than maximal forgiveness when it is reflective of situations to which we should be sensitive. I should add that I fall back on the same analytical habits in my own writing, appealing to Xs and Ys or creatively naming illustrative thought-experiments who walk in and out of the text; that we both do this to excess at times suggests that both Pettigrove and I err in doing so when it leads us to value or recommend something that is not reflective of the limits of practices. What is hoped for depends on the possibilities in varieties of bodies and relationships.

In the second chapter, “The Standing To Forgive,” Pettigrove correctly argues that he “gets the phenomenology right” by expanding the class of those who claim readiness and moral power to forgive (39). Here, the highly abstract method succeeds precisely because Pettigrove is engaging with a body of works that rely on just such abstractions to exclude possibilities and maintain that only victims can forgive. Pettigrove assesses and refutes arguments from a “debt-cancelling” perspective that forgiveness is like a literal contract violation, and “emotion-based” arguments logically dependent upon authoritative reporters of emotional states (24). Pettigrove concludes that persons who are not the victims of the wrongdoer can accomplish forms of third-party forgiveness.

His treatment of relational accounts in this chapter is the only juncture which gives me pause, and my bias here ought to be made plain; I am one of the theorists who suggest “that forgiving involves restoring or repairing relationships” (30). Pettigrove holds this is inadequate as a general account of forgiveness, on the grounds that “we can forgive wrongdoers with whom we do not have a relationship prior to the wrong and with whom we do not anticipate having a relationship in the future,” and we can forgive the dead, the absent, and those with whom we had

previous relationships we won't restore (31). I suggest this is not fully appreciative of what some theorists mean by relationship, at least in the case of the dead, the absent, and those "previously" in relationship with a forgiver; as I have written elsewhere, in many cases separation is not necessarily a severing of a relationship. To separate closely joined relationships changes their relative locations; indeed, *to separate* only makes sense if we understand their distance relative to each other. In the case of the dead and the indefinitely absent, I would add that much of relationship is literally in our heads; we relate to the dead the way we relate to many people, by thinking about them in certain ways, imagining what they would say, arguing with them and in a real sense feeling that their view of us still directs our conduct. Wrongdoers with whom we have no relationship, utter strangers, may still stand in relationship to us, and even if they do not, they are often more easily written off, less likely candidates for forgiveness. The evident ease with which an anonymous commenter on a website can be harmful and unforgiving, the fact that I can ignore the man on the bus who stepped on my foot quite carelessly, the opportunities to just shrug off what strangers do, all suggest that indeed, relationship maintenance is a very powerful reason to forgive.

My examples above only describe trivial, isolated acts. In Chapter Three, "Forgiveness and Character," Pettigrove provides a valuable contribution to forgiveness literature, arguing that we forgive characters as well as acts, and sometimes a character flaw is precisely that to which we must respond in the absence of an identifiable, single act. How I wish I had this book when I struggled in my own work to articulate what's wrong with types of annoying wrongdoings over time. When one's roommate reaches a threshold of messiness, when one's neighbor borrows something without returning it one time too many, I reach for ways to describe the types of acts at issue. Pettigrove provides us the valuable reminder that philosophers have focused far too

much on acts as the only thing to forgive. His project of loosening up conceptions of forgiveness does important work here, and his meta-ethical point is made persuasively. What aggravates is not that Cara freeloader drinks from her friends on one particular occasion, Pettigrove suggests in one example; it's that she's a freeloader (51). I would add that his account suggests an intriguing reason to think forgiving a character failing is more difficult than forgiving isolated acts; character traits and vices just don't end the way acts do. This suggests more work to be done on the phenomenology and ethics regarding what it takes to forgive that which continues.

The first three chapters contribute good grounds for Chapter Four, "Understanding, Excusing, Forgiving." Pettigrove previously established that different pro-attitudes may be constituents of forgiveness, and that character failings could be candidates for forgiveness just as acts can. In this chapter, Pettigrove now considers, not understanding *simpliciter* as though it were a simple concept, but what sorts of accounts, pleas, and excuses are offered when wrongdoers ask for understanding, in light of the many attitudes that go with forgiving and the many things that can be forgiven. Here, Pettigrove does a far more careful job than anyone in the field, to my knowledge, of considering why some pleas for understanding mitigate condemnation and some don't, why some circumstances invoke empathy and others more clearly reveal what was in the agent's control and what was not. Pettigrove distinguishes between forgiving and understanding, compellingly advancing a case for holding these, and preferring these, to be separable. It is difficult to resist his view that sometimes understanding inclines us to condemn all the more, and other times, "the adjustment in our attitudes that results from finding ... actions intelligible may incline us to forgive" (66). I would add only that understanding gained from narrative accounts may not even *incline* us to be more forgiving than we were, so much as they just accurately locate us in the mysterious landscape of a wrong. Consider times when an act

seems not just wrong but out of nowhere, out of character, or difficult to even ascertain, when we're most inclined to yell, "What was that all about?" I may not feel less upright, but at least I know what I am to be righteously indignant about.

If I have less detailed criticism of the final four chapters, it is because together they constitute such a great addition to the philosophical literature on forgiveness that I am preoccupied with my gratitude for their contribution. Chapter Five, "Forgiveness and Love," connects two aspects of moral life that it is almost embarrassing have not been connected so well previously. I noted in my introduction that I could count the major monographs on forgiveness on my fingers, but one will find very scarce references to them in the chapter on love, because philosophers of forgiveness have been slow to attend to the connections between the two concepts. Pettigrove is persuasive that "forgiving involves ways of thinking about and acting toward others as well as ways of feeling about them," and "the same is true of loving" (74). Although Pettigrove is attentive to connections that others have neglected, this is a rare occasion on which I wish he had contextualized his own account more excellently in existing philosophical literature, since the work of many feminist philosophers of care ethics have contributed a great deal to philosophy and love. The absence of reference to this literature is very difficult to overlook when Pettigrove discusses the love of parents for children, a relationship grossly neglected in philosophical literature before feminism correctly attended to the moral importance of mothering. When Pettigrove considers the values related to loving one's own children from Augustinian, Kantian, and Utilitarian points of view (79), I expect recognition of feminist scholarship in this section, suggesting that the value of the particular relationship itself informs one's understanding of love of one's children.

The final chapters include, in Chapter Six, some deeper consideration of arguments Pettigrove has previously advanced in other publications on “unapologetic forgiveness,” and in Chapter Seven, a truly novel analysis of the relation of forgiveness to grace, in which he aims “to challenge the assumption that forgiveness must be deserved” (124). The comparison of grace to gratitude and to Seneca’s conception of “favours” is richly supplemented by some of the most particular, applied, and personal examples of the book, including a bit of Pettigrove’s own family lore as he shares a story about his great-grandfather. I do not believe it is a coincidence that Chapter Seven is the most engaging of the monograph. I recommend the monograph on the whole, but if I could wish just one chapter were explored by other philosophers, it would be this valuable reconsideration of grace.

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