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 978-0-521-87882-1 - Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration  
 Charles L. Griswold  
 Excerpt  
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# Forgiveness Ancient and Modern

Ancient pagan notions of forgiveness are a vast and poorly studied topic.<sup>1</sup> That such notions existed is more than merely probable. The vocabulary for them was in place, along with a cluster of related notions – pardon, mercy, pity, compassion, apology, debt relief, excuse, among others – as was a sophisticated understanding of the emotions (in particular, retributive anger) to which forgiveness somehow responds. Similarly, the ends that forgiveness proposes, such as reconciliation, peace, and certainly the forswearing of revenge, were well understood. I very much doubt that there existed a single view on any of these topics (something like “the ancient pagan view”), though establishing that point would require a careful and comprehensive study of ancient literature, law court speeches and jurisprudence, the writings of the historians and physicians, and of course the philosophical texts. As is true in respect of other ideas, it would not surprise if the philosophers rejected or modified common views about forgiveness and related notions. Nonetheless, such notions did circulate in pre-Christian pagan thought and culture (counting here the Roman as well as Greek), contrary to common wisdom.

<sup>1</sup> Some help concerning their role in the Western tradition (to which my discussion is limited) may be found in K. Metzler, *Der griechische Begriff des Verzeihens: Untersucht am Wortstamm συγγνώμη von den ersten Belegen bis zum vierten Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, Reihe 2, 44; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991); and J. Krašovec’s *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness: the Thinking and Beliefs of Ancient Israel in the Light of Greek and Modern Views* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 78; Leiden: Brill, 1999). I am grateful to Chris Bobonich, Brad Inwood, David Konstan, David Roochnik, and David Sedley for discussion of the issues examined in this chapter.

Another vast territory stretches between them and Bishop Butler’s influential eighteenth-century account, examined in the second section of this chapter. I doubt that there existed a single view about our topics during that long period – Christian “forgiveness” too has an interesting conceptual history. Because my focus in this chapter is not primarily historical, however, and because the conceptual framework assumed here is secular, I offer only the briefest of observations about “the Christian tradition” of thought about my topics.

It is surprising and illuminating that forgiveness is not seen as a virtue by the ancient Greek philosophers. Understanding why helps to explain something about the conceptual context in which it becomes a virtue (or the expression of a virtue), as well as what it would mean to think of it in that way, and it is a chief aim of the following section to offer that explanation. I also attempt to delineate differences between forgiveness, excuse, and pardon, and to begin setting out the connection between forgiveness and anger. I argue that the perfectionism of ancient philosophical ethics, along with views about human dignity, provide the backdrop against which the ancient philosophical view of forgiveness is conceived. Limited in focus as it is, my discussion of ancient and modern forgiveness attempts to articulate the complex conceptual landscape in which forgiveness is located, thereby contributing significantly to the project of setting out a theory of forgiveness.

[i] PARDON, EXCUSE, AND FORGIVENESS IN ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY: THE STANDPOINT OF PERFECTION

From you let me have  
 much compassion (*sungnômosunên*) now for what I do.  
 You see how little compassion (*agnômosunê*) the Gods  
 have shown in all that’s happened; they  
 who are called our fathers, who begot us,  
 can look upon such suffering.  
 No one can foresee what is to come.  
 What is here now is pitiful for us  
 and shameful for the Gods;  
 but of all men it is hardest for him  
 who is the victim of this disaster.

Sophocles, *The Women of Trachis*, 1264–1274<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Trans. M. Jameson, in *Sophocles II*, ed. D. Grene and R. Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

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The vocabulary of forgiveness, and certainly of political and judicial pardon, was known to Plato, Aristotle, and their contemporaries as well as successors. The Greek term typically used is *sungnômê* or a cognate.<sup>3</sup> The rarity of the relevant use of the term by ancient philosophers, then, is not due the unavailability of the word. The verbal form of *sungnômê* is “*sungignôskô*,” meaning to think with, agree with, consent, acknowledge, recognize, excuse, pardon, have fellow-feeling or compassion with (as in the quotation from Sophocles with which this section begins). The etymology of the term suggests cognitivist connotations. Similarly, we talk of “being understood,” where this means that one’s interlocutor has entered into one’s situation, grasped it sympathetically from one’s own perspective, seen why one has acted or reacted as one has, and made allowances (this could mean anything from forgiving to pardoning to excusing). The range of meanings of *sungnômê* – from sympathize, to forbear, forgive or pardon, excuse or make allowance for – is fascinating, and anticipates several of my questions about the connections between these notions.

