
Vengeance and Forgiveness: The Uses of Beneficence in Social Control

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Similarity of consciousness is instrumental to the cohesion of social groups; consciousness of similarity is a source of their integrity. These conditions may be undermined by the thoughts, sentiments, and activity of the wayward; but, as Durkheim (1964, pp. 70–110) taught us, they can also be reinforced by a sanction which dramatizes collective commitment to the values challenged by those who transgress them. It does not follow, however, that penal sanction is the necessary condition of social integration, which, among other things, involves the process of living and working together without undue resentment and hostility. Indeed, the purpose of this paper is to show that, in the western world, at least, forbearance is the most important remedy which groups apply to breaches in their social order. I will argue that in the absence of a counterbalance to the punitive impulse, without some value which brings about forgiveness as an end in itself, our society would be rent by perpetual animosity and grudge. Forgiveness is therefore not to be understood as a contingency which tempers an essentially punitive justice; it is more often the prior element in social control. The formula “All will be forgiven except those deemed worthy of punishment” thus stands as a counterpoint to the common understanding “All will be punished except those deemed worthy of forgiveness.” This holds true for a wide range of social action. Just as the order of face-to-face behavior is sustained in the face of frequent improprieties by remedial apologies and ritualized acceptances, so continual threats to the cohesion of small groups may be negated by the practice of “making up” through unilateral or mutual contrition

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and forgiveness. So, too, the integration of larger units is typically maintained by using punishment as a last rather than a first resort.

In view of the conventional wisdom on the subject of social control, however, it would seem that forgiveness of wrongdoing is a more or less exceptional thing. There is something about the imperative of *lex talionis*, “an eye for an eye,” that appeals to our immediate understanding; the doctrine of forgiveness, though it may seem right to us, is less intelligible. Why should this be so?

Before all else, we must recognize that the spirit of vengeance, the impulse to do harm to those who have wronged us, cannot be reduced to some innate “aggressive” disposition. On the contrary, that impulse stems from the same moral principle which compels us to return good for benefits received and to express deference to our benefactors. Gratitude and vengeance cannot exist independently of one another because both are derived from an identical source. If fairness requires that benefits be returned in kind, then it must also demand, in the absence of some kind of restitution, that harm be returned to those who do injury to us. Retributive justice must parallel distributive justice—any other equation would offend our moral sense.

Yet it is odd that we should go to the trouble to formulate, let alone sanctify, a rule which compels us to do what is psychologically natural. But what if, as against its apparent meaning, the real purpose of *lex talionis*—the “Law of the Heel”—is not to promote retaliation but to restrict it? Then the principle must be rephrased. “An eye for an eye” must mean, essentially, that for an eye lost one must exact of one’s transgressor no more than an eye, and so forth. However, this interpretation suggests that we are really not inclined to wreak vengeance in measured doses, that in the very essence of retaliation there is something which causes it to exceed in gravity the act which it would otherwise reciprocate in a measured way.

Once we have received a benefit from another, says Simmel (1950, pp. 392–93), we cannot achieve satisfaction by merely offering him a similar benefit in return, for his act has a voluntary character that no counteraction can have—precisely because it would be a provoked, and sometimes compulsory, reaction. The opposite is also true. When a transgression is unwarranted, that is to say, not itself occasioned by a

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wrong, there is an intensely felt sense of indignation, of injustice, to which no mere equal reaction can give expression. But we should perhaps be more precise. It is not that the initial transgression is impossible to repay; rather, it requires, by force of its voluntary character, a higher repayment. To accommodate this qualification, we must underscore the distinction between *retribution*, which involves the impartial infliction of punishment according to fixed rules of proportionality, and *revenge*, which consists of a violent and passionate retaliation, disproportional in severity to the initial act. Revenge is conditioned not by the fact of injury but of having been morally abused and outraged. For this reason, the injured are never satisfied by mere retribution.

