

Derrida - how forgiving the forgivable is not forgiveness but amnesty and is often just condoning not forgiveness

The philosopher Derrida has some interesting thoughts on forgiveness. And scary thoughts they are.

IS THERE A PERSON TO FORGIVE?

Derrida like Hume and co thought the self is not a fixed thing. You are literally becoming a different mind and entity every moment. So there is nothing to forgive. There is no one to forgive. To forgive Jack the Ripper is forgiving the self that committed the crimes and it is unjust to blame him now or say he needs forgiving or we need to forgive for the Ripper that committed the crimes is no longer in existence and the person in front of us is no longer Jack the Ripper. For forgiveness to be possible you need to be a person and stay that person.

All that makes morality to be a social construct and every justice against a bad person is not a justice at all. It makes forgiveness a social construct as well - its impossible.

We have to put that aside and examine what forgiveness if possible is saying.

DERRIDA EXPLORES FORGIVENESS AS GIFT

Suppose you see forgiveness as a gift.

Derrida holds that if a gift is a gift then the giver will hide her identity and will not allow a situation where she has to be thanked. A real gift is never reciprocated. A real gift is free from all demands and takes care to avoid any risk that you might get something out of it. And you can be after a reward and not realise it. A true gift cannot appear as a gift. Even the giver must not see it as a gift. Why? Because you see something worthwhile in yourself by giving the gift. So if you do not see it as a gift then you avoid getting anything at all out of giving. You are really giving.

Derrida points out that if you are hospitable you are taking people into your place that you own and thus creating a boundary and some control over them. They are treated well but as outsiders. So for him, hospitality is a bit deceptive. It is not as welcoming as it pretends.

Do not forget that forgiveness is a form of hospitality - where the evil person is given the status of a dear trustworthy friend.

FORGIVENESS IS A CONTRADICTION

Forgiveness is to be a gift. That totally contradicts how you are to see what the other person has done as unforgivable. That is one heavy judgement.

But for the purpose of argument, let us follow the implications that arise from assuming forgiveness is a gift. Everybody thinks it is a gift they give themselves, the other person and a gift they can receive from another.

So we are taking forgiveness as a gift. That leads us to the next point.

Derrida holds that forgiveness is a paradox you forgive what cannot be forgiven. Anything else is not the real deal. Derrida holds that forgiveness is never completed. You have to keep forgiving the wrong done to you. It is never a once for all act.

Forgiveness that requires the other person tries to change is amnesty not forgiveness. Forgiveness that does not require but hopes to open the door to the person changing is anticipated amnesty not forgiveness.

Derrida says that if you do not forgive you cannot be called immoral for doing so. To forgive presupposes that not forgiving is a valid moral option. You are doing what is morally acceptable whether you forgive or do not. The reason forgiveness is never a duty is because you need to forgive freely and without pressure. If forgiveness is a duty then it is a bigger duty if there is a God who commands it like the Christian God does. Thus God should be dropped. God is only a hindrance. Instead of morality being based on God, God undermines morality.

And forgiving what is forgivable is in his thought very cheap. If an act is unforgivable and you think it is forgivable then you cheapen the damage done. You cheapen the wrong.

Forgiveness presupposes that some acts are so heinous they are unforgivable. While we realise that people have to be

angry with us and condemn us before they can forgive we don't want them to see us as unforgiveable even if they will forgive!

To forgive should be a free act and how can it be unless you have the right not to forgive meaning the action is unforgiveable? If what they do is forgiveable then they do not need my forgiveness and my forgiveness does not matter.

If you calculate that an act is not bad enough to be unforgiveable then forgiving is based on a condition. "I forgive you because it is below the threshold for being unforgiveable". It is measured.

And if you forgive somebody for deliberately spilling a drop of tea on your couch is it really logical to say that is forgiveable while if the person ate your baby alive it would not be? Both acts open the door to evil and evil is by definition a Pandora's box. The difference is only cosmetic.

If I forgive what evil you do then the evil is forgiveable. Why then did I need to forgive? Why then did the action need to be forgiven? The two questions are not the same so do not confuse them. Here is the difference.

Derrida argued that there is no value in forgiving when something is forgiveable. So you can only forgive the unforgiveable. That gives it value. You really are putting good where there is evil. He denied that if you forgive the person you must require them never to do the bad thing again.