We find appeals to “*sungnômê*” among the law court speeches of various ancient rhetoricians. Consider Isocrates 16.12–13 and Andocides 1.57, 2.6–7, where the defendant appeals for pardon by reminding the

<sup>3</sup> By contrast, the verb used in the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:12 is *aphiêmi*, whose meanings include to acquit (in a legal sense), release, send away, cancel a debt, excuse. The 1611 King James version translated “and forgive [*aphes*] us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” So too in Luke 11.2.4 (where the King James translates “and forgive [*aphes*] us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us”); 23.34 (“Father forgive [*aphes*] them, for they do not know what they do”). Wyclif’s fourteenth-century translation of the Bible renders the term as “forgiveness.” Yet the Liddell, Scott, and Jones *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968) does not list “forgive” as one of the meanings of *aphiêmi* (though it does for the noun *aphesis*). The Latin vulgate used “*dimitto*,” meaning at base to release from, discharge, send away, with a primary context of forgiving a debt; and in Matthew, “sin” is “debita,” so too Luke 23.34, “Pater, dimitte illis; non enim sciunt quid faciunt.” (I am grateful to Hester Gelber for bringing my attention to the Latin, and for conversation about the complex meanings of pardon, forgiveness, and mercy in Medieval philosophy and culture.) For some discussion of the Biblical notions of forgiveness see A. Margalit’s *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), ch. 6. He notes on p. 188 that the Hebrew Bible uses two notions of forgiveness, one as “blotting out the sin” and the other as “covering it up” (disregarding but not forgetting). Only God can “forgive and forget,” that is, blot out the sin, remove it from the book of life, so to speak. See also D. W. Shriver, Jr., *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), ch. 1 and 2; and *Dimensions of Forgiveness*, ed. W. Worthington, Jr. (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 1998, Part I (“Forgiveness in Religion”). For a monumental scholarly examination, see J. Krašovec’s *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*. Krašovec does not tackle the Gospels, and about 700 pages of his lengthy text are devoted to the Hebrew sources. As will become evident in Chapter 2, my own view of forgiveness combines elements of “*sungnômê*” and “*aphiêmi*.”

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jury of shared human shortcomings.<sup>4</sup> Something similar goes on in tragic appeals based on an analogous situation, such as in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* 1401–2, where Electra, in praying to Artemis that she sympathize with Electra's love for her brother Orestes, reminds Artemis of her love for her own brother Apollo; all of which is meant to elicit "forgiveness" ("sungnômê") for Electra.<sup>5</sup>

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle uses the term mainly in two connections. The first concerns the nature of voluntary action in Book III. When the agent's deeds are caused by external force or are undertaken in ignorance of the relevant facts, the person is neither simply culpable nor praiseworthy. Sometimes, maybe often, there are mixed actions, as when someone is "forced" to throw the cargo off the ship in order to prevent it from sinking. When the external force is extreme, and people commit one of these "qualified willing" acts and, we proceed from this thought: "there is pardon (*sungnômê*), whenever someone does a wrong action because of conditions of a sort that overstrain human nature, and that no one would endure" (1110a24–26).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See also Andocides I.141, where the term means "sympathy." For another interesting example of a court room use of the term, see Lysias 31, where as D. Konstan notes, *sungnômê* "is not pardon or acquittal; it is more like a shared attitude." *Pity Transformed* (London: Duckworth, 2001), p. 39. I would maintain that this case is still rather like the Isocrates and Andocides passages in meaning something like "excuse"; but agree that all three assume the innocence of the plaintiff (it is not an appeal to mercy). See also Lysias 1.3 and 10.2.