More often than not, however, the moral equilibrium restored by vengeance is only temporary. For that extra measure of retaliation to which a victim is entitled may enrage the offender and so create a perpetual cycle of animosity or feud. We thereby come to a dilemma. On the one hand, social life as we know it would be impossible if grudge were not liberated from the processes which evoke and perpetuate it. On the other hand, it is inconceivable that individuals or groups could have sustained cause with one another without committing (for diverse reasons and often unintentionally) acts worthy of grudge and retaliation. This dilemma can be resolved only by an act of renunciation. Society must deny unlimited discretion to those who would retaliate against another. But how can it bring about, let alone routinize, such a measure of self-restraint?

The Obligation to Forgive and Forget

It is difficult to make sense of forgiveness when social interaction is conceived in terms of sustained claim and counterclaim. However, this contradiction may only stem from a tendency to look at interaction in its *restricted* form. In *generalized exchange* (see Ekeh 1974, pp. 49–53) there is total compatibility between forbearance and reciprocity, in that A forgives B and is “in turn” forgiven by C. (“Forgive us our trespasses,” one prays, “just as we forgive those who trespass against us.”) What we have, then, is a kind of social contract which promotes justice by demanding of all the same renunciation. One is obliged to forgive, although the recipient of forgiveness need not formerly have been its dispenser. Put differently, forgiveness is a generalized obligation toward a collectivity rather than a specific obligation due a particular transgressor.

But what is the reason for this obligation? Against what possibilities

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has it been imposed upon us? The answer to that question is evident enough. Forgiveness enables us to escape bloody cycles of vengeance and retaliation, as the Greeks taught us centuries ago (in particular, see Aeschylus [1970]). And Gouldner (1973, pp. 274–75) has reminded us of this just recently in his discussion of the “norm of benevolence”: “The norm of benevolence . . . serves as a mechanism for stopping vicious cycles of social interaction. . . . It is extremely difficult to stop such a vicious cycle or to extricate oneself from it. Of the few things that may be done to stop it, among the most necessary is that one of the parties must manifest forbearance; he must ‘turn the other cheek,’ ‘go the second mile.’ It is precisely such forbearance that the norm of benevolence encourages.” But renunciation of vengeance is not enough. Society and its members must not only forgive; they must also forget. The words of an authoritative theologian (Mackintosh 1927, p. 30) convey the *sociological* importance of this objective:

Those people who say that they can forgive but not forget betray the fact, unconsciously for the most part, that their forgiveness has been accompanied by reservations and qualifications which, morally, are fatal. It is of course true that the offending sin is remembered in the sense that we are still aware of it; when our mind recurs to the subject, we are conscious and may always be conscious, that it once happened. But what has utterly changed for us is its value or personal significance. Before, it was a fact that provoked and maintained estrangement; now, if pardon is real, the injured man has wholly ceased to regard that past event as determinative of his personal relationships to the offender. Self and neighbor are now at peace. In this sense all true forgiveness forgets the guilt which it pardons. . . . Thus it hardly needs saying that forgiveness differs by a whole moral universe from the mere abandonment of revenge.¹

On the collective, as opposed to the dyadic, level, however, it is the phenomenon of amnesty which best exemplifies the way a social system can be bound together by forbearance. This is because amnesty is the act of forgiving and forgetting the crimes of a collectivity, or, more precisely, part of a collectivity, for the expressed purpose of celebrating union. Amnesty is an act that more often than not supposes the guilt of those to whom it is offered but which omits reference to it in the offering itself. Amnesty, or collective forgiveness, is in this sense the most radical affirmation of social integration. In amnesty, as in forgiveness in general, integration is the explicit end in view.²

If there is any merit to what has just been said, then we have a right to conclude that the humanitarian impulse is a necessary but not

sufficient condition of forgiveness. Neither is it a sufficient condition of mercy, which, by mitigating the intensity of sanction, comes into view as an attenuated variant of forgiveness. Indeed, one might assert that the exclusively humanitarian theory of forgiveness and mercy (which is probably the most commonly held) is a fiction which directly subserves a systemic necessity by maximizing its exercise. However, while it is related to the notions of toleration (Merton 1957, pp. 342–46) or even protection (Goode 1967) of deviance, forgiveness itself is not a mode of accommodation; it does not unofficially condone wrongdoing. On the contrary, it is granted only under the assumption that the transgressor will “go and sin no more.”³ Thus, each group maintains its integration by setting up a series of safeguards against its own punitive tendencies, so that most of the wrongdoing which is not accommodated can be “written off” (through forgiveness) without promoting an impression that core values are taken lightly.

