

TLS

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THIS WEEK

We begin the New Year with two very different considerations of the importance of childhood experiences. The latest research gathered by Alison Gopnik (below) in *The Philosophical Baby* shows, Herbert Zimiles explains, how “the vigour and scope of babies’ explorations, unfettered by the inhibitions and distractions of later life, give them a freedom and fluidity that renders them as truly exceptional beings”. Exploring the cognitive foundations of babies’ learning processes is one more piece in the familiar puzzle of nature and nurture. Jacqueline Banerjee’s Commentary article, outlining the formative experiences of Sir Paul Harvey, the original author of the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, also takes up the theme. Harvey looks at first glance like a pillar of the Establishment, producing his great work single-handedly after a distinguished civil service career. But, as Banerjee shows, the boy whom Henry James met as a “lovely infant” with “eyelashes six inches long” was not the “orphan nephew” of his hostess, but her illegitimate half-brother. This potentially ruinous background was compensated for by the interest and support not only of Harvey’s sister, but also of another “mother figure”, W. B. Yeats’s patron Lady Gregory. Harvey’s professional life was devoted to public service rather than letters, but his early literary experiences seem to have had a lasting effect. His Companion, described with characteristic reserve by the *TLS* in 1932 as “useful” was, Banerjee notes, an “astonishing” achievement, parts of which were still recognized as “brilliantly done” by Margaret Drabble when she came to edit the fifth edition.



Australia’s cricketers, pondering another three years without the coveted Ashes after their failure to beat England in the current series, might yearn for a player like Hugh Trumble, ancestor of Angus Trumble, whose book *The Finger* is reviewed by Ferdinand Mount. Trumble’s “uncommonly long fingers” helped him to spin the ball prodigiously, an Antipodean art now apparently fallen into desuetude.

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Wrongdoing and suffering wrong are pervasive features of human life. How ought we to respond to them? Many advocate forgiveness, apology and atonement. Forgiveness in particular is trumpeted as a panacea that prevents or helps cure everything from cancer to cycles of violence. But how are we to understand this family of ideas? Is there a definitive analysis of, say, forgiveness, that responds to the "what is it?" question with a list of necessary and sufficient conditions? The answers are surprisingly difficult to work out, in part because they involve such complex topics as the nature of the emotions and methodological questions about what it would mean to provide an analysis of the given concept.

On most contemporary accounts, including my own, forgiveness requires forswearing moral anger, or what one might also call (following Bishop Butler as well as a number of later thinkers) resentment. You cannot plausibly claim to have forgiven someone for a wrong done to you if you are still harbouring resentment. Proponents of forgiveness are thus critics of resentment, holding, at the extreme, that resentment or vengefulness never has moral or even psychological justification, however understandable it may be. This latter view typically goes hand in hand with the conviction that forgiveness is at its best unilateral or unconditional: one should grant it regardless of whether any steps (such as apology or atonement) are taken by the offender. In fact one can argue against the appropriateness of moral anger, as Seneca does in *On Anger*, while not making any room for forgiveness. But in contemporary discussions the two tend to be tightly linked.

In *Resentment's Virtue: Jean Améry and the refusal to forgive*, Thomas Brudholm asks whether there could be a persuasive case for what he calls "unforgiveness", in spite of "the boosters of forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation". The context in which he seeks to make the case is that of great evil (such as "mass atrocity"). His main targets are the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa and its best-known member, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The title of one of Tutu's books – *No Future Without Forgiveness* – concisely captures the view Brudholm disputes. It feels almost impious to question Tutu's position on the matter, given his astonishing achievements, courage and charisma. And yet Brudholm does precisely that with care and insight. Tutu "does not acknowledge resentment as a legitimate moral sentiment on any level", unilateral forgiveness being the ideal. He goes on to document ways in which the TRC, under Tutu's influence, at times pressured victims of apartheid to forswear their resentment and forgive. Brudholm convincingly questions whether victims were always well served thereby.

How would one make a case for the virtue of resentment? Building on Jeffrie Murphy's groundbreaking work on resentment and forgiveness, Brudholm turns to the writings of Jean Améry for the answer. Améry was an Austrian of Jewish and Catholic parentage who joined the Belgian Resistance and in 1943 was caught, tortured and sent to Auschwitz, among other camps. Miraculously he survived, and became a prolific author. In 1978, he committed suicide. In the work to which Brudholm devotes most of his attention – *At the Mind's Limits: Contempla-*

A sorry business

CHARLES L. GRISWOLD

Thomas Brudholm

RESENTMENT'S VIRTUE
Jean Améry and the refusal to forgive
235pp. Temple University Press. £32 (US \$51.50).
978 1 59213 566 0

Nick Smith

I WAS WRONG
The meanings of apologies
298pp. Cambridge University Press. £47;
paperback, £16.99 (US \$99; \$24.99).
978 0 521 68423 1

Linda Radzik

MAKING AMENDS
Atonement in morality, law, and politics
244pp. Oxford University Press. £45 (US \$74).
978 0 19 537366 0

tions by a survivor on Auschwitz and its realities (the original German title translates as "Beyond Guilt and Atonement") – Améry made his case for not surrendering his moral anger or what he called his "ressentiment" against both those who assaulted him and those who would forget the crimes of the Third Reich. Brudholm sets up a stark contrast between Tutu's allegiance to forgiveness and Améry's resistance to forgiving great crimes.

Améry's salient point seems to be that it is immoral to forgive before adequate steps have been taken by wrongdoers as well as by those who attempt to forget and "move on". His *ressentiment* is a protest against evil and amnesia. Might one not take such a stand, however, without inflicting harmful lifelong anger on oneself? His *ressentiment* also expresses the demand for an "undoing of the past". But that is, Brudholm adds, "absurd and impossible".

