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Divine forgiveness I: Emotion and punishment-forbearance theories

Brandon Warmke 

Bowling Green State University

Correspondence

Brandon Warmke, Department of Philosophy,
Bowling Green State University, Bowling
Green, OH, USA
Email: bwarmke@bgsu.edu

Abstract

In this, the first essay in a two-part series, I begin by distinguishing between three kinds of inquiries about divine forgiveness. I then canvass two approaches to theorizing the nature of divine forgiveness, developing them in various ways, and noting where, in my estimation, there are problems.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Many people take great comfort in the thought that God can forgive them for the wrong things they have done. For some, forgiveness is even an ineliminable feature of their understanding of God. The British theologian Anthony Bash tells us that “[f]orgiveness is part of the essential being of God. God is, in God's own being, forgiving and God cannot be unforgiving” (Bash, 2007, p. 105). Whether or not Bash is correct, there is no question that many theists of one stripe or another are taught that God can forgive them. The Psalmist in the Hebrew Bible says to God, “You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all of their sins” (85:2). In the Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul tell us to “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (4:32). In the Quran, Sura 39:53 reads: “O my servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of God: for God forgives all sins: for he is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.”

But what is it for God to forgive? This is the question I wish to explore. In this, the first essay in a two-part series, I begin by distinguishing between three kinds of inquiries about divine forgiveness. I then canvass two contemporary approaches to the nature of divine forgiveness, developing them in various ways, and noting where, in my estimation, there are problems. In the sequel to this paper, I will discuss two further philosophical accounts of the nature of divine forgiveness. I will conclude by offering some general reflections on the difficulties associated with thinking about divine forgiveness and then suggest future avenues for research.

A few preliminary remarks are in order before we begin. First, my aim is to provide a critical survey of the recent philosophical literature on divine forgiveness. I will therefore not attempt a historical study of what theologians or philosophers have said about divine forgiveness in the past. This is not a work of historical theology. Nor will I address in any substantial way cognate topics in Christian theology such as atonement or justification.

Further, I will assume for present purposes that God's forgiveness is not supremely mysterious. If God's forgiveness was supremely mysterious, then there is very little to say about it. But for now, I adopt a methodology that allows serious and sustained inquiry into the nature of God's forgiveness. This is not because I endorse some view or other about what we can know about God or God's forgiveness, but rather because the contemporary philosophical literature is comfortable speaking about God's forgiveness in the way it does. Moreover, I will set aside the question

whether divine forgiveness is possible at all. My goal is to explore what God's forgiveness could be on the assumption that God can indeed forgive.

Third, I will at times refer to the Christian scriptures by way of articulating or criticizing some account of divine forgiveness. I do so because this is the tradition in which much contemporary philosophical discussion of divine forgiveness takes place and because this is the tradition I know best. Someone acquainted with different philosophical and theological traditions may very well write a much different article on divine forgiveness. Let the many flowers bloom. Further, I do not assume that my uses or interpretations of the scriptures I discuss are definitive. Theologians and exegetes will surely have much to contribute to philosophical work on divine forgiveness, and I hope they will do so. For my relative theological ignorance, I beg their forgiveness.

2 | DIVINE FORGIVENESS: NATURE, STANDING, NORMATIVITY

It will be useful to distinguish several inquiries regarding divine forgiveness. First, consider the topic with which we shall be concerned: the *nature question*. What is the nature of God's forgiveness? One might go about answering this question by providing a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, or perhaps a set of non-trivial and illuminating sufficient conditions. One might instead try to answer the nature question by describing the characteristic or paradigmatic features of God's forgiveness, perhaps acknowledging that no comprehensive theory of divine forgiveness is likely forthcoming. Answers to such questions would be aimed at understanding the success conditions on God's forgiveness.