The Sacred Character of Forgiveness

We may not be justified in saying that forgiveness is occasioned by systemic necessity alone. This may simply be the condition which facilitates or brings it about. After all, forgiveness is a value which is deeply embedded in the religions of western civilization. Might not its ultimate source, therefore, reside in the ideals of culture rather than in the imperatives of social structure? That is an important issue. It is also a complex one.

While forgiveness was central to the initial formulations of Christian culture, its significance has undergone substantial revision. The early point of view of Roman Catholicism, on which all subsequent Christian doctrines on the subject are modeled, stressed forgiveness as a generalized obligation emanating from mankind’s debt to Christ. In turn, divine grace was abundantly available in exchange for diverse forms of penance and was eventually administered through a florid system of “indulgences.” This system was repudiated during the Reformation.

However, the fact that Protestantism stripped the worshipper of certain access to a divine forgiveness did not negate the value of worldly forgiveness as an end in itself.⁴ Indeed, even today, and among even our most radically secular societies, forgiveness continues to be an intrinsically noble thing. Moreover, to find something common between divine and worldly forgiveness is to transform an ordinary into an extraordinary act, so that whoever grants pardon in the secular sphere is perceived by others to be endowed with a mystical, even charismatic, competence. As Gouldner (1973, pp. 272, 275) puts

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it, "When a man is seen as able to tear himself out of the field of tightly constraining social forces . . . , when he restrains himself from returning hurt for hurt, insult for insult, he is often, and in a way rightly, viewed as possessing certain special individual qualities of an almost heroic cast." Thus, by embodying in his actions a charismatic principle, the exponent of forgiveness is lent a social significance he would not otherwise have.

In considering the conditions under which forgiving rather than punitive reactions to transgression may occur, we have asserted the importance of two particular conditions: structural necessity, brought about by the consequences of vengeance, and cultural demands, especially those embodied in the major doctrines of Christianity. Obviously, each factor may, and no doubt does to some extent, make its own separate contribution to the taming of man's retaliatory disposition. In saying this, however, we have probably oversimplified things. For while social and religious necessity are analytically distinct, they may not be completely so in the real world. Specifically, one may entertain the possibility that the theology of forgiveness is a sanctification of its functional necessity (acknowledging, at the same time, that such a necessity is not universally sanctified). Of course, this would not mean that the sacred elements of forgiveness are no more than epiphenomena of social convenience. On the contrary, once created, religious motives act back upon and often subserve the social conditions which brought them about. The emergent reciprocal connection can be very important: forbearance may be activated by structural pressures but made meaningful through religious account and rationalization. Transformed into a virtue, necessity becomes sanctified.

Forgiveness, Justice, and Social Authority

The manifestations of forgiveness cannot be explained by structural pressure or ideology alone. There is an associated psychological factor. For, whatever brings it about, once forgiveness has been granted the bestower often feels it his duty to continue to forgive. This is not only because the initial act is occasioned by the same felt obligation which demands the second and subsequent acts, but also because forgiveness may, by the very force of its necessity, become so imperative that it appears to the offender that he actually has a right to it. In fact, this right does not formally exist but is only the phenomenological manifestation of its systemic roots. Put differently, the community is not obligated to forgive; it is rather obliged to do so. As an ultimate

consequence, claims to forgiveness are made because a wrongdoer compares his plight with that of others who have been spared and so considers its denial a form of injustice. The connection between forgiveness as a systemic prerequisite and forgiveness as an individual entitlement is mediated by this social comparison process.

