Response to My Commentators

TRUDY GOVIER

I wish to express my thanks to all those who have written here about diverse aspects of my work over some forty years and to Cate Hundleby for her organizational and editing work. Those who have generously contributed their time and talent here are busy persons whose thoughtful efforts are greatly appreciated. As a result of their energy and talent, the present volume offers considerable food for thought, with some touching and constructive reflections. Without being able to respond to every interesting interpretation and comment, I will do my best here to consider some major aspects of these essays.

Takuzo Konishi's interest in the development of informal logic since the 1970s shows a close knowledge of the work of many central figures. I greatly appreciate his interest in my work and close attention to it. A major theme of Konishi's study is that in their early phase the theory and practice of informal logic were driven by pedagogical concerns. I of course vividly recall this period and my own intense interest in the field during the 1980s. Our concern that students be able to identify, understand, and assess arguments led quickly to puzzlement and uncertainty about what the appropriate standards were, once we left the terrain of established formal logic. It seemed clear that standard formal logic did not apply plausibly to many natural language arguments; it seemed much less clear just what did apply and what could be said those arguments. Was there a theory to be had, in this area? If so, what was it? Although it is correct to state, as Konishi does, that pedagogy informed my scholarship, I state the point somewhat differently, saying that pedagogy drove at least some of the scholarship in the sense of motivating it. Working with students on natural language examples led

us to pressing questions with no obvious answers. Konishi cites my confession that I have no graduate course credits in formal logic. That, in fact, is something I regret. When I was a graduate student at the University of Waterloo in the late 1960s, there was a renowned course in formal logic offered by Jay Minas. Due to scheduling conflicts, I was unable to take that course, whose legendary status led me to regret its lack. To this day, I feel that regret.

Like Takuzo Konishi, Moira Kloster shows great care and patience exploring developments in informal logic and, in particular, my textbook, *A Practical Study of Argument*. When, in 1983, I signed a contract with Wadsworth, I did not fully grasp the implications of agreeing to write new editions when the publisher felt a need. The weight of that obligation increased over three decades. As users will know, there were six such demands. I cannot claim that each re-writing task was approached with enthusiasm. The text is a large book; in the days when one dealt with physical manuscripts, it amounted to a bulky 1000 pages. In each new edition, I adapted theoretical content in an effort to be sensitive to new interests (as, for instance, in the topics of evaluating Internet material, and considering questions surrounding visual arguments), revised and up-dated examples, and addressed criticisms from instructors, students, and reviewers. Several editions were written in rather trying circumstances. Recalling the many challenges, I especially appreciate the careful attention these editions receive from Moira Kloster. With several editions, I had valuable help from proof-readers and trouble-shooters: let me recall again, for the record, the work of Lowell Ayers, David Boutland, Colin Hirano, Carrie MacWilliams and – most of all – Risa Kawchuk.

Kloster makes the interesting suggestion that I could have included in the text more references to empirical work about reasoning and its pitfalls, benefitting from psychological studies as to which false moves are most tempting and hardest to avoid. Although I did discuss the

confirmation bias and would not want to have enlarged an already substantial text, I will not deny the force of this criticism. She makes the interesting comment that in recent years, argument is less socially acceptable than it formerly was. I cannot be certain that this is a phenomenon, but to the extent that it is, that is highly regrettable. It is, after all, through discussion and argument that we are able to reasonably respond to other persons and address differences regarding practical problems and theory. If argument is becoming less socially acceptable, may be due to the speed at which we communicate electronically. Another factor, I suspect, is an uneasy sense that when we argue we are in conflict, may offend people, and are not respectful of diversity and difference. I have disputed that presumption and urge again here that it is careful attention, not the ignoring of difference, that shows respect for the person with whom we disagree. If argument is becoming less socially acceptable than it once was, that will not be because the need for it has lessened. Hard issues of fact and theory, policy and action, persist and if we try to resolve them without serious consideration and scrutiny of arguments, the loss will be enormous.

To be sure, rhetorical strategies exist enabling us to convey contestable claims without putting forward an argument. For example, we can use language making presumptions about disputable matters (labeling actions as 'reform' or 'progressive' or 'vindictive' or 'reductive', for example). We can offer explanations of supposed facts that are not established as facts at all. We can assume agreement in the audience by careful use of terms like "us", "it is known", and so on. We can simply insert dismissive words or phrases ("nonsense" or "that's ridiculous" or "not so") with no back-up of reason or evidence. There are many such moves: I once called them 'packing strategies.'