Forgiveness only has value when it is forgiving the unforgiveable. But then we have a new problem. For Derrida forgiving is a contradiction, you forgive what is not forgiveable and cannot be forgiven. There is no way out of the contradiction. If you forgive what cannot be forgiven that is a contradiction. You are either not forgiving or faking it. The unforgiveable is not forgiveable in principle. He said forgiveness is the act of forgiving the unforgiveable so forgiveness then is a contradiction.

CHRISTIAN FORGIVENESS

Derrida noticed that in Christian forgiveness, the person is forgiven as well as the act. But that leads to you saying, "I forgive you but if you will not do this thing again." Derrida says that forgiveness is forgiving the unforgiveable so there should be no condition. Derrida is clear that this is not true forgiveness at all.

The Christian wants to be respected as a forgiver instead of the other taking advantage of the forgiveness.

The Christian wants to respect the other by expecting or hoping that the other will do better in future.

The Christian wants to respect God who is offended by the sin. God forgives but promises it heals and that he can help the bad person grow into a better one.

The Christian has to forgive as an instrument of God - God forgives using the disciple.

The Christian sees forgiving as a reward in itself and a gift of God that God rewards. This contradicts Derrida's insistence that real forgiveness avoids ANY hope or anticipation of a reward. It is not to be a reward in itself or rewarded.

So if secular forgiveness which forgives the person and the act has problems faith in God based forgiveness is worse and adds to the problems.

Some Christians say when they forgive they forgive the bad thing somebody did and they also forgive that person. That is wrong. The act cannot be separated from the person for the person is the problem. There is only forgiving the person.

It is better to genuinely try and forgive what cannot be forgiven. You do not forgive for you cannot but the intention is totally about goodness. To argue that forgiveness is better than this intention is ridiculous. It makes a laughing stock of any attempt to make sense of right and wrong. Forgiveness can only be simulated not granted if there is no right and wrong or if you think there isn't.

If something is unforgivable in itself and/or is unforgiveable as far as our feelings are concerned then what? For us to see it and feel it is unforgiveable means that if we still forgive then forgiveness is a painful heroic gift. Nobody wants to suffer to forgive and all who talk about forgiveness do it to get inner peace. If it is agony to forgive then is the moving on worth it? No. And even more so when forgiveness as Derrida notes is not a one time deed but a deed spread over what could be a very long time. It seems you would only do it for a God. Also it is clear that most of those who say they forgive are in fact dealing with a hurt by making excuses for the perpetrator - they are condoning. And all know how to mask this. They are also pressured to mask it for human nature tends to disparage the doormat.

UNCOMMON?

And there is the problem of how we all see and feel that many actions that are forgivable as unforgivable which compounds and boosts the occurrences of the problems.

One thing for sure is real forgiveness is a rarity...or does it ever exist? If you have to forgive for God that is harder than forgiving for man even if in principle sin is unforgivable. So God is a hindrance and a toxin. And if sin is unforgivable only God knows if you are forgiven and it could be that hardly anybody gets forgiven.

FORGIVENESS, ESPECIALLY GOD'S, IS NOT ABOUT ANY PURPOSE

If you forgive the unforgivable it does not change anything. It is like painting a pink wall pink. God's forgiving does NOTHING. All that happens is that he changes his attitude to you and even that is a metaphor for religion says that God always has a good attitude to us no matter what we do. No wonder we want his cheap forgiveness! Forgiving changes nothing – acting on it makes the changes. A person can forgive and fail to act on it. If God forgives and then works on you the forgiveness did nothing. Yet forgiveness is what is put first by believers. They prefer to be forgiven by God than to have him fix the damage. If there is a choice they will choose forgiveness and not reform if it has to be one or the other.

A forgiveness like that looks very like condoning. Bringing God into it makes sure of that. Forgiveness is far more condoning then!

It is said, "Evil A being unforgivable and Evil B being unforgivable does not mean they are equally unforgivable. While an act is either forgivable or it is not, unforgivable murder is not on the same level as unforgivable words." But unforgivable means it is black and white. It means an evil so intolerable that it cannot be pardoned. Intolerable is just intolerable there are no grades. This makes the child stealing a lollypop as bad as the world's most ruthless bankrobber.

Sin is a religious interpretation of evil. It is trying to create evil and thus like trying to murder God for God and evil are incompatible.