Second, there is the *standing question*: How does God have the standing to forgive humans for what they do, either to God or to each other? To have standing to forgive a wrongdoer is to be in a position to forgive that wrongdoer in the first place. Only if one has standing to forgive in some situation is forgiving a wrongdoer "on the table." It is typically thought that one possesses the standing to forgive a wrongdoer for an offense only if one was the victim of that offense.¹ In what sense, then, can God be the victim or target of wrongdoing? Further, consider the wrongs we commit against other humans—can God forgive us for those? It is commonplace to think that only in exceptional cases can third parties forgive wrongdoers for what they do to others. Your plumber cannot forgive me for lying to you. How could it be, then, that God has standing to forgive us for the things we do to other humans? Attempts to answer the standing question will therefore seek to explain how God could have the standing to forgive us our wrongs, perhaps including those wrongs we do to other humans.²

Third, we may ask the *normativity question*: under what conditions is God's forgiveness morally just (or good or praiseworthy)? It is commonly claimed that for forgiveness to be morally appropriate, the wrongdoer must meet certain conditions: She must apologize, repent, or have a change of heart.³ Is this true in the case of God's forgiveness? Is a wrongdoer's repentance and change of heart a necessary or sufficient condition for morally appropriate divine forgiveness? It is also sometimes argued that forgiveness is morally appropriate only if the victim forgives for the right kinds of reasons.⁴ For what reasons would a perfect moral being forgive? What kinds of motivations would a perfect moral being have for forgiving wrongdoers?

These questions are interdependent. It might be thought that if God could not in principle forgive because of a lack of standing, then any further metaphysical or normative inquiry into an impossible form of forgiveness is idle wheel-spinning.⁵ And yet if the question is how God could have the standing to do x, then it would be very helpful indeed to know what x amounts to. Further, if we had good reason to believe that third parties ought sometimes to forgive wrongdoers, then an answer to a normative question could help inform our answer to the standing question.

The nature question and the normative question are also interdependent. In order to know under what conditions God's forgiveness would be morally just or appropriate, it would be helpful to know what divine forgiveness is. On the other hand, identifying the norms governing God's forgiveness might clue us in to the type of thing God's forgiveness is.

The upshot: We can investigate the nature question on its own, but our best theories of the nature of divine forgiveness will be answerable to our best theories of God's standing to forgive and of the ethics of divine forgiveness. In what follows, I will direct primary attention to the nature question but at times will note consequences that some or other theory has with respect to the standing and normative questions. I believe this is unavoidable. Let us now turn to two contemporary philosophical accounts of divine forgiveness.

3 | EMOTION THEORIES

One strategy for theorizing the nature of divine forgiveness is to model it on human forgiveness, a phenomenon with which we are arguably much better acquainted. On this approach, understanding human forgiveness is thought to give us insight into divine forgiveness. The standard view among philosophers is that human forgiveness is (or at least crucially implicates) a certain kind of change to one's emotional life. Jeffrie Murphy, for example, tells us that "[f]orgiveness is primarily a matter of how I *feel* about you (not how I treat you)" (Murphy & Hampton, 1988, p. 21, emphasis original). According to Paul Hughes, "forgiveness is essentially a matter of how one *feels* about another" (1993, p. 108, emphasis original).

What are the specific emotional changes at issue? By and large, forgiveness is thought to require the overcoming of resentment (e.g., Hughes, 1993; Murphy & Hampton, 1988), though there is considerable confusion about what kind of attitude resentment is and what it means for one to overcome or eliminate one's resentment (see Warmke, 2015). Others have sought to expand the class of emotions that may or must be overcome when one forgives. Some claim that hostile feelings (if there are any) must be expunged and that one must take up an attitude of good will towards the offender (Garrard & McNaughton, 2002). Others expand the class of negative attitudes that may or must be overcome to include disappointment, sadness, and hurt feelings (Blustein, 2014).

According to an emotion theory of *divine* forgiveness, then, God's forgiveness involves some sort of emotional change. When we do wrong, God feels a certain kind of negative emotion towards us because of our sin. God forgives us by eliminating or expunging that negative emotion and perhaps also taking up a positive emotional stance towards us.

