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On Ordered Pluralism

Matthieu Queloz
Wolfson College, Oxford

This paper examines Miranda Fricker's method of paradigm-based explanation and in particular its promise of yielding an ordered pluralism. Fricker's starting point is a schism between two conceptions of forgiveness, Moral Justice Forgiveness and Gifted Forgiveness. In the light of a hypothesis about the basic point of forgiveness, she reveals the unity underlying the initially baffling plurality and brings order into it, presenting a paradigmatic form of forgiveness as explanatorily basic and other forms as derivative. The resulting picture, she claims, is an 'explanatorily satisfying ordered pluralism.' But what is this ordered pluralism and how does Fricker's method deliver it? And to what extent can this strategy be generalised to other conceptual practices? By making explicit and critically examining the conception of ordered pluralism implicit in Fricker's procedure, I assess the promise that her approach holds as a way of resolving stand-offs between warring conceptions of ideas or practices more widely. I argue that it holds great promise in this respect, but that if we are to avoid reproducing just the schismatic debates that the pluralism of paradigm-based explanation is supposed to overcome at the level of what is to be regarded as a paradigm case, we need to take seriously the thought that what *counts* as a paradigm is partly determined by our purposes in giving a paradigm-based explanation.

Keywords: ordered pluralism; paradigm-based explanation; individuation; concept/conception distinction; blame; forgiveness;

1. Individuation in Terms of Points

Philosophy is full of enduring schisms or stand-offs between competing conceptions of an idea or a practice—conceptions which are often so different that it is unclear that they are conceptions of the same thing at all. One conception of forgiveness, for example, sees forgiveness as necessarily *earned*; another sees forgiveness as precisely not earned, but unconditional or *gifted*. This gives rise to a puzzle: why should we regard such diametrically opposed conceptions as conceptions of one and the same phenomenon?

In her 'Forgiveness: An Ordered Pluralism' [Forthcoming], Miranda Fricker aims to integrate these two competing conceptions of forgiveness—which she labels *Moral Justice Forgiveness* and *Gifted Forgiveness*—into a single conception of an internally diverse practice. If conceptions of forgiveness differ, Fricker argues, it is because the practice of forgiveness itself takes a plurality of forms. Each conception one-sidedly highlights one form and takes it to exhaust the practice, when in reality, the practice combines all these forms. But what holds them together?

For Fricker, what holds them together is the *point* they serve. We can achieve an 'explanatorily satisfying ordered pluralism' [Forthcoming: XX], she suggests, by individuating the practice of forgiveness in terms of its most basic point, which is the unity underlying the initially baffling plurality. That plurality can then be ordered by seeing one form of forgiveness as paradigmatically serving that point and other forms as derivative ways of serving the same overarching point. However various the phenomena brought under the heading of 'forgiveness' first seem, we understand what holds them together once we see how (in Hume's phrase) they 'point all to a like end' [1998: sec. 3.2].

The notion of a *point* remains somewhat underdetermined, but I take it to mean something like the *most basic useful difference* the practice makes or aims to make in the lives of those who engage in it.[1] For Fricker, the most basic point of forgiveness is *to liberate the forgiver from redundant blame-feeling*. Blame-feeling becomes redundant once it is clear that it has achieved (or perhaps has no prospect of achieving) *its* point, namely to inspire remorse in the wrongdoer with a view to

[1] For a more fine-grained disambiguation of the notion of a 'point,' see Queloz [2019].

securing moral alignment.[2] (Fricker foregrounds the value of liberating the forgiver from redundant blame-feeling, though she recognises the value of liberating the wrongdoer from redundant remorse.) Both Moral Justice Forgiveness and Gifted Forgiveness serve this point in different ways. Sameness of point is thus the plurality's unifying glue.