Kloster links my work on argument and informal logic to themes in social philosophy, regarding attention to the thinking of other persons, and showing respect and

consideration for them. I appreciate this connection, which has rarely been made by others and which I may well have under-estimated myself.

Laura Pinto offers a detailed and thoughtful application of my work on trust and distrust, relating this work to the 'audit culture' in education. As she explains, in that context trust is centrally important at many levels: between teachers and parents, between teachers and students, between administrators and teachers, and at policy levels. What is at stake is professional trust, a form of social trust. Pinto emphasizes that trust should not be reduced to confidence: she interestingly and importantly observes that, unlike confidence, trust is required in contexts of uncertainty and has moral dimensions. An audit culture in education is one in which the achievements and capabilities of teachers are understood to be directly indicated by the test scores of their students. These scores, made public, are regarded as objectively showing the attainments of students and the competence of their teachers. Empirical research into educational success along these lines reveals a limited view of the nature and role of trust, argues Pinto. Obviously, I heartily agree. In an audit culture, there is a managerial conception of trust, and a distorting emphasis on test scores, with a resulting impression of certainty and control. That emphasis may give an impression of certainty and control, but any such impression is highly misleading. Undermining the trust that is needed in educational contexts, the audit culture in education has baneful effects. While measurable indicators may seem objective and rational, they produce distorting incentives and may leave out too much. Surveillance and testing can neither provide nor replace trust; and Pinto's sobering account shows how and why attempts to make them do so distort educational efforts. It is very rewarding to see my reflections on trust and distrust so persuasively applied to the context of education: I found her essay fascinating.

Exploring public forgiveness, the article by Alistair Little and Wilhelm Verwoerd raises fundamental questions about context and process in addressing political wrongs of the past. Their work powerfully illustrates the breadth and importance of concerns about private and public. Little maintains that in Northern Ireland, after the Troubles, such terms as "forgiveness" and "reconciliation" were unwelcome: they seemed overly religious, simplifying, and evocative of directed top-down processes such as those promoted in South Africa. One interpretation of Little's observations here is that what is useful and appropriate may vary considerably depending on the context. That there should be such variation is quite plausible; apart from the underlying cultural differences, we might consider the vastly larger numbers of involved people, outstanding leadership, and pressures emerging from the significant risk of large-scale civil war in the South Africa of the 1990s as compared with the situation in Northern Ireland. Another factor would include attitudes toward race and religion in these contexts. Little's story of Tutu's efforts in Northern Ireland is both fascinating and disturbing. His claim that Tutu's work in that context was overly choreographed, sensationalist, and actually dangerous will make readers want to learn more about the events described.

Little urges that for improving relations between people who have been opposed, one needs timing, a sense of place, humility in the use of language, and a sense of what human transformation can cost an individual, family, or group. If a person establishes relations with a former enemy, his friends and family members may feel betrayed and deem him disloyal. How ethically significant are such feelings? We might understand this phenomenon as a conflict of values; it raises the question as to whether loyalties based on past affiliation should trump values tied to moving forward into a shared future.

Hesitant to refer to improved relations with former enemies as 'reconciliation,' Little prefers the more neutral

word 'change.' And yet, rather ironically, the last few sentences of his contribution describe amicable relations and good feeling between himself and some former enemies. As Little tells the story, with their shaking hands, phoning, sending cards, and even hugging him, these people have become his friends and coexist with him in a state of warm relations. In these remarks I find every indication that these persons have *forgiven* Alistair Little for past deeds and now regard him as a person with whom they are *reconciled*.

In both South Africa and Northern Ireland, Wilhelm Verwoerd has been centrally involved in post-conflict processes, widely understood as involving forgiveness and reconciliation. In South Africa, national reconciliation was sought through top-down processes; in Northern Ireland, the work of Verwoerd, Little, and others, has been largely bottom-up. In one context "forgiveness" and "reconciliation" were much-used terms; in the other, such language has often been resisted, as Little describes. Given his work in South Africa and expressed enthusiasm for the South African TRC, one may be surprised to find Verwoerd largely in agreement with Little about the limitations of a top-down process. Through our many conversations and joint writings, I know of Verwoerd's energetic defense of the South African TRC and his admiration for the work of Archbishop Desmond Tutu. I find it somewhat unclear how his ideas in the period 1997 – 2003 are consistent with his approval of Little's views – although given the enormous amount of work these two have done together, that agreement should not have been entirely unexpected.