Suppose evils are not made equal by being totally intolerable and totally unforgivable. What about sin then? Sin A being unforgivable and Sin B being unforgivable does not mean they are equally unforgivable. While a sin is either forgivable or it is not, unforgivable blasphemy is not on the same level as unforgivable murder against a person. If evil is necessarily unforgivable then religion is worsening the problem. It proclaims it unforgivable to disrespect and insult God. So instead of one evil you have two. You have two unforgivables instead of one. Religion makes evils that are 10% unpardonable to be 90% unpardonable. It makes actions unforgivable when they hurt nobody and are only wrong in the religion's head. Unforgivable sin makes forgiving a last resort. It bans trivialising forgiveness. These ideas show how abhorrent religious doctrine and devotion actually is for religion flippantly tells you to say sorry to God and all is forgiven.

The problems with religious forgiveness are bad. God forgives when you simply say sorry. Even worse the sorry makes God FORGET the sin. God does not bury the hatchet and mark where it is laid in this case!

Now if God comes first or alone matters then it follows that if it is unforgivable if I slap a baby hard then fair enough but the offence done to God by this act is even more unforgivable. If sin is unforgivable then clearly two sins can be unforgivable with one being more unforgivable than the other. If sin is unforgivable then imagine how unforgivable it is when it attacks the one being who matters: God. Derrida might be thinking of wrongs we do to each other and calling them unforgivable and that is not nice but it is sheer horror if you involve God. Obviously if evil is unforgivable we must consider a belief that makes you intend to hurt a God even if there is none is itself unforgivable. It is wrong to give people a belief that creates more unforgiving for the fact remains that if there is no God and you think there is you still intend something unforgivable by offending him.

Though if all evil is unforgivable, something still repels us about religion for it is clearly trying if not succeeding to make it worse!

ITS REALLY CONDONING

Forgiving the unforgivable is impossible. It is a euphemism for condoning and lying about it. You can only condone the unforgivable. You cannot forgive the unforgivable any more than you can bring back the Bible exactly as it was if it is erased from the world forever. God does not forgive so God is not really God and cannot truly love sinners. There is no room for loving the sinner and hating the sin if that implies forgiving.

SO?

Forgiveness is only possible when what is done is unforgivable and shouldn't be forgiven.

Shouldn't means that forgiveness in some way is dangerous and harmful and it is better not to forgive. This speaks of the damage it does. But what about forgiveness being inherently bad? If what is done is inherently unforgiveable then forgiveness is immoral.

So in terms of results and in itself forgiveness is evil and forgiving is fundamentally about defiance.

If we are talking psychology, then forgiveness is only a word. Its a word that does not mean anything - a contradiction is not a thing but a nothing and a nonsense. Its an attempted violence against your nature.

It is also impossible and is not a paradox but a contradiction.

What is happening then is not forgiveness but condoning.

If God cannot forgive then God does not exist.

A forgiving God is meaningless.

God may forgive when we repent or he may give us forgiveness even if we do not so all we have to do is accept it not ask for it.

Forgiving means you judge the person as having shown a bad side and are letting that go. If forgiving is fake the judging part is certainly real!! Forgiving means taking a risk - you judge that the other person may still be a danger and may abuse the mercy. Forgiveness involves being judgemental and moving on past the judgement but not ignoring it or defying it.

Hate the sin and love the sinner by forgiving them is a lie.

Hypothetically, if you really can forgive the unforgiveable then you are a God. You are bigger than morality and bigger than the fact that what was done cannot be forgiven. No God then can lay out moral decrees for you.

Only morality can forgive a person. But clearly morality is bigger than God. Religion says that this is an error - God is morality. But if you could have one without the other you would want morality so in that way morality matters and God does not. God and people forgiving means they are following a social construct. Morality might not even authorise the forgiveness for all we know if it could. Morality might not even authorise the forgiveness for all we know if it could. That makes it real but only in the minds of those who forgive and are forgiven. The reality could be totally different.

If forgiveness is impossible then imagine that if it could be granted despite that then it is up to the individual entirely to forgive and nobody has the right to suggest or much less command something so impossible.

For Derrida, whether it is possible or not is beside the point, forgiveness is a secret gift. Its anonymous. If God is watching and God rewards then forgiveness's status as a gift is suspect. It is a bigger problem if the main person, God, the one who is all about, sees it than the recipient.

Derrida's account of forgiveness refutes God as a credible idea and as a desirable one.

It may explain why religions of love and mercy soon disintegrate into violence and corruption. The world has been repeatedly shocked and baffled at how that happens so easily and can happen so fast. And the problem is hard to define and determine because forgiveness obscures all.