Thus, the transgressor's sense of having a "right" to forgiveness is by no means an illusion, based as it is on the real social necessity of foregoing sanction on a selective—that is, a just—basis. On the other hand, not only forgiveness per se but also the conception of forgiveness as a right is a social necessity inasmuch as it ensures that the allocation of mercy not be subject to the whims and vicissitudes of diverse people and institutions. In this manner, a socially necessary function is institutionalized. This is reinforced in two directions. First, the ideology of forgiveness, which holds its exercise to be an absolute good, makes it easier for the wronged to forgive. "To err is human," as they say, but "to forgive, divine." Second, the conception of forgiveness as a right makes it easier for the offender to accept forgiveness, for, when viewed as an entitlement, forgiveness carries with it no sense of humiliation and degradation.

We are thus brought to another problem. If the act of immediate and passionate retaliation brings together the common conscience of a society, as Durkheim (1964, pp. 70–110) claimed, then to what extent is this function undermined by forbearance? That is to say, if forgiveness subserves integration in one respect, might it not subvert it in another? The standpoint from which this question is derived is a popular one. It found expression in ancient warnings against the "lax" doctrines of Saint Paul and in the more recent admonition of G. B. Shaw, "Forgiveness is a beggar's refuge; we must pay our debts." Such statements, of course, lead us to associate punishment with authority and to take forgiveness to be a renunciation of authority. In fact, nothing could be farther from the truth. For the mere possession of the power to forgive implies the power not to, so that the exercise of one or the other capacity matters little as far as the affirmation of morality is concerned. It matters only that wrongdoing be recognized in the name of society. This is to say that society affirms its integrity not necessarily by punishment of wrongdoing but by reaction to it, whatever the mode to which that reaction may conform.

However, we should recognize an important qualitative difference. Negative sanctions are more or less formally prescribed; forgiveness is almost always a discretionary benefit. Punishment, then, flows from principle, forgiveness from the willful grace of an identifiable person. Among those who benefit by his hand there must be deeply felt, positive sentiments whose intensity could not be negatively re-

produced among those who suffer under impersonal statute. This is why forbearance rather than power is the main source of the *personal* legitimacy of the socially dominant. Hence the tendency to restrict the power of pardon to supreme political authority. It is also noteworthy that the possessor of high authority does not himself impose penal sanctions, for by such activity he could only implicate himself in the realm of the common and profane. This invidious distribution of vital functions introduces a qualitative element to what only appears to be a quantitative difference between the supreme leader and lower authorities. The leader's mercy sets him apart, renders him awe inspiring, and enables him to make extraordinary claims on the loyalty of even his most remote following. Thus, a counterpoint to forgiveness as an expression of benign altruism is the fact that by granting the transgressor a benefit he can never repay, one gains permanent ascendancy over him.

The forgiveness of authority, or, rather, the authority of forgiveness, may be looked at from a different point of view. On the social level, forgiveness is an interpersonal process; it ends the moral isolation of the offender by reconciling him, directly or indirectly, to an injured party. On the personality level, forgiveness is an intrapersonal process which seeks to overcome the tension between an ego and a superintending conscience. In Fenichel's (1945, p. 138) words, "The pressure from the part of the super ego to which the ego is exposed creates first of all a need for getting rid of this pressure, for regaining the lost self-esteem, and for reassurance against feelings of annihilation. This aim is best achieved by 'forgiveness'." As a strictly psychological process, says Fenichel, forgiveness involves the absolution of the ego by an internalized authority.