Douglas Drabkin defends such a view. He reports that "there is no other way that God can forgive us, as far as I can see, except through a change in emotion" (Drabkin, 1993, p. 237). Is this a plausible assessment? Let us return to the question of what emotional changes may be at issue in divine forgiveness. An obvious candidate is resentment. One might reason as follows. Forgiveness is the same phenomenon wherever it is found. Human forgiveness is the overcoming of resentment. Therefore, divine forgiveness is the overcoming of resentment. On this view, when we do wrong, God has resentment towards us. We are, as Jonathan Edwards famously put it, "sinners in the hands of an angry God." God forgives us by eliminating that resentment. Although not her own view, Anne Minas suggests that one way to think about divine forgiveness is as the "[g]iving up of resentment" (Minas, 1975, p. 144).

One *need* not think that God gives up resentment, however, to adopt an emotion theory of divine forgiveness. As in the human version of the emotion theory discussed above, God might instead give up sadness, disappointment, or hurt feelings. There may be other options, too. Douglas Drabkin argues that there is a kind of emotional change that is natural to suppose that God experiences and that this change is a good candidate for divine forgiveness. On this view, God, like any loving parent, will "suffer on our account" when we do evil (235). "When we repent," he says, "God feels our joy and ceases to suffer" (235). He concludes: "This, I am suggesting, is how God forgives us: by rejoicing in our repentance" (235).

Given the philosophical consensus that forgiveness is or crucially implicates the changing of emotion in the human case, emotion views of divine forgiveness have this going for them: they forward an apparently consistent theory of the nature of forgiveness across all cases. The specific emotions that may or must be overcome in order to forgive might differ to some degree or another, but otherwise, forgiveness—either human or divine—is crucially a matter of how the forgiver feels about the wrongdoer.

Emotion views of divine forgiveness, however, encounter difficulties. First, let us consider two objections that Anne Minas has raised against the view that God forgives by eliminating *resentment*. The first objection can be put in terms of a dilemma. If God forgives by eliminating resentment, then this elimination will happen in one of two ways: it will (a) fade away or (2) cease immediately. On the “fade away” option, God will undergo a process of emotional change, whereby the resentment will either be experienced *less strongly* until it disappears entirely or the resentment will be experienced *less often* until it disappears entirely. The problem with this view, Minas argues, is that God cannot experience change in the way that would be required by a fading away of resentment:

In perceiving situations, he knows them in a way in which they are fully real to him, meaning that he reacts not just by forming judgments, but also with all appropriate feelings. Then, to be omniscient is to have all reactions to all situations equally vividly, regardless of when they happened. So the reactions of omniscient beings cannot change over time. So even if God were subject to change, and this change could take place in time (even though he is supposed to exist outside of time) he would not be able to change in this particular way, since this change involves a dimming of feeling (145).

Minas's objection is not merely that a fadeaway view would require that God have the ability to undergo emotional change over some length of time (though that does appear to be a commitment of this view and might alone be reason to reject it). Rather, the objection is that the dimming of God's resentment requires us to deny that God is omniscient—we would have to deny that all of God's experiences are simultaneously vivid before God's mind. For if God's experiences are equally vivid to God, then God could not react to a wrongdoer by experiencing a fading of resentment. The idea, I think, is that if all of God's experiences were simultaneously vivid, then God could simultaneously experience variable levels of resentment towards you (say, at .9 strength, and .8 strength, and .7 strength ...), but God could never experience the *movement* from strong resentment to weak resentment to no resentment. There would be no fading—just a wall of variable-strength resentment experiences in addition to an experience of a lack of resentment (if such a thing is possible).⁶

Consider the second way of construing God's emotional change: The elimination of resentment is immediate. On this construal, God's resentment does not fade or dim, it just disappears. However, this view also looks to run afoul of God's omniscience. For if God is omniscient, then God cannot experience the change from feeling resentment towards someone to not feeling resentment towards someone. God would experience *both* simultaneously and therefore not experience the *elimination* of resentment.⁷ How, then, could it be true that God forgives?