This contrasts with other ways of individuating conceptual practices, such as their individuation in terms of a common core of necessary features, or shared causal-historical origins.[3] As Fricker notes, her strategy is inspired by the state-of-nature-based genealogies of Craig [1990] and Williams [2002].[4] These genealogies provide the key to understanding Fricker's ordered pluralism. They are counterproposals both to the individuation of concepts in terms of a common core of necessary conditions and to genealogies which speculatively trace lines of causal descent to some distant point of origin. Instead, these genealogies propose to formulate, in light of our best understanding of human needs, a functional hypothesis about the point of a concept or practice. That hypothesis then guides their understanding of what the concept or practice must involve—they let the *what* grow out of the *why*. Craig's genealogy, for example, yields an *ordered pluralism about the concept of knowledge*: hypothesising that the point of the concept of knowledge is to flag good informants, he asks what properties a cost-effective concept rendering us sensitive to the presence of good informants would pick out. These indicator properties—having a good track record, being able to offer a

[2] See Fricker [2016].
[3] An account of how concepts might be individuated in terms of their common origins is Sainsbury and Tye's originalism about concepts [2012].
[4] See Queloz [2020] for a discussion of the relation between paradigm-based explanation and genealogical explanation in this vein.

justification, standing in the right causal relation to the relevant state of affairs, etc.—turn out to map neatly onto the various conceptions of the concept of knowledge that have been advocated in the literature. Each conception, though wrongly taking itself to be exhaustive, latches onto a real aspect of our concept of knowledge which pluralistically combines all of these aspects in orderly fashion and for good reason: each aspect helps us pick out properties which *typically* indicate the presence of a good informant (or can be understood as deriving from that root concern by complicating the story a little).

Similarly, Fricker shows how disparate conceptions of forgiveness latch onto real features of the same practice. The plurality is unified by an overarching purpose and ordered around a paradigm case: Moral Justice Forgiveness. This paradigm-based explanation, which explains what needs forgiveness answers to and why it does so in a plurality of ways, is what gives Fricker's account 'more explanatory musculature than any mere acknowledgement of plurality could hope to build' [Forthcoming: XX].[5]

Adopting this point-based way of individuating conceptual practices need not mean that one elides the difference between Moral Justice Forgiveness and Gifted Forgiveness. Sometimes, as Ruth Millikan has pointed out, what counts as the same is what accomplishes the same, while sometimes, what counts as the same is what accomplishes the same *by the same means*:

[5] In contrast to Craig and Williams who present something as *practically* necessary, Fricker exploits a Strawsonian '"humanly necessary" kind of necessity,' presenting the paradigm case of forgiveness as necessary in virtue of our 'human emotional nature' [Forthcoming: XX]. But how far does this contrast go? Must her claim not be that the practice of forgiveness is *practically* necessary in virtue of reactive attitudes that are *humanly* necessary?

> Let us suppose, for example, that you tie your shoes by looping one lace into a bow, encircling it with the other, and pulling through, while I tie my shoes by looping each lace separately, then tying them together. The results that we get will be exactly the same, but do we exercise the same ability? [2000: 11]

Both have accomplished the same thing—tying their shoes—and have in that sense exercised the same ability. But they have accomplished it by different means, and have in that sense exercised different abilities. Millikan's suggestion is that this example yields a useful model for one application of the concept/conception distinction, and this also seems helpful in thinking about Fricker's account: Moral Justice Forgiveness and Gifted Forgiveness *accomplish the same*, thus warranting being brought under a single concept; but they accomplish the same *by different means*, thus explaining why the practice of forgiveness gave rise to different conceptions of forgiveness.

2. Identifying a Paradigm Case

How does one identify a paradigm case? For Fricker, it is clear that Moral Justice Forgiveness is the paradigm and Gifted Forgiveness the derivate. Indeed, she presents one as 'hermeneutically parasitic' on the other—we can only make sense of the former against the background of the latter. Yet this choice of paradigm was quick to attract dissent. In 'The Priority of Gifted Forgiveness' [Forthcoming: XX], Lucy Allais argues that Gifted Forgiveness is the paradigm and Moral Justice Forgiveness the derivate.

The risk is that disagreement over what is to count as the paradigm ends up reproducing precisely the schisms that paradigm-based explanation was meant to overcome. Factious debates over whether this or that definition captures the essence of a conceptual practice will have been transposed into debates over whether this or that form of a practice is its paradigm case.