There are several difficulties when it comes to analysing Améry's position. First, the word *ressentiment*, which is taken from Nietzsche, blends resentment with a desire for revenge, a sense of powerlessness, and envy. Since Améry isn't trying to defend those emotions, Brudholm is left with suggesting that "a Nietzschean and psychological understanding of the term [*ressentiment*] captures the social judgment of him [Améry] and his kind": And yet Améry wishes to defend *ressentiment*. The resulting confusion is best credited to a second difficulty: as Brudholm acknowledges, Améry is not a systematic thinker and does not offer a well worked-out argument. This applies to forgiveness, too: "Améry does not do justice to the phenomenon and the concept". Compelling a witness though Améry is, one finishes Brudholm's thought-provoking book warned about the dangers of unilateral forgiveness, but still looking for a well worked-out position about the conditions to be met by both offenders and victims if forgiveness is to come off. Such conditions would have to guarantee that forgiveness does not collapse into condoning, excuse-making, or forgetting, and that resentment is given its due but no more.

On almost any account that requires some-



The Toyota Motor Corp President Akio Toyoda at a news conference in Nagoya, Japan, February 5, 2010, after a global recall of Toyota cars

thing of the offender, apology will play a key role. Nick Smith's *I Was Wrong: The meanings of apologies* is by far the best systematic account of apology available. It is wide-ranging, very well informed and philosophically sophisticated. As in the case of forgiveness, talk about apology now permeates our culture. One can hardly pick up a newspaper without reading about an apology being offered by, or demanded from, a corporate entity of some sort – State, Church, business corporation – or prominent individual. Apologies are commonplaces of everyday interpersonal relationships as well. We often question whether an apology has been truly made or not, and sense the potential for manipulation in fake or incomplete apologies. The range of relevant factors includes the offender's exact choice of words; assumption of responsibility; repentance; atonement; truth-telling; and expression of sympathy. Each one of these factors is knotty in itself. An apology from someone who is not somehow causally responsible for the wrong, and did not somehow intend the wrong, seems misplaced. And yet we do accept apologies on behalf of institutions, offered by spokespersons who themselves had nothing whatsoever to do with the wrong in question.

The intricacies of apology are such that Smith declines to offer a "final definition". Instead of working out the conditions for what will count as an apology, he explores the "meanings" of apologies. These derive from the context; there is no point in trying to locate the "necessary and universal essence of a social practice like apologizing in light of its range of meanings and cultural nuances". Does this approach work? There is reason to wonder, as Smith picks out what he calls the "regulative ideal" that is "categorical apology", the "touchstone" sense, and points to the need for a "standard" to distinguish what will and will not count as an apology.

In doing so he isolates what can only be necessary conditions for something to count as an apology. To take Smith's example, I cannot apologize for murdering Abraham Lincoln since I did not in fact murder him. Sometimes the "meaning" of an apology is not a condition of its being an apology, but many

of the meanings Smith isolates are necessary conditions. His philosophical methodology, then, is debatable. It is at its most fruitful when he analyses collective apologies. His discussion of the perplexing problems of assigning intentions and responsibility to collectives is excellent, as is his measured defence of the possibility of doing so. Smith also offers an interesting discussion of gender and apology (is it true that women apologize more than men?) and of non-standard cases such as apologizing to the dead, to animals, to things, and to oneself.

Of course we will expect more than apology from a wrongdoer. Linda Radzik's fine book *Making Amends: Atonement in morality, law, and politics* offers a carefully argued and innovative theory to the effect that what is needed from offenders is atonement. Her "ethic of atonement" is built around a notion fraught with religious connotations, but is a secular philosophical theory. She is keenly aware of the potential for manipulation in demanding atonement; noting that "the history of atonement is in large part a history of degradation". As an example that serves as a challenge she describes the horrors of the Magdalen asylums of Ireland. The exploitation of women – justified by demands for atonement – by these Catholic "asylums" has yet to be fully atoned for.

Starting from her thesis that wrongs damage relationships, Radzik expertly and critically examines theories of atonement as moral transformation and as debt repayment (the repayment may be understood in terms of restitution, or in retributivist terms – sometimes theologically articulated – which treat suffering as the medium of exchange). She rightly finds them incomplete or problematic. They minimize the moral significance either of the victim (transforming yourself doesn't necessarily help your victim) or of the offender (restitution can be made by a third party). Instead she offers a model of reconciliation that reflects "the social nature of wrongdoing". Indeed, "proper atonement" requires reciprocity from the victim, such as bilateral "respectful communication". Steps to be taken by the wrongdoer normally include apology, moral self-improvement, empathy with the victim, and reparations. When the offender atones, "the victim will have good reason to give up her resentment, fear, and distrust of the wrongdoer" and to forgive.

While it sounds as though Radzik is working out the conditions that warrant forgiveness, she also maintains that the victim may justifiably need to hold on to her resentment out of self-respect and a sense of justice. So one could atone and be reconciled without being forgiven. I do not find that argument persuasive: an offender who has atoned in Radzik's sense should be forgiven, over time, by a self-respecting victim who values what is just, and Radzik herself seems to waver when writing that "the final correction of wrongdoing seems to depend on the victim's... willingness to forgive or morally reconcile with an offender who has made a sincere and proportional atonement". She nonetheless makes a very strong case for her reconciliation theory, including its political and legal applications. Her discussions of "restorative justice" and of the problem of collective atonement are superb, and dovetail nicely both with Smith's analysis of apology and with Brudholm's discussion of "resentment's virtue".