Perhaps this is reason to reject God's omniscience. If emotion theories of divine forgiveness are faced with the above dilemma due to God's omniscience, then so much the worse for omniscience. This is Douglas Drabkin's strategy. God does know all truths, Drabkin claims, but this does not imply that all of these truths are equal objects of God's attention at all times (237). God is able to “experience a temporal succession of emotions in response to the changing moral state of our souls” (235). God can attend consciously to various aspects of creation and so respond emotionally to them, even if God knows dispositionally all that there is to know. God's experience of a fading or transitioning in emotions is simply due to God's shift in *attention*. This shift makes God's forgiveness possible.

Even if Minas were to grant this point, she claims that there is another serious problem: resentment is not an attitude that God could possess in the first place. Resentment arises only when one is the victim of injury that one *takes personally*: “to forgive is just to cease to have any personal interest in the injury. It is to regard it as if it had happened to someone else in whom we have no special interest, other than the general interest we have in all human beings. So the father might forgive his prodigal son by ceasing to take the son's prodigality personally” (145).

Yet, Minas says, God is not the kind of being who could have this sort of attitude. First, “it is fairly clear that taking an injury personally, as opposed to having a general sense of its wrongness, is a distinctly human failing, an imperfection” (147). An Olympian god or goddess might take human wrongs personally by feeling hurt or insulted. A perfect moral being would not. Further, resenting someone for what she does results in a certain further breach

in the relationship (i.e., a breach not due solely to the wrongdoing itself). So if God felt resentment towards us, this would further damage our relationship with God. But, Minas says, "a perfect being could not allow this to happen" (147).

What should we make of this argument? There are at least three lines of reply open to an emotion theorist. The first concedes that God cannot have feelings of personal injury but rejects that this is any part of God's resentment. Indeed, there is no agreement in the forgiveness literature as to resentment's specific cognitive, affective, and cognitive profile.⁸ The challenge facing this strategy is to forward an account of resentment that is befitting of a morally perfect being and does not require that God have feelings of personal injury.

A second line of reply rejects Minas's assumption that resentment, understood as involving a feeling of personal injury, is unbefitting of God. Minas claims that taking injuries personally is a human failing and concludes from this that because it is a failing for humans, then it is a failing for God, too. But one could deny this move. One could claim that taking injuries personally is not, as such, a moral failing for any kind of being, human or divine. Or one could argue that even if taking wrongs personally is a failing for humans, this does not mean that it is necessarily a failure for God. Either way, the relevant claim would be something like: God *can* be the victim of moral injuries and *can* take these wrongs personally.

A third line of reply denies that God forgives by eliminating *resentment*. Yes, God's forgiveness is an emotional change but not one having to do with resentment. Recall Drabkin's suggestion that God forgives by pivoting from suffering in response to our wrongdoing to rejoicing in response to our repentance. This is the emotional change that constitutes God's forgiveness. Of course, other candidate emotional changes could be offered.

Minas's criticisms aside, there are other problems with emotion theories of divine forgiveness. First, there is the issue of God's impassibility. The doctrine of divine impassibility is the teaching that God—in God's own being—is unable to suffer or have reactive emotions (see, e.g., Gavrilyuk, 2004). When we humans are wronged, we are affected: we suffer, we feel insulted, injured, or offended. But, it might be thought, God is above all that. God would not be affected by our wrongdoing the way other creatures are: There is no possibility of sadness, disappointment, resentment, or hurt feelings, the bread and butter of emotion theories of forgiveness. To pursue this matter further would take us into deep waters and far past the harbor of my own theological competence. But here's the rub: It seems to me that to endorse an emotion theory of divine forgiveness is already to settle the question of divine impassibility.