The way to avoid this recreation of schisms, I suggest, is to take seriously the idea that what *counts* as paradigm is partly determined by our *purposes in giving* the paradigm-based explanation, and particularly by what aspect of the practice one is trying to bring out. Fricker's purpose in giving her explanation is to bring out the way in which forgiveness frees us of redundant blame-feeling in ways that remedy some of the deficiencies of blame. Allais' purpose, by contrast, is to bring out the importance of forgiveness as an expression of the willingness to interpret others' actions in more charitable or optimistic terms than they obviously deserve, a willingness fuelled by attitudes (of generosity, trust, and love) that flawed human beings depend on if they are to live together and take occasional missteps in their stride. Once we see that these purposes do not conflict, we can recognise that the explanations need not conflict either (as long as the relevant functions are broadly co-executable). Each explanation highlights different *aspects* of forgiveness, different respects in which the effects that forgiveness tends to have *tie in with* human needs.

Not only is Fricker's identification of a paradigm guided by her functional hypothesis about forgiveness, therefore; the paradigm's claim to *being* the paradigm is inseparable from the functional hypothesis. What counts as paradigm depends on the functional hypothesis that animates the paradigm-based explanation.

To take the question at issue between Fricker and Allais to be 'What is the paradigm case of forgiveness?' is thus to ignore a crucial parameter. Something is a paradigm *only insofar* as it paradigmatically exemplifies a function. This is what makes a paradigm *explanatorily basic*: it is basic in virtue of being paradigmatic *of* the function that the explanation draws on in individuating the practice and in accounting for its having been found worth cultivating. But in relation to other functions the practice might also perform, other cases will emerge as basic and paradigmatic. Given that Fricker and Allais seek to illustrate different functional hypotheses, it is no surprise that they differ in their assessment of what is paradigmatic and what is derivative. They are not so much disagreeing as at cross purposes—helpfully so, however, since it is by exploring to what extent a conceptual practice can be organised around different overarching purposes that we work towards a comprehensive grasp of the many purposes it serves.[6]

3. Dependence Claims and the Wider Applicability of the Method

There is, however, real disagreement between Fricker and Allais in at least one regard, namely over whether Gifted Forgiveness is hermeneutically parasitic on Moral Justice Forgiveness. According to Fricker, the moral meaning and value of Gifted Forgiveness is conceptually dependent on Moral Justice Forgiveness, just as the meaning and value of giving away something for free is conceptually dependent

[6] Here also Fricker's notion of an ordered pluralism proves helpful, because one criterion by which to assess the viability of a functional hypothesis is the extent to which it brings order into the plurality. Of course this then still leaves the question of how the many functions relate to each other. As I have argued elsewhere [Queloz 2020, 2021], that may be where an integrative master model—for instance in the form of a genealogical model—is required to explain which functions are prior to which, and why they differentiated into a plurality of functions in the way they did.

on its being something one normally has to pay for. The 'shock of gratuitous generosity from someone you have wronged' can sometimes 'exert more transformative motivational power than the negative affect involved in the moral demand for remorse' [Forthcoming: XX], but it is only against the background of the expectation that forgiveness needs to be earned that granting it gratuitously can *come as* a shock. Hence, Moral Justice Forgiveness is not just *explanatorily* prior, but also *conceptually* prior to Gifted Forgiveness, which Fricker takes to suggest that it is *genetically* prior as well. This conceptual priority claim is stronger than the explanatory priority claim; to resist it, Allais has to maintain that Gifted Forgiveness can be made sense of independently of Moral Justice Forgiveness. Allais' line is that the relevant contrast foil which bestows meaning and value on Gifted Forgiveness is not primarily Moral Justice Forgiveness, but the unforgiving default view of wrongdoers that their actions warrant according to our moral book-keeping [Forthcoming: XX].

Towards the end of her article, however, Fricker makes an even stronger priority claim, to the effect that forgiveness must fulfil its most basic function before it can fulfil any other function: the forgiver's liberation from blame-feeling is 'the condition of any further liberations or values that may flow from it'—the 'various good things that forgiveness may do for us are all dependent upon the prior fulfilment' [Forthcoming: XX] of that most basic function. Other functions which forgiveness has been taken to serve, such as restoring relationships, can only be served *by* expunging redundant blame-feeling. Her justification for saying this is that 'expunging non-redundant blame-feeling could only be premature' [Forthcoming: XX].

This is not a claim about conceptual dependence; one way to hear it is as a claim about *functional* dependence: fulfilling one function is a *causal precondition* of fulfilling others. But if the claim is that a *token* of forgiveness could only restore a relationship on the precondition that it also liberated the forgiver from redundant blame-feeling—which seems the intended reading—the claim is surely too strong. A token of forgiveness can restore a relationship even when it fails to liberate the forgiver from *redundant* blame-feeling. It is true that, relative to the function which Fricker regards as prior, forgiveness would then be premature and to that extent unjustified. But sometimes, restoring the relationship is simply more important, and fulfilling one function at the cost of failing to fulfil another will be a price worth paying. It remains unclear why there would be a functional dependence here to stop one.