Verwoerd explores the relationship between public forgiveness and private interpersonal forgiveness. Indeed this topic emerges as a most important one and given his experiences in both South Africa and Northern Ireland, one on which he must be almost uniquely qualified to explore. As does Little, Verwoerd maintains that people can best work towards improved relations with their

former enemies through careful bottom-up processes, with no pressure and or direction from the top. When such private processes are pursued sensitively, they can be made public; if that is done with due care, the publicity will provide a link between private and public forgiveness. Accordingly, one way of envisaging a relation between private and public forgiveness is to approach the problem from the bottom up. Verwoerd offers persuasive examples of small-scale activities and encounters, sensitively publicized. The top-down approach to interpersonal relations emerges from his account rather less clearly; it would involve, somehow, making personal what starts out as public. In South Africa, some proceedings of the TRC were publicized; shown on television and described in the press, they can rightly be described as public processes. Perhaps elements of such public encounters could sensitively motivate private encounters. That would provide an example of making the public private.

In my own work on public forgiveness, I sought to explain how it could make sense to attribute beliefs and attitudes – and changes in them – to collectives. This philosophical approach to an aspect of public-private questions does not address the interpersonal challenges that would emerge from the sorts of practitioner experience available to Alistair Little and Wilhelm Verwoerd.

Kathryn Norlock and Alice MacLachlan have both caught me out on bold claims: Norlock on the unforgivable and MacLachlan on revenge. As to the unforgivable, Norlock carefully articulates my views about personhood and its implications with regard to choice and the possibility of moral transformation. I have urged that any person capable of morally significant action has the capacity to choose his or her actions. Even a person who has committed serious wrongs should not be rejected as *rotten* or a *monster* beyond all hope of moral transformation. A person who has committed heinously evil acts remains a moral agent who is not reducible to his

or her acts. My position is that such a person may be *conditionally unforgivable* if he or she has not renounced the evil acts and shown remorse. But the person should not be regarded as *unconditionally* unforgivable. I took this stance from a basis in what Norlock describes as "the metaphysics of personhood." My stance has understandably been controversial and found unattractive by several prominent commentators. Some have been all too ready to reason from the appalling nature of *acts* designated as unforgivable to the permanent and absolute unforgivability of the *agents* who have committed them. I insist on the distinction between acts and agents. Norlock does the same.

Quite rightly, Norlock scrutinizes my bold claim that it is objectionable for *anyone* to adopt the attitude that *any person is irredeemable*. She points out that this claim is not plausible when applied to a person who is the victim of an atrocity inflicted by a perpetrator whom the victim deems unlikely ever to repent in her lifetime. One can hope that the perpetrator of atrocities will repent and redeem himself. And one can hope that the victims of atrocities will understand the grounds for that hope and reflect it in themselves. Norlock argues that what we can hope for may not be what we can be held to as a moral minimum: we cannot rightly expect that hoping in such a way can be morally demanded of victims.

Granting my arguments about personhood, moral agency, and the possibility of moral transformation, Norlock seeks to resolve a paradox that emerges in the context of victims who regard their perpetrators as irredeemable. She submits that, while granting my arguments about moral personhood, it may nevertheless be the case that the victim of a serious wrong could fail to believe in the possibility of any moral transformation by the perpetrator and, in so failing, not be in any 'objectionable' moral or epistemic state. In a constructive and most interesting discussion, Norlock uses the work of Blake Myers-Schultz and Eric Schwitzgebels, seeking to

resolve the paradox. She maintains that (a) we can have knowledge without belief; (b) we can have correct and true beliefs that are not the basis of an attitude; and (c) we can have attitudes embodying a content that is in conflict with our beliefs. Attitudes involve a certain profile of outward behavior and inner experience; I find it easier to accept (b) and (c) than to accept (a), which in any event is not strictly necessary to relieve the paradox.

Norlock follows Margaret Walker in saying that hope may be killed; if it is, the victim of an atrocious wrong should not be blamed for giving up on a perpetrator. One may know and even in a sense believe, that a perpetrator, as a moral agent, is capable of choice, resolve, and change. And yet one's attitudes toward that perpetrator, as expressed in feelings and actions, could nevertheless have content out of accord with that knowledge. Such content could include hatred, fear, despair, and other emotions not expressive of any hope that the person would change. An observer might allow that the unforgivability of such a perpetrator would be conditional because someday he might be morally transformed and repent. And yet for the victim, he would seem unconditionally unforgivable. Her attitudes would not necessarily be in accord with any knowledge or beliefs regarding 'the metaphysics of personhood', regarding the agency and potential for change of all who constitute moral persons.