<sup>5</sup> Consider Sophocles *Electra* 257 and Euripides *Ion* 1440, where the term means excuse or pardon but could be understood as "forgive." See also J. de Romilly, "Indulgence et Pardon dans la Tragédie Grecque," in her *Tragédies Grecques au Fil des Ans* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1995), pp. 61–77. At Thucydides 3.40, in the course of the Mytilenean debate, Cleon advocates that no hope should be extended that the rebels will "be excused (*xuggnômên*) on the plea that their error was human"; they acted intentionally, and "it is that which is unintentional which is excusable (*xuggnômon*)." Trans. C. F. Smith, in *Thucydides* 4 vols, vol. II (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). The family resemblance of the notions of excuse, pardon, and forgiveness is indicated by the fact that P. Woodruff translates here "pardon" (*Thucydides: On Justice, Power, and Human Nature* [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993], p. 70), while R. Warner chooses "forgive" (*Thucydides: History of the Peloponnesian War* [New York: Penguin, 1987], p. 216). When we come to "xungnômês" at 3.44, Smith and Warner both have "forgiveness," and Woodruff "pardon." Thucydides pretty clearly means "excuse" or "pardon" rather than "forgiveness" in the sense I will specify. However, it is interesting and relevant that he ties *sungnômê* to a fault with which one can sympathize, and whose expression is unintentional. Compare Herodotus VI. 86, where the term should be translated "forgiveness."

<sup>6</sup> I am using T. H. Irwin's translation of the *NE* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed; unless otherwise noted, all further references to Aristotle advert to that translation of the *NE*. I note that at *Rhetoric* 1384b3, "suggnômonikos" has the sense of being inclined to make allowance, to be indulgent.

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At 1111a1–2, Aristotle remarks with respect to the ignorance condition that it is ignorance of particulars (not the universal) that makes an action involuntary. Such cases of involuntariness “allow both pity and pardon.” We read later in Book V, 1136a5–9 that

some involuntary actions are to be pardoned, and some are not. For when someone’s error is not only committed in ignorance, but also caused by ignorance, it is to be pardoned. But if, though committed in ignorance, it is caused not by ignorance but by some feeling that is neither natural nor human, and not by ignorance, it is not to be pardoned.

Thus far, *sungnômê* means something like excusing, and Aristotle is setting out conditions for permissible excusing (cf. 1109b32). Because it is a matter of excusing or pardoning rather than forgiveness, it is perfectly proper for it to be tendered by someone who was not injured by the behavior in question. Indeed that is one of the indications that we are in the presence of pardon rather than forgiveness.

The second connection in which Aristotle uses the term concerns his treatment of *akrasia* in Book VII. Aristotle is arguing that *akrasia* caused by *thumos* (emotion), which reflects a partial listening to logos, is less shameful than that caused by *epithumia* (appetite). He adds: “it is more pardonable (*sungnômê*) to follow natural desires, since it is also more pardonable to follow those natural appetites that are common to everyone and to the extent that they are common” (1149b4–6).<sup>7</sup> So we can pardon someone who has unfortunately given into a desire that is natural and common, that is, one that we can recognize in ourselves too. Presumably this requires a degree of self-knowledge, the ability to put oneself in another’s place by imagination (admittedly this is debatable), and the recognition of shared humanity. These three elements were also implicit in the passages from the orators and Euripides mentioned above, and their connection with forgiveness is indeed intuitive, a point to which I will return below. At 1150b5–12 we read:

It is similar with continence and incontinence also. For it is not surprising if someone is overcome by strong and excessive pleasures or pains; indeed, this is pardonable, provided he struggles against them – like Theodectes’ Philoctetes

<sup>7</sup> Cf. 1146a2–5, where in the discussion of incontinence Aristotle remarks that if a person has belief but not knowledge, and is in some doubt, “we will pardon failure to abide by these beliefs against strong appetites. In fact, however, we do not pardon vice, or any other blameworthy condition [and incontinence is one of these].” See D. Roochnik, “Aristotle’s Account of the Vicious: a Forgivable Inconsistency,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 24(2007): 207–220.

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bitten by the snake, or Carcinus' Cercyon in the *Alope*, and like those who are trying to restrain their laughter and burst out laughing all at once, as happened to Xenophantus.