Here is a second general concern with emotion theories. Suppose God is not impassible. There still remains the question of whether there is some specific emotion or set of emotions that must be overcome in order for God to forgive. In recent years, there has been push back against emotion theories of *human* forgiveness. There are, to my mind, persuasive arguments showing that overcoming resentment is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition.⁹ Furthermore, if one can forgive by engaging in some or other kind of emotional change, what kinds of changes qualify as forgiveness? And why? Defenders of divine emotion theories will therefore face many of the challenges that face defenders of human emotion theories of forgiveness. They will perhaps also face a much more limited set of emotional options. Some philosophers have thought that in forgiving, one forswears attitudes like vindictiveness, hatred, bitterness, and rancor.¹⁰ Presumably, though, a perfect moral being would have no reason to forswear morally objectionable attitudes (if those attitudes are indeed morally objectionable) because that being could not have them in the first place. The challenge for the emotion theorist is to provide an account of the emotion(s) that may or must be overcome in divine forgiveness that are *also* plausible attitudes for a perfectly loving and just being to have.

Finally, emotion theories of forgiveness fail to capture the thought that divine forgiveness affects us. We might care that God is no longer angry (or sad, or disappointed, or suffering) because of our wrongdoing, but is this all there is to God's forgiving us: a change in God's feelings about us? Rather, it seems natural to think of God's forgiveness as effecting a change in our status or standing in our relationship to God. It is difficult to see how emotion theories fully capture this change in the standing or status of our relationship with God.

4 | PUNISHMENT-FORBEARANCE THEORIES

Another contemporary philosophical approach to divine forgiveness says that God forgives by forbearing punishment. In his paper, "Can God Forgive Us Our Trespasses?" for example, David Londey argues that God *cannot* forgive. He comes to this conclusion on the assumption that forgiveness crucially involves the remission of any "penalty or sanction," including "moral censure" and "more tangible punishments" that a wrongdoer is due (Londey, 1986, p. 5). In their respective replies to Londey, Andrew Brien and Dean Geuras take divine forgiveness to be the forbearing of "deserved punishment" (Brien, 1989, p. 35) and the remission of a "deserved penalty" (Geuras, 1992, p. 65).¹¹ Whereas emotion theories of divine forgiveness claim that God forgives by undergoing an emotional change, punishment-forbearance theories claim that God forgives by remitting or forbearing deserved punishments.

Let's flesh out the view. We should first distinguish two claims about the relationship between divine forgiveness and punishment. One claim is a normative one: God's forgiving us makes it morally inappropriate for God subsequently to punish us (see Swinburne, 1989, p. 87, fn. 8). Such a claim says little or nothing about the nature of God's forgiveness itself. It simply says that if God forgives us for something (whatever that forgiving amounts to), then it would be wrong for God to punish us for it. A distinct claim is a conceptual or metaphysical one: God forgives *by* forbearing punishment.¹² Forbearing punishment is how God accomplishes forgiveness. This is the view I want to consider.¹³

According to this account, when we do wrong, we justly deserve punishment from God. As Anne Minas puts it:

It is easy to envisage the deity in the role of a judge who makes decisions about punishments and rewards. For it is he who decides the lots of humans in life and death and these lots are often conceived of as rewards or punishments. People who are good or bad in this life get good or bad lots respectively, in the afterlife. In addition, it is often thought that virtue is rewarded and vice punished by the deity in this life. Misfortunes, for instance, are sometimes thought of as being sent by God as a punishment for wrongdoing (Minas, 1975, p. 141).¹⁴

On this view, our wrongs condemn us to God's just punishment. But when God forgives, God commutes the sentence. God forgives us by forbearing a deserved punishment. When I speak of God's "forbearing" punishment, I have at least two things in mind. First, for God to forbear punishing a wrongdoer is for God to do something like decide not to punish her. Forbearance is taken to be an exercise of agency. Second, by forbearing punishment, God also actually abstains from punishing. What are the punishments that God remits? We might think of God's punishments ranging from, on the one hand, "misfortunes" (as Minas puts it), all the way to a final, torturous, eternal existence on the other. Whatever the punishments are, forgiveness functions to pardon us from them. On this view, then, forgiveness "is akin to clemency exercised by a judge in the courts, or pardon by a high official. Someone who is in a position to mete out punishment for a wrongdoing decides to give less punishment than what is called for by the nature of the wrongdoing, or no punishment at all" (Minas, 1975, p. 141).