The achievement of self-absolution is a salient issue in those sectors of western civilization which have been designated as "guilt cultures" (see, for example, Brown 1959). Social control, after all, involves the management of guilt (which is always potentially disabling) as well as the installation of an agency which produces guilt. It requires "remissive" as well as "interdictory" modes and institutions (Rieff 1966, pp. 232-33).⁵ The role of psychiatry in this regard was foreseen by Freud at the turn of the century. "One works," say Freud, "to the best of one's power . . . as a father confessor who gives absolution, as it were, by a continuance of his sympathy and respect after the confession has been made" (cited in Klassen 1966, p. 225). The paradox, however, is that psychiatry can only forgive what is not recognized to be a sin. Thus, in a letter to Pfister (Meng and Freud 1963, p. 125), Freud is careful to distinguish secular from sacred forgiveness: "The utterance, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee; arise and walk' is psychologically

profound. If the sick man had asked 'How knowest thou that my sins are forgiven?' the answer could only have been: 'I the Son of God forgive thee.' In other words, a call for unlimited transference. And now, just suppose I said to a patient: 'I, Professor Sigmund Freud, forgive thee thy sins,' what a fool I would have made of myself."

Whether we are dealing with transgressions in the sphere of the sacred or the secular, we must also recognize a class of instances in which forgiveness intensifies rather than diminishes the self-reproach of the culpable. This occurs when there is a disproportionality between what exchange theory would designate as a man's "rewards," on the one hand, and his "costs" and "investments," on the other (Homans 1974, pp. 241–68). Just as a person feels resentful when his rewards are less abundant than those whose sacrifices are comparable to his own, so he will feel, somehow, blameworthy or painfully exceptional when the penalty he incurs is less harsh than that received by those who have been equally abusive. In this we are reminded of the characters Barabbas and Jean Valjean, who use up their lives overcoming the guilt brought about by their having been forgiven. In view of this ironic possibility, we must recognize that forgiveness may originate out of a hostile attitude, whose purpose is to activate another's sense of guilt—and not always as an instrument to some end but sometimes for the pure joy of doing so.

But there is another side to the matter. Whatever role it plays in the dramatization and maintenance of ascendancy, part of the humiliation of being forgiven is in having to publicly declare oneself a transgressor. This need for public repentance has the effect of deterring those who would otherwise confess their failings. It is perhaps partly for this reason that by the sixth century a public confession and repentance were no longer required for absolution by the Catholic Church. Penance became a private affair (Emerson 1964, p. 111; McNeill 1938). But this may also be part of the reason why offenders are so often welcomed back to the fold with what actually seems to be impunity. Thus, in the presence of his brothers, the father of the Prodigal Son bade his servants, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him." This gesture, and others like it, is simply a way of reducing the anguish of an admission of guilt, which is implicit in the very acceptance of forgiveness. It is one among an array of techniques commonly used to induce a person to receive a benefit which degrades him.

However, pardon may be intolerable when the recipient is actually innocent, or at least considers himself innocent, of the act for which he is shown mercy. He may therefore be compelled to reject it and bear the consequences of doing so. In other words, while the principle

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of *noblesse oblige* sustains the established distribution of power through forgiveness and the promotion of indebtedness, a refusal to be obligated is a direct challenge to the legitimacy of that structure. The idea that forgiveness will promote indebtedness and eventual reintegration into the social order thus assumes an initial commitment to that order, and, consequently, an initial sense of guilt at having offended it. Forgiveness presupposes the feelings it seeks to instill. That is to say, it cannot create feelings of culpability but only exaggerate already existing sentiments. By the same token, forgiveness can promote conformity only when conformity is part of the terms on which it is offered.

These last remarks show why a world without punishment—a social system which could only bring itself to forgive—would be impossible. This is because punishment helps bring about the social commitment and the capacity to conform which forgiveness presupposes. But a group or a society governed by punishment alone would be equally unthinkable. Without forgiveness, the destructive cycle of hostile action and counteraction could not be broken. And guilt, unrelieved, would be impossible to bear.