In this second context (that concerning incontinence and intemperance), *sungnômê* seems somewhat ambiguously positioned between excuse and forgiveness. The incontinent action is not simply involuntary due to ignorance or external force (indeed, Aristotle rules that he acts willingly, 1152a15); on the other hand, it seems that even a person not injured by the agent's incontinence may offer *sungnômê*. Aristotle says nothing about the identity of the wronged party, so it does not seem to be the case that the wronged party alone grants *sungnômê*. Indeed, nobody but the agent himself may have been harmed by the incontinence. Consequently it seems best to interpret this as a matter of excuse and pardon rather than of forgiveness. Given the ambiguities, however, we may also grant that this passage is evidence that the idea of "forgiveness" was hovering in the air.

Irwin translates the term throughout as "pardon," with one exception, viz., 1143a19–24, where "Aristotle plays on the etymological connection with *gnômê*; 'consideration' is needed" (Irwin, p. 341).<sup>8</sup> This chapter in Book VI in which Aristotle describes "consideration" occurs in the context of the discussion of the intellectual (rather than moral) virtues, and makes it clear that it is the virtue of taking all things into account: "considerateness is the correct consideration that judges what is decent; and correct consideration judges what is true." The considerate judge takes into account the particulars of the situation, and does not, as Irwin points out, simply apply the rule inflexibly.

Interestingly, for present purposes, in running through the moral virtues Aristotle discusses the mean with respect to anger: to be angry "at the right things and toward the right people, and also in the right way, at the right time, and for the right length of time, is praised" (1125b31–32). Hitherto this "mean" condition has been nameless, so Aristotle calls it "mildness" (*praotês*, which might also be translated "calmness"; cf. *Rhetoric*, bk. II.3). But mildness immediately comes in for mild chiding, as it errs more "in the direction of deficiency, since the mild person is ready to

<sup>8</sup> In the Glossary to his translation, Irwin defends his translation of "*sungnômê*" by "pardon" as follows: "it is the exercise of judgment and consideration that finds circumstances (as we say, 'special considerations') in an action that exempt the agent from the blame *usually* attached to that type of action" (p. 341). I take this as confirmation that Aristotle has in mind here excuse rather than what I am calling forgiveness.

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pardon (*sungnômê*), not eager to exact a penalty" (1126a1–3). Being too mild and pardoning is "slavish," for such a person fails to defend himself and his own. The excess of anger is irascibility. Once again, the mild person's fault is his tendency to excuse or to let the offender off the hook too quickly, and this is linked to the former's tendency to give up his anger too quickly. At the same time, the anger in question is, for Aristotle, directed toward an individual (it is "personal"), and thus resembles what we would call "resentment." The connection between pardoning and giving up (personal) anger captures an intuition to be explored below.

Aristotle's analysis of the conditions under which one would excuse (in that sense, pardon) someone is perceptive. But how is excusing, so understood, to be differentiated from forgiving? The question is surprisingly complex, but at a minimum we may say that to excuse is not to hold the agent responsible, even while his or her action is recognized as wrong. In one sense or another, the agent is judged to have acted involuntarily (for Aristotle, then, excusing would seem to mean not taking a wrong act as a sign of the agent's inherent viciousness). This being accepted, and abstracting from such considerations as negligence on the part of the wrong-doer, it would be inappropriate for the wronged party to hold onto her resentment against the wrong-doer. This is a case of what one author calls "exculpatory" excuses, as distinguished from "mitigating" excuses.<sup>9</sup> To forgive someone, by contrast, assumes their responsibility for the wrong-doing; indeed, what distinguishes forgiveness is in part that it represents a change in the moral relation between wrong-doer and wronged that accepts the fact that wrong was indeed done, and done (in some sense) voluntarily. The difficulties arise in part because of the sheer complexity of the concept of voluntary action. One could argue that there are always mitigating excuses, that wrong-doing is never just voluntary; there is always a story about how one ended up doing the evil deed. This is perhaps why people hold that *tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*. Granting the complexity of the just-mentioned issues however, the common saying is mistaken, if "pardonner" means "forgive."

Why is it that Aristotle nowhere praises forgiveness (as distinguished from pardoning and excusing) as a virtue? The core answer lies in the

<sup>9</sup> T. Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 55–56. For an illuminating and precise discussion of excuses, see J. L. Austin's "A Plea for Excuses," in his *Philosophical Papers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 175–204.