But perhaps this dependence claim should be heard in a normative rather than a functional key, as the claim that one can only *properly* or *justifiably* restore a relationship through forgiveness on the condition that one thereby liberate the forgiver from redundant blame-feeling. This would make the discharge of that particular function into a *normative precondition*, i.e. a necessary condition for acts of forgiveness to be justified. But it also remains unclear why we should accept this, not least since Fricker writes that she does not want 'to encourage the idea that the most important or most *valuable* thing that forgiveness does is to be found in its most basic role; not at all'; 'Forgiveness,' she continues, 'serves a family of purposes or functions, and the question of the relative value of this or that function remains an open question' [Forthcoming: XX]. Indeed; so how does Fricker end up with the

conclusion that the benefits of forgiveness are dependent on the prior fulfilment of its basic point?

I suspect that the explanation has to do with one of the insights that powers her ordered pluralism, namely that in light of the paradigm case, something very like what she regards as the normative precondition of Moral Justice Forgiveness—the wrongdoer's remorseful alignment with the moral understanding of the blamer—can also be discerned in other types of forgiveness: in Proleptic Gifted Forgiveness, remorseful alignment becomes a *hoped-for effect* which *retroactively justifies* the act of forgiveness; in Distributed Gifted Forgiveness, alignment is a normative precondition of forgiveness, but is neither remorseful nor the wrongdoer's—it is the alignment of the *moral community* with the blamer's moral understanding. The same point is being served in these cases and similar elements are at work, albeit in displaced and slightly altered forms. Hence Fricker's conclusion that '[w]hat we have seen … is the continued presence of the normative precondition in deceptively concealed form' [Forthcoming: XX].

But deceptive concealment does not leave the normative precondition unaltered: in Proleptic Gifted Forgiveness, it changes from something that is a normative precondition into something that is *not* a normative precondition, but rather a *post hoc* justification; and in Distributed Gifted Forgiveness, the content of the precondition itself changes, substituting the community for the wrongdoer. Consequently, it does not follow that what is a normative precondition for Moral Justice Forgiveness is also a normative precondition for Gifted Forgiveness. And even if it did follow, this would still not yield the conclusion (read as a claim about the normative precondition for forgiveness) that the delivery of other benefits of

forgiveness depends on the prior fulfilment of its basic function. This would require the relevant normative precondition to be *that the blamer be liberated from redundant blame-feeling*, and while this might be an *effect of the fulfilment of* the normative preconditions at work in different forms of forgiveness, none of those preconditions has that as its *content*.

Are these dependence claims essential to ordered pluralism? Do derivative forms of a paradigm have to stand to it in relations of conceptual, functional, or normative dependence in order to count as having been integrated into an ordered pluralism? By separating incidental from essential features of Fricker's method, we gain a better sense not just of what the method is, but also of whether it might be generalised to practices other than forgiveness.

My reconstruction suggests that what brings order into the plurality is the point of forgiveness, and the way in which seemingly disparate forms of forgiveness can be shown to serve that same point in different ways. The various dependence claims are not essential to this, and are indeed absent from Craig's and Williams's accounts. These dependence claims are best seen as *particular instances* of the connections that might be revealed by ordering various forms of a practice around the beacon of a paradigm case. Being hermeneutically parasitic is just one example of a particularly close relation between derivative and paradigm. The relations between different forms of a practice might also be rendered intelligible and orderly in different ways: interdependent forms of a practice might co-emerge, or independent forms might turn out to differ in systematic ways in order to preserve the same functionality across varying contexts of application.

The only priority claim that is essential to the method is the claim to explanatory priority made on behalf of the paradigm case. Yet even this claim is, as we saw, relative to one's purposes in giving the explanation. The method can therefore travel lightly and easily from one subject matter to another: lightly because it makes few presuppositions, and easily because it can flexibly adapt itself to the concerns of those who deploy it. This suggests that it holds great promise as a method by which to integrate rival conceptions of conceptual practices more widely.

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