Another point, closely related to the above, forces itself upon us. Durkheim was wrong when he thought social integration to be possible only by the moral exclusion of wrongdoers. From the initial assumption that the sanctity of rules is defined in terms of the punishment applicable to their violation, he assumes that punishment must promote their efficacy. Functional relationships, however, are not necessarily implied in definitional statements. Nevertheless, Durkheim's logic has had its effect on the contemporary conception of human failings. The wrongdoer has come to be described as "deviant" or "outsider." These are terms which we have assiduously avoided, implying as they do an intrinsic, qualitative dimension to what is more often than not a situational and temporary failure. If the malefactor is "outside" of society, then he is only outside of it in certain respects, reproducing the condition in which we all find ourselves. The senses in which the transgressor is excluded merely define his relationship to the group, which, in turn, presupposes the specific conditions of his inclusion. This could only be the case if the group achieved its integration not only by denying the offender but also by eventually embracing him, dramatizing its relation to him, binding him unto itself by total or partial forgiveness.

From a negative standpoint, integration anchored in consensual exclusion is bad therapy because everyone in the community is at one time or other subject to it. The strategy of exclusion also ignores the status of those rejected, who, as Mead (1918) was the first to show,

form reactive countercultures and so come to constitute a source of danger from without. In contrast to an exclusionary vengeance, then, forgiveness, insofar as it allows the community to embrace the wrongdoer, more often effects a "cure" (in the only sociological sense cure can possibly be conceived) for both. Thus, in the statement "God hates sin but loves sinners" there is sociological truth, in that all groups seek to transform their sinners without losing them—and part of themselves.

However, the willingness of a community to accept wrongdoers pardoned by formal authority should not be taken for granted. This is an issue which hinges on the typical perception of the conditions surrounding the pardon itself. If a pardon is to be considered a right, whether in some absolute sense or in view of mercy or forgiveness shown others, then it will be considered wrong when one person receives it while another, who is comparable to him, does not. One forgiven under these conditions cannot be reintegrated into a community which is in any way committed to the values which those conditions violate. On the other hand, the reaction of a community to the offender's pardon and the reaction of the offender himself are not independent of one another. The community's acceptance of him depends in part on his dramatizing his sense of guilt; hence the necessity of expressed contrition. (Its failure to meet these two conditions helps account for the nearly universal condemnation of the recent pardon of a former United States President.)

Forgiveness thus promotes integration when it is considered just by others and when they are convinced of the offender's commitment to their values. The latter requirement, however, helps explain why it is so difficult to forgive a man twice, in that the second transgression discloses the real strength of an initially avowed commitment. It thus explains why some offenses cannot be forgiven at all. That is to say, the unforgivable transgression is one which, by the manner or circumstances in which it is carried out, betrays the perpetrator's contempt for the values he has violated. It reveals his insincerity, his essential disloyalty and lack of devotion to the basic ideals of his society. It lays bare a fundamental moral deficiency whose forgiveness would be utterly pointless. But society could not long survive if this rare, genuinely psychopathic, occurrence were encountered more frequently than it is.

Summary and Conclusion

In all societies there is a disparity between what men are entitled to and what it is possible to give them. Limitations on resources and the

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adverse social consequences of according individuals their just deserts help bring this dilemma about. Social stability therefore requires that people sometimes give benefits without receiving benefits in return and that they sometimes refrain from visiting harm upon those who have injured them. As Gouldner (1973, p. 264) puts it, "Certain aspects of social relationships must be exempt from both the requirements of complementarity and from the norm of reciprocity." Ironically, this principle finds one of its most instructive expressions in the phenomenon of retribution, which would seem to embody its negation. However, the formulations of retributive justice are not at all inspired by an impulse of vengeance, as may have been originally thought, but are actually directed against it. The rule which demands an eye for an eye, or, more specifically, no more than an eye for an eye, is really determined by and inspires in turn a spirit of forbearance, simply because it denies the tendency to take more. It is also clear from what has been said that vengeance and forgiveness are not always discriminable activities but may often be fused together in a single act of mercy, wherein the act is punished in a measured and restrained way. Vengeance is thereby transformed into a milder retribution.