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character of his perfectionist ethical scheme, for it is one that seeks to articulate and recommend the character of the man – and in Aristotle, it is a man – of complete virtue.<sup>10</sup> The gentleman possessing the perfection of moral virtue – the *megalopsuchos* – certainly has no need (by his own lights, anyhow) for being forgiven, because by definition he is morally perfect (and in any case, his pride would not allow him to recognize himself as in need of forgiveness). He also would seem unforgiving of others, for three reasons. First, he has no interest in sympathetically grasping the situation and faults of non-virtuous persons – they are of little account to him. Second, he would judge himself immune to being injured by them morally (with a problematic qualification to be mentioned in a moment), though of course he could be harmed (say, by being murdered). He would seem to be above resenting the actions of *hoi polloi* (and by definition, another *megalopsuchos* would not injure someone of the same stature). Hence Aristotle's comment that the *megalopsuchos* or magnanimous man

cannot let anyone else, except a friend, determine his life. For that would be slavish; and this is why all flatterers are servile and inferior people (*tapeinoi*) are flatterers. He is not prone to marvel (*thaumastikos*), since he finds nothing great; or to remember evils, since it is proper to a magnanimous person not to nurse memories, especially not of evils, but to overlook them. . . . He does not speak evil even of his enemies, except [when he responds to their] wanton aggression. He especially avoids laments or entreaties about necessities or small matters, since these attitudes are proper to someone who takes these things seriously. (1124b31–1125a5, 8–10)

The magnanimous person is “self-sufficient” (*autarkos*; 1125a12). The problematic qualification to all of this is that the polis could deny him something he does very much wish for, viz. warranted honor. But the denial of that honor would not, one assumes, elicit from the *megalopsuchos* resentment or forgiveness so much as contempt, even if it also elicits

<sup>10</sup> In *Perfectionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), T. Hurka says of a “perfectionist” moral outlook that “this moral theory starts from an account of the good human life, or the intrinsically desirable life,” and that its “distinguishing ideal is that of *human perfection*” (p. 3). Hurka distinguishes between the “narrow” (and traditional) version of the view, according to which the good life “develops these properties [of human nature] to a high degree or realizes what is central to human nature” (p. 3), from the “broader” view that focuses instead on excellence (p. 4). Rawls states that for a perfectionist we are to “maximize the achievement of human excellence in art, science, and culture” (quoted by Hurka as an example of the “broad” view; p. 4). The philosophers I am discussing in this chapter all see their ideals as excellences of human nature, set a high (to very high) bar for that excellence, and correspondingly (I am arguing) end up without a place for forgiveness in their moral outlook.



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anger.<sup>11</sup> It is worth recalling Aristotle's comment that "it is difficult to be truly magnanimous, since it is not possible without being fine and good" (1124a3–4); the paradigm of moral virtue sets a *very* high standard. In painting the magnanimous man, Aristotle is not simply reproducing the pathology of the run of the mill aristocratic gentleman.

The third reason why forgiveness is not part of the magnanimous person's outlook is implicit in the hierarchical value scheme that is part and parcel of this perfectionist outlook, and comes across in the dismissiveness that characterizes the attitude of the *megalopsuchos* toward "inferior people." Non-magnanimous victims of wrong-doing do not seem to have any standing to be treated otherwise, or at the very least, their being wronged just does not command the magnanimous person's moral concern. Differently put, the idea of the inherent dignity of persons seems missing from this perfectionist – or as we might also say, keeping in mind the etymology – aristocratic scheme. The non-perfectionist scheme within which forgiveness has its place recognizes the reciprocal moral claims and demands that people have standing to make of one another.<sup>12</sup>

There is even less place for *sungnômê* in the supremely worthwhile theoretical life as Aristotle describes it, because that life abstracts as far as possible from involvement with other human beings (except, perhaps, those friends engaged in the same study of the divine; *NE* 1177a33–b1). The perfect theorizer is god, and Aristotle's god manifests no concern whatever for anything or anybody but himself qua thinking about himself. Strictly speaking he (or, it) can neither be said to *act* nor to have emotions; god neither forgives nor requires forgiveness. For Aristotle,

<sup>11</sup> Did the Greeks have our idea of "resentment," including of "class resentment" and "existential resentment"? For discussion, see D. Konstan's "Ressentiment ancien et ressentiment moderne;" and W. V. Harris, *Restraining Rage: the Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), ch. 8 (esp. pp. 187–197). Konstan does allow that, in spite of semantic ambiguities and the relevance of social context to determining who may be the proper object of resentment, Aristotle in particular does recognize something closely resembling our concept of resentment. And the first word of the *Iliad* certainly carries, as the context makes clear, the sense of "deliberate anger" as defined by Bishop Butler (see below). See also Konstan's illuminating chapter on anger in *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), ch. 2.

