

Moral Travel and the Narrative Work of Forgiveness

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ABSTRACT What is forgiveness? How is it differentiated from other forms of ‘moving on’ – e.g. overcoming the debilitating effects of past injuries by somehow diminishing them in memory? Philosophers have generally approached this problem by focussing on a specific type of outcome, holding certain key elements in their analyses fixed: the victim, the wrongdoer, the injury, and (hence) ‘justified’ resentment that the victim ‘appropriately’ overcomes. This paper takes a different tack, focussing instead of the emotional praxis or work of forgiveness – the kind of work that potentially eventuates in so-called genuine forgiveness. This work is helpfully construed as a narratively mediated species of ‘moral travel’. It often requires victims to open the points held fixed in standard philosophical analyses to potential negotiation and reconceptualization so as not to remain stuck in telling repetitive and debilitating stories of resentful victimization. Such work is inherently open-ended, taking victims towards a resolution that cannot be predicted in advance. This means there is no determinately right outcome to such work; paradoxically, it may even culminate in what many would say is not forgiveness at all. I present just such a case drawn from Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*, not simply to ‘normalize’ such outcomes, but to highlight the frame-shifting, developmental challenges inherent in the emotional work of forgiveness. Such challenges are not always so visible on standard philosophical approaches.