There is also a positive side to this statement. By preventing the interminable feuds which are so often the consequences of vengeance, and, in so doing, restoring the wrongdoer to society, forgiveness emerges as the very principle of that society's integration. The efficacy of this principle is not limited to those groups which, like the Quakers, find in forgiveness the main premise of their moral values and who see the transgressors in their midst as an opportunity to practice what they preach. (Dentler and Erikson [1959] suggest as much in their penetrating article on the subject.) Rather, the integrative consequences of forgiveness are to be observed everywhere in our society. But this does not deny the central and universal importance of punishment in social organization and control. On the contrary, forgiveness and punishment are intimately linked; the one dramatizes and lends significance to the other. In this sense, punishment stands out as a reaction to a wrong which is not forgiven. It then comes to appear, however, that punishment is the source of integrative consequences actually brought about by its renunciation.

Notes

1. For a discussion of the psychological mechanisms which might impede this process, see Pattison (1965).

2. "Amnesty," one may recall, has the same root as "amnesia." A collectivity must "repress" memory of the harm done to it by its members so that indispensable enterprises which require their cooperation may proceed and not be incapacitated by the cumulative burden of past wrongs. This presupposes the offender's freedom from permanent stigma; otherwise his ability to contribute to society would be restricted. The late United States Senator Philip Hart recognized this in his preamble to the proposed "National Reconciliation Act of 1975." "This bill," he writes, "would expunge from the record material related to the draft or desertion offenses. A true amnesty, or forgetting, of such offenses must include these provisions. Otherwise the individual is marked by a record which may hinder him for the rest of his life" (*Congressional Record* [March 11, 1975], p. 1). Here we come upon the social implications of individual stigma or labeling. By preventing former offenders from making positive contributions, overly punitive societies deprive themselves. They suffer because they remember too well.

3. "Thus, in the Hebrew word *Macha*," says Emerson (1964, p. 83), "the primary meaning is 'to stroke' or 'to rub over.' The root shows that what has been done cannot be undone, but that the purpose of forgiveness is to remove the effect of sin."

4. The question of the criteria for mercy and forgiveness was one of the major issues to which Luther himself spoke. That aspect of Catholicism which most aroused the scorn of Luther was its insistence on linking grace to good works. This doctrine led to the conclusion that by committing exceptional acts of secular mercy, a man adds weight to his entitlement to divine mercy. "Merit had become a conception covering and embracing the whole of life," says Mackintosh (1927, p. 137). "Apart from it there would be no increase of grace, and the new grace was its recompense." This view of grace was rejected not only because of its calculative—even "commercial"—implications but also because of its presumption about the heights to which man could, by his own efforts, raise himself. In the words of Niehbur (1940, p. ix), "The Reformers believed that there is no possibility of man achieving any goodness which would make it possible for him to be justified in the final judgment, if divine mercy does not achieve this justification." "Between man and God," then (Mackintosh 1927, pp. 137–38), "there is no place for merits, or for a grace that apportions salvation to the merit acquired." Now, what the Protestant revolution eventually did was to sever the former connection between forgiveness in the sacred and secular spheres of life. Although the secular obligation to forgive (incurred by reason of God's grace) continued to be recognized, that obligation was no longer backed up by ethical doctrine. Since faith, rather than good works, became the means to salvation, divine forgiveness was not available as a compensation for worldly forgiveness, whose use then diminished. Just as the sentiments of charity were attenuated by the collapse of medieval institutions to care for the poor (Nicholas 1898, p. 152), so the spirit of forgiveness was weakened by the repudiation of the medieval institution of merit and indulgence. A less tolerant attitude was substituted for an earlier and more flexible concordat between man and the devil.

5. In the words of Klassen (1966, pp. 15–16), "The preaching of standards and values . . . without any escape from a violation of these standards is analogous to increasing pressure until finally the conveyor has to burst." Klassen goes on to express agreement with both Brown (1959) and Mowrer (1961, p. 77) by saying that "the emergence of the new psychology, which so

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deeply pervades all western thought, has pointed to a serious weakness of Christianity: it has bungled badly the problem of guilt" (p. 15).

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