<sup>12</sup> I am grateful to Stephen Darwall for some of the phrasing here, and for urging me to emphasize this point with respect to the ancient philosophers. For an account of the idea that human dignity involves the standing to demand certain forms of treatment, see Darwall's *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

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god leads the life of the mind, and is therefore the paradigm of perfection. Consequently, we would live god's life fully, were we able.

The situation is even starker in the case of Plato, who barely mentions forgiveness (or even pardon) as a virtue at all. The word "sungnômê" in something like the sense of forgiveness certainly presents itself in Plato, but as in Aristotle, it is not put to any serious ethical work.<sup>13</sup> His perfectionist ethics is more extreme than Aristotle's in its thesis that *no* harm can come to a good person. Consider Socrates' defiant statement to the jury of his peers:

Be sure that if you kill the sort of man I say I am, you will not harm me more than yourselves. Neither Meletus nor Anytus can harm me in any way; he could not harm me, for I do not think it is permitted that a better man be harmed by a worse; certainly he might kill me, or perhaps banish or disfranchise me, which he and maybe others think to be great harm, but I do not think so. I think he is doing himself much greater harm doing what he is doing now, attempting to have a man executed unjustly. (*Apol.* 30c7-d6)

Presumably a person who cannot be harmed, thanks to the armature that virtue furnishes, has nothing for which to forgive the wrong-doer;

<sup>13</sup> *Sungnômê* or a cognate is used by Echecrates at *Pho.* 88c8 to mean that he sympathizes with Phaedo's plight given the failure of the arguments; at *Symp.* 218b4 Alcibiades says that his auditors "will understand and forgive" (trans. Nehamas and Woodruff) his drunken remarks about Socrates; at *Phr.* 233c4, Lysias's non-lover claims he will "forgive" (meaning excuse) the lover for the latter's unintentional errors; at *Rep.* 391e4 it means excuse (so Grube translates it) and at 472a2 "sympathy" (Socrates is saying they will sympathize with his delaying tactics when they hear the next proposition, viz. that philosophers should rule). At *Laws* 757e1 the Stranger speaks of "toleration" (*suggnômon*), as T. Saunders translates, of a shortfall from perfect justice (but perhaps "lenience" would translate the term better); so too at 921a3-4, of a cheating workman who counts on the "indulgence" of his god (similarly 906d1; cf. 731d7, for an interesting reference to [falsely] pardoning oneself due to self-love). See also *Laws* 770c4 (where the term means something like "sympathetic" or in agreement with our way of thinking); 863d4 (showing understanding of wrong-doers because of their ignorance); 866a4 (the granting of pardon, immunity from prosecution); 924d2 (excuse); 925e8 and 926a1 (a citizen is to forgive the lawgiver for inconveniencing the individual while promoting the common good, and the lawgiver to forgive individuals for their inability to carry out some orders). These last two references may mean excuse rather than forgiveness – the sense is ambiguous. At *Euthydemus* 306c Socrates says that we "ought to forgive them [the pretenders to philosophy] their ambition and not feel angry" (trans. Sprague). The connection there between forgiving (that does seem to be the right translation) and surrendering anger is noteworthy. All of the translations of Plato cited in this chapter are to be found in J. M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (eds.), *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Press, 1997). Socrates nowhere recommends that others forgive wrongs; indeed he predicts that "vengeance will come" upon those who voted to execute him (*Apol.* 39 c-d), evidently at the hands of his followers. As Mark McPherran has pointed out to me, Plato's eschatological myths too leave little or no room for forgiveness in the afterlife (though see *Pho.* 114b).