Punishment-forbearance theories of divine forgiveness raise a host of questions. Could a perfectly just God forbear a *deserved* punishment?¹⁵ This is a normative question. What is it that we have done to God that would entail that we deserve to be punished (and have this punishment potentially forborne) *by God*? This is a standing question. Since I am here only concerned with the prospects for a punishment-forbearance theory as an account of the nature of divine forgiveness, we will set aside these issues.

In some ways, punishment-forbearance theories look preferable to emotion theories. Emotion theories fail to account for how divine forgiveness effects a change for us *vis a vis* our relationship with God. But on the present view, forgiveness serves to pardon wrongdoers from punishment. This is clearly a change that affects our relationship with God: We can be confident God will no longer punish us. A punishment-forbearance theory also perhaps explains why so many people find great comfort in God's forgiveness. To whatever extent people take comfort in the thought that God no longer resents them (or is sad, disappointed, or offended, etc.), they will be more likely to take comfort (or take more comfort) in the thought that God is no longer going to punish them for their misdeeds.¹⁶

Punishment-forbearance theories have their own problems. First, this account is a non-starter unless God punishes human beings (or is at least willing to do so) and has the power to remit those punishments. An obvious way to push back against this view is to deny that God is in the business of punishing human beings in the first place. Hell might be the destiny for some persons without it constituting God's *punishment*.

Let us then suppose that God does punish (or is willing to punish) and can remit punishment. One worry for a theory that conceives forgiveness as the forbearance of punishment is that these phenomena appear to come apart, both conceptually and in practice (see, e.g., Griswold, 2007; Haber, 1991; Mabbott, 1939; Murphy, 2003; Pettigrove, 2012; Tosi & Warmke, 2017). Consider the case of a parent who punishes a child for breaking the House Rules ("Do not talk back to mom") and yet interpersonally forgives her. It appears that forbearing punishment is not a necessary condition on forgiveness (Hughes, 1993; Warmke, 2011). Nor does it appear sufficient: one could forbear punishment for a wrong and yet still retain all manner of vindictive or retaliatory attitudes over the event in question (Warmke, 2013).

One might object that even so, this only shows that in the *human* case, the forbearance of punishment is neither necessary nor sufficient for forgiveness. But this is not good evidence against the claim that God's forgiveness is the forbearance of punishment. Perhaps this reply is correct. Either way, this raises the question of how similar we should want or expect our theories of human and divine forgiveness to be. If a theory of the nature of forgiveness is implausible in the human case, is this evidence that it is also implausible in the divine case? Or should we instead expect divine and human forgiveness to be radically different things? I will not attempt to answer this question here, though I will return to it in the sequel.

Here is another potential worry about punishment-forbearance theories: They may mistakenly conflate forgiveness with acts of mercy or pardon.¹⁷ Forgiveness is typically thought to be something that, barring exceptional circumstances, only the victim can do (recall the standing question). This is not true of acts of mercy or pardon. Any third party with the authority to execute and remit punishment can do so. If divine forgiveness is judge-like remittance from punishment, then how does God's forgiveness retain the kind of second-personal involvement that forgiveness is typically thought to possess? Karin Scheiber has nicely framed the problem:

[M]ercy offered by a judge is not forgiveness. Offering mercy, that is, mitigating a just punishment on moral grounds, requires a certain authority (such as that of a judge or queen) but not personal concern; with forgiveness it is the other way round...This does not mean, however, that one should not talk of God as judge or that the idea of God as a judge should be changed until it is no longer judge-like. Nor does it mean that God is not in a position to forgive (Scheiber, 2001, p. 176).

