

FIL 4300 – høst 2022

Christel Fricke

Forgiveness as a Response to Moral Wrongdoing

Human agents can inflict harm on other sentient beings. Inflicting such harm can be morally wrong. Persons can experience the harm other persons inflict on them as an injustice. When does a harmful action count as an injustice, that is, as an act of moral wrongdoing? Many philosophers have provided answers to this question focusing on the respective agent's responsibility and blameworthiness. The general tenor is that an agent is blameworthy for having done something morally wrong only if s/he is responsible for her/his action and its consequences and if what s/he did was indeed morally wrong. Accordingly, injustices are consequences of the doings of blameworthy agents.

The first to suffer harm from an agent's moral wrongdoing are those directly – and negatively – affected by it, that is, her or his victims. In their accounts of injustice, philosophers have mostly neglected the perspective of the victims and their moral vulnerability. But the victims are not the only ones to suffer from the consequences of wrongdoing; third parties and even the wrongdoer her- or himself may be affected in their respective ways. Thus, after an agent has done wrong and victimized other persons, these victims are not the only ones who have a reason to blame her or him.

Forgiveness is a response to moral wrongdoing and moral blame. Its function may be that of putting an end to the conflict initiated by the moral wrongdoer and to provide moral repair. The question is how we should understand the nature and normative constraints of forgiveness if we want to defend the claim that forgiveness can indeed provide moral repair. It may be the case that forgiveness is a task for victims, third parties and even the respective wrongdoers themselves and that it takes different shapes, dependent on who it is who forgives.

We shall proceed in three steps. First, we try to develop an understanding of the nature and consequences of moral wrongdoing. Then, we shall look at blaming responses to moral wrongdoing. And finally, we shall look at various accounts of forgiveness with a particular focus on three questions: What does it mean to forgive? What can forgiveness achieve? Who is entitled to forgive a wrongdoer?

Those who consider taking this course might read the overview article on 'forgiveness' in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/forgiveness/> The readings for the course are available through the Leganto page.

The course will be taught in English. All the course readings are in English. For getting the study points, students are requested to attend the seminar meetings on a regular basis (they cannot miss more than three without excuse). Furthermore, they will have to write a semester paper (semesteroppgave) on a topic related to the course. They may write this paper either in English or in Norwegian.

On August 27 and 28, 2022, Christel Fricke will host an international workshop on the topic of moral vulnerability – which is closely related to the topic of this course.

All students are cordially invited to attend this workshop. Attendance is, however, not a course requirement – after all, the workshop takes place on a Saturday and a Sunday. Students interested in attending this course should see this invitation as a free gift – and accept it.

Attending the workshop is independent of taking this course. *All* students will be welcome.