

Atonement and the Limits of Philosophy: Review Essay

Thomas Brudholm

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Linda Radzik's *Making Amends: Atonement in Morality, Law, and Politics* was originally published in 2009 by Oxford University Press. It has already been reviewed—and very positively so—in several journals (for example: Calhoun, Cheshire 2009. “Review of Linda Radzik, *Making Amends: Atonement in Morality, Law, and Politics*”, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* 2009 (8); MacLachlan, Alice 2011. “Relating after Wrongdoing: A Review of Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective”, *Hypatia* 26:4; Smith, Nick 2010. “Kantian Restorative Justice?”, *Criminal Justice Ethics* 29:1). The main purpose of this essay—which is triggered by the publication of the 2011 paperback edition—is not to add yet another (and grossly belated) review, but rather to raise a cluster of questions emerging from the book. First, however, some general comments on the book.

Making Amends deals with an important and underdeveloped part of philosophical ethics, namely theorizing about what morality demands of us when we have done wrong. Radzik hopes that her book will complement other philosophical works on issues arising in the wake of wrongdoing and in the context of reparative practices. It most certainly does so. Most interestingly, because of the simple but effective shift of perspective: Instead of asking how we should see and treat the wrongdoer, and instead of approaching the wrongdoer as the other (e.g. from the perspective of the judge, the victim or society), Radzik approaches the wrongdoer as someone who might be one of us, and as a capable moral agent. That is, as a morally conscientious person who is capable of acting anew—not frozen passively forever as ‘the wrongdoer’ or in the fact of his or her wrongful acts. Sometimes, *we* wrong others, and sometimes—hopefully oftentimes—we try to do what we can to right the wrong and to make amends (other times, of course, we are all too prone to move on as if nothing had happened). Sometimes it is clear what we must do, how we should do it, and why it is morally significant. Other times, the whole situation is murky and we agonize about how to own up to it, or whether to try atone at all. In our modern expert culture, we can seek advice and help from a whole range of specialists, including psychotherapists, social welfare officers, victim-offender mediators, lawyers, and religious

T. Brudholm (✉)
University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark
e-mail: brudholm@hum.ku.dk