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«Blame and Forgiveness»

I would like to express my sincere thanks to professor Jaffro that he found an opportunity to make this very interesting presentation.

As a person who wrote an article on forgiveness I feel an increased responsibility talking about this subject. I have read many articles on special issues concerning forgiveness, not only about blame and forgiveness, but also about anger and forgiveness, punishment and forgiveness, understanding and forgiveness, reconciliation and forgiveness, and so on, and so on. I beg everybody in advance to excuse me, because maybe I will disappoint with my comment not only professor Jaffro but also other participants of today meeting. I do not consider myself a full-fledged expert on the topic "forgiveness". The matter of fact is that the more I read the more I become confused about the most fundamental questions on forgiveness. And the acquaintance with the full-paper of professor Jaffro "Blame and Forgiveness" has only deepened my confusion.

That is why I am not going now to make any final statement on forgiveness. I would prefer to rise questions which have their roots in my confusion.

The first question and that is as trivial as well as the most intricate: what does it mean "to forgive somebody"? There are different models on this subject and the most popular model (professor Jaffro calls it "the standard view") states that when one person forgives another he or she overcomes resentment and/or other hostile feelings. I totally agree and I wrote the same in my article on forgiveness. The problem for me is that it is not enough for an ethical answer. Perhaps, for that reason Jeffrie Murphy proposes to expand the definition of forgiveness adding that this overcoming must be on moral grounds [Muprhy, 2003: 16]. But this makes the trial to articulate the essence of forgiveness even worse because in that case we must ask: what are moral grounds? And finally to come to the eternal question: what is morality? So, the first question sounds the next way: what is it "to forgive somebody"?

That leads us to the second question. If we think that we are able at least potentially to answer the first question giving a philosophical definition and description of forgiveness, what language should we use? In English there are debates about what resentment is and the same about mercy, clemency, understanding, indignation, anger, and so on. The presentation of professor Jaffro clearly and virtuously demonstrates us that there are different points of view on the phenomenon of blame and its relations to forgiveness. And what to do the Russian researchers who, as we understood in our department, even cannot translate more or less unambiguously many of these words into Russian?

Another example. A lot of researchers in "forgiveness studies" including professor Jaffro, when they designate the person who forgives, use the word "forgiver" or "victim" and when they denote the person who committed an offense or a wrong they resort to the words "offender" and "wrongdoer". To be honest I am very uncomfortable with this language although sometimes I use these words. If we agree that to forgive is seeing in the person who offended us not only an offender, then how can we denote him or her with the word "offender"? From the very beginning of the discourse on forgiveness, we must recognize that the person who committed an offense cannot be reduced to this offense. So, how could we talk about forgiveness?

This question linked with the next one: is it possible to define any conditions for forgiveness at all? A lot of researchers including professor Jaffro talk that forgiveness requires some conditions. The question, which is risen in the presentation of professor Jaffro, is not if forgiveness is possible if we put forward some conditions to it, but: "*In what way is ceasing to blame a necessary condition for forgiveness*?" As far as I read the set of conditions, which researchers propose, is diverse but usually includes apology or begging forgiveness. Additional conditions depend on the image of forgiveness and the view on morality. For example, Richard Swinburne proposes one version of conditions [Swinburne, 1989: 81], Jeffrie Murphy another one [Murphy, 1982], Charles Griswold the third one [Griswold, 2007: 47–53; 149–150], and so on. When three or four years ago I read Griswold's book on forgiveness for the first time it seemed to me very plausible, what he set up as conditions for forgiveness, but the more I read on the topic the more I became confused.

If you excuse me for a wordplay, the problem is that the conditional version of forgiveness requires accepting own, you may say, preconditions and they are not so evident. For example, a precondition is that one party in forgiveness can be reduced to another party by the appealing to the third party or to the impersonal point of view. In other words, this replacement means symmetrical relations, interchangeability and open access to forgiveness to be judged from the impersonal or third-party position. But for me to put myself in the impersonal position or in the position of another person is even more problematic then pulling myself up by my hair. The latter I can at least imagine like in the fantastic story with baron Munchausen and even to look at it as at a very useful trick in some situations. Not the same with the former one. The matter of fact is that I cannot imagine me as not me, because even when I imagine myself on the place of another it is going to be I-imagine-myself-as-another and not as a true other. It rather an reinforcement *my self* but not a replacement. What people really change and replace is their social roles… but to reduce *my self* to a social role is to reduce philosophy to a social science.

An important view on the problem of symmetry and asymmetry everyone may find in works on forgiveness written by Jean Derrida [Derrida, 2001; Derrida, 2015]. But I would like to mention another philosopher. In a short essay on Love and Forgiveness ("What love knows?") and not only there Jean-Luc Marion distinguishes between the scientific situation and the love situation [Marion, 2015]… The scientific situation means that I perceive another as an object from a zero point while the love situation means that the center or the zero point is assigned for the beloved one. The problem for the conversation about forgiveness here is that only the love situation opens us possibility to forgive. And that leads me to my last question: if we agree that forgiveness consists in overcoming resentment and, of course, hatred, angry and thirst for revenge, by using what force can a person perform this operation? To put it differently, with what force can he or she replace these hostile feelings and desires? Perhaps, Soren Kierkegaard [Howell, 2009], Leo Tolstoy, Martin Luther King [King, 1963: 34–41] were right telling us that we have only one enough powerful force here and this force is love?

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