What this does mean for Scheiber is that in our attempt to understand God's forgiveness, "the idea of God as a judge is not useful" (176). I take it that her thought is that we need not deny the possibility that God forbears punishment, but we should deny that God's forgiveness is the forbearance of punishment.¹⁸

Endnotes

¹ Thus, Jeffrie Murphy: "I do not have *standing* to resent or forgive you unless I have myself been the victim of your wrongdoing. I may forgive you for embezzling my funds, but it would be ludicrous for me, for example, to claim that I had decided to forgive Hitler for what he did to the Jews. I lack the proper standing for this. Thus, I may legitimately resent (and hence consider forgiving) only wrong done to me" (Murphy & Hampton, 1988, p. 21, emphasis original).

² For more on the standing question, see Warmke (forthcoming).

³ See, e.g., Griswold (2007).

⁴ See, e.g., Murphy and Hampton (1988).

⁵ See Pettigrove (2008, p. 458).

⁶ A further worry: if it is true that simultaneously, God could experience resentment of n-strength, but also not experience resentment (or experience its absence), then it appears that simultaneously, God has both not forgiven (in virtue of still having resentment) and forgiven (in virtue of not experiencing resentment or experiencing its absence). Some explanation for this apparent contradiction would be needed. We will return to this point below.

⁷ This objection can be pressed regardless of the specific emotion at issue and not just resentment.

- ⁸ See Warmke (Manuscript).
- ⁹ See, e.g., Garcia (2011); Pettigrove (2012), Nelkin (2013); Warmke and McKenna (2013); Pereboom (2014); Warmke (Manuscript).
- ¹⁰ See, e.g., Garrard and McNaughton (2002).
- ¹¹ One might wish to distinguish penalties from punishments, but Londey, Brien, and Geuras each use the terms interchangeably, and sometimes even do so in the context of a single argument (e.g., Brien, 1989, p. 35). For present purposes, I don't think anything is obscured by using the terms interchangeably.
- ¹² There are a several ways to articulate this claim: (a) forbearing punishment is necessary for forgiveness; (2) forbearing punishment is sufficient for forgiveness and (b) forbearing punishment is necessary and sufficient for forgiveness. I'll proceed as if the view minimally requires the necessity claim.
- ¹³ For a punishment-forbearance account of human forgiveness, see Zaibert (2009).
- ¹⁴ Cf. Karin Scheiber: "Usually the topic of forgiveness is linked with the idea of God as the moral lawmaker and cosmic judge" (Scheiber, 2001, p. 175). In support of the thought she references Kant's *On Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* and this passage from Minas.
- ¹⁵ This is the heart of Londey's 1986 objection to the possibility of divine forgiveness. However, this problem (or some version of it) must be addressed by virtually *any* theory of forgiveness, human or divine. If resentment or blame is sometimes a fitting response to wrongdoers, what justifies giving them up and forgiving?
- ¹⁶ Glen Pettigrove writes: "One might think that the reason people take comfort in the belief that God has forgiven them is because they believe God is the cosmic judge whose job is to punish wrongdoers. God's forgiveness is thought to release them from the sentence they would otherwise have received. They now need not fear future (perhaps eternal) punishment" (Pettigrove, 2008, p. 458).
- ¹⁷ See, e.g., Mackintosh (1927, p. 23).
- ¹⁸ I am grateful for the feedback I received from an audience at the University of Notre Dame Center for Philosophy of Religion, where I presented an earlier version of this paper in December 2015. I also thank Craig Warmke for his thoughtful comments on an earlier draft. Two anonymous referees for this journal also helped improve the paper. Remaining errors are my own.

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Brandon Warmke is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Bowling Green State University. He works in ethics, moral psychology, and social philosophy. His writing has been published by Newsweek, Salon, Live Science, the Huffington Post, and in philosophy journals such as *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, and *Philosophical Studies*.

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