As does Kathryn Norlock, Alice MacLachlan concentrates on a bold claim made in my work about forgiveness and revenge. I argued that the desire for revenge is an evil desire because it is a desire for satisfaction at having caused the suffering of another person. MacLachlan rightly contests a rhetorical escalation in my account from 'satisfaction' to 'pleasure', correctly noting that it is unwarranted. Her main criticism of my account of revenge lies elsewhere: it is that I omit what she regards as a necessary condition of revenge. MacLachlan argues that in order for A to achieve revenge against B, it

is not sufficient for A to deliberately harm B as a response to B's harming A and for A to experience satisfaction as a result of his inflicting that harm. One must add the condition that B knows that *it is A who has injured him and that A has harmed B in response to the harm B did to A*. In MacLachlan's view, it is essential that this message is communicated for A's infliction of harm on B to amount to a case of revenge. It is indeed interesting that Adam Smith also held this view.

But notwithstanding this historical point, I remain uncertain about the argued extra condition. One can imagine a grim example in which A kills B in revenge for B's killing a member of A's family. B, being dead, will be in no position to know that it was A who caused his death. And if B dies quickly, he may not know at the time of death what is causing his death. I submit that in such a case A will be entirely likely to think that he has achieved revenge against B, and he will not be incorrect to do so. To say this is not, of course, is to condone or approve A's action here. It is just to state that A's killing of B can count as an act of revenge, one with which A will feel satisfied as an avenging agent, whatever 'message' B may or may not have received. With MacLachlan's final comments about moral pictures of revenge being over-simplified and blocking out wider entanglements between agents, I am of course in total agreement. In any event, MacLachlan and I generally agree that if we consider the risks of revenge, inflicting harm on someone who has wronged us is a faulty and hazardous mode of moral address.

Linda Radzik considers repair of relationships, emphasizing a perspective of respect for persons. Radzik offers a careful and thoughtful reconstruction of a relational approach to wrongdoing. I'm grateful for her sympathetic and constructive essay, which begins from my work and George Sher's criticism of relational approaches. Radzik contrasts empirical claims regarding relationships with normative ones, offering a 'reasonable consequences' interpretation that straddles the gap between them.

Sensibly, she proposes that wrongdoing always provides a reason for parties to negatively adjust their empirical relationship. It does not always provide a conclusive reason. Radzik's account correctly includes an 'other things being equal' clause. That is important: there are relationships that are damaging and so flawed that they ought not to be repaired. Radzik does not discuss relationships so flawed that they should not be repaired: she carefully notes that whether one ought to repair a particular relationship depends on whether doing so would be unreasonably imprudent or conflict with one's other obligations.

Radzik argues that relationship repair is more like disarming a threat than rebuilding a relationship that is broken. If I were to question her careful account, it would be on the grounds that both she and Sher fail to consider the phenomenon of thick moral terms. Consider in this context an example of a mother-son relationship that begins as good but then runs into difficulties. Let us assume that the son has happy memories of his childhood and the two communicate well and frequently and enjoy each other's company. Suppose that the son falls into a habit of substance abuse and as a result frequently borrows money from his mother, failing to repay it. She becomes uneasy about his welfare and hesitant about lending him money, beginning to interpret his pressing requests and other behaviour toward her as manipulative in intent. At this point there will be what Sher would regard as empirical changes in their relationship (fewer contacts, denied requests, feelings of anger, for example). The son comes to regard his mother as 'cold' and 'suspicious'; his mother finds him as 'exploitative', and 'manipulative.' Applying Radzik's account, we would say that the mother has reasons to negatively adjust her relationship with her son. One might argue that she morally ought to counteract those reasons, disarming a threat to their relationship, on the grounds that she is his mother and they have had a good relationship in the past. Alternately, one might argue for

the opposite conclusion, on the grounds that his persistent requests and growing financial needs threaten her wellbeing and capacity to meet other obligations. Sher, and implicitly Radzik in her initial agreement with him, would seem to regard such aspects as *suspicion* and *manipulation* as purely empirical. I think the categorization is disputable, given the negative connotations of these terms. Terms such as 'suspicious', 'manipulative', and 'exploitative' qualify as thick moral terms. If one agrees with that stance, there may be another way to address the issue of a descriptive-normative gap.

That question is one of many that may be raised in all the areas discussed in this book. Again, I thank the authors and the editor for their work on this volume and hope that constructive and illuminating conversations on these many issues will continue.