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ARTICLES

Forgivingness, Pessimism, and Environmental Citizenship

Kathryn J. Norlock

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Abstract Our attitudes toward human culpability for environmental problems have moral and emotional import, influencing our basic capacities for believing cooperative action and environmental repair are even possible. In this paper, I suggest that having the virtue of forgivingness as a response to environmental harm is generally good for moral character, preserving us from morally risky varieties of pessimism and despair. I define forgivingness as a forward-looking disposition based on Robin Dillon's conception of preservative forgiveness, a preparation to be deeply and abidingly accepting yet expecting human error. As with other virtues, however, preservative forgiveness is available to some of us more than others; in the second half of this paper, I consider the deep challenge posed by rational pessimism, especially on the part of those who have been given many reasons not to hope for the very moral improvements for which they strive. I conclude that for those of us with the power roles and personal resources especially conducive to environmental activism, preservative forgiveness inclines us to remain engaged in environmental activism with fellow flawed human beings, recognizing our own mutual depredations while committing us to cooperatively respond.

Keywords Forgiveness · Virtue · Pessimism · Ecocitizenship

Introduction

Philosophers of forgiveness disagree as to whether forgiveness is, or should be, considered a virtue. I am not usually one of the philosophers who argue that forgiveness ought to be understood primarily as a virtue. However, in what follows I argue for the cultivation of a virtue of forgiveness, specifically for a variety of

K. J. Norlock (✉)
St. Mary's College of Maryland, 18952 E. Fisher Rd., St. Mary's City, MD 20686, USA
e-mail: kjnorlock@smcm.edu

preservative forgiveness, that is, a predisposition to be forgiving in light of the inevitability of human error. In the context of environmental ethics, in particular, I presume it is uncontroversial to state that culpable human actions have been, and will continue to be, sources of environmental degradation. Our attitudes toward human culpability for environmental problems have moral and emotional import, influencing our basic capacities for believing cooperative action and environmental repair are even possible.

In short, I am arguing that preservative forgiveness promotes good *ecocitizenship*, and specifically, those practices of ecocitizenship that take the form of environmental activism and dedication to policy change. I use the term in a narrower sense than its originator intended, but in a way compatible with its broad definition. Broadly, as Robert Hull characterizes it, ecocitizenship "is not the whole of human excellence," but constitutive of it, and includes "the recognition that we are all plain citizens of our planet, that we for our own physical, intellectual, and moral benefit share it with other forms of life," and that fellow human beings are among those with whom we must share the planet well (Hull 2005). In the more narrow and literal sense of ecocitizenship, I argue that preservative forgiveness promotes one's *social and political engagement* with fellow human beings one would otherwise condemn as blameworthy for environmental depredations, which can, when taken to extremes, result in the vice Hull identifies as ecomisanthropy. Hull notes that ecomisanthropy, "the tendency to undervalue grossly or completely ignore human interests in favor of wild nature, is rare," but I am concerned about intermediate states short of misanthropy, states in which one's rational pessimism that humans are capable of or likely to change their environmental practices promote one's despair, disengagement, and consequently, inaction (Hull 2005). I suggest that the environmental crises we currently face are so significant that concerted collective action and changes in environmental policy are indeed requisite to a life of human flourishing. Therefore, dispositions that carry the risk of disengagement, despair, and inaction are dispositions that an environmental virtue guards against. It is the project for the rest of this paper to show that preservative forgiveness assists in reducing such risks.

Having the virtue of forgivingness as a response to environmental harm is generally good for moral character, preventing excesses of excusing and condemning, so that we locate responsibilities rather than sliding into attitudes of helplessness or recrimination, which foster inaction or misdirect our energies. Further, cultivating forgivingness is especially urgent for those of us who enjoy positions of power that require public and ongoing responsiveness to the environmental depredations of fellow human beings. As with other virtues, however, preservative forgiveness is available to some of us more than others; in the second half of this paper, I consider the deep challenge posed by rational pessimism, especially on the part of those who have been given many reasons not to hope for the very moral improvements for which they strive. I conclude that for those of us with the power roles and personal resources especially conducive to environmental activism, preservative forgiveness has a role to play in our environmental ethical lives.

Part One: Forgiveness as a Virtue

What it means to say that anything is a virtue bears some explanation, and the virtue of forgiveness, in particular, is one that requires some construction; as philosophers have noted, forgiveness is not a central virtue for the ancient Greek philosophers from whom we derive our theoretical frameworks. My own working definition of virtues relies on an Aristotelian framework; I characterize virtues as the appropriate states and dispositions to act of an excellent person. When one acts in accord with the virtues, one finds the contextually appropriate mean between two extremes. Virtues are not universal rules but the excellent practices of desirable and essential character traits that promote our realization of our natures and our happiness, so not everything that admits of a mean between extremes can be a virtue. For instance, there is no virtue of lying, even though everyday moral life might allow for an excess of lying (mendacity) and a deficiency of lying (such as brutal honesty regardless of circumstances).

Charles Griswold offers the valuable reminder that Aristotle's is a "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," a self-sufficient and magnanimous man whose relationships, true friendships, are with similarly virtuous characters (Griswold 2007). The virtue of forgiveness, therefore, does not appear central to the life of an excellent person, since forgiveness presupposes the wrongdoing of imperfect others and one's own vulnerability to resentment and vengefulness. With Griswold and others, I prefer to steer away from perfectionist depictions of agents as "immune from receiving injury," and proceed from a view of humans as characterized by fallibility; I take it to be fundamentally morally important that we are subject to luck, that suffering is pervasive, and that we are "embodied, affective, and vulnerable creatures," which Griswold rightly notes changes "what will count as a virtue" (Griswold 2007). Margaret Urban Walker is persuasive that as vulnerable and emotional creatures, for whom relationships are vital, we require trust and hope in others for our well-being, perhaps our very persistence; an inclination toward forgiveness may be a precondition of relationships we can rely on to continue, especially if an excellent and happy life includes not just minimally decent relationships but some enduring and trust-filled relations as well, in which one can expect occasional forgiveness (Walker 2006).

If forgiveness is to be considered a virtue, then it must be possible to identify extremes of excess and deficiency. Philosophers who identify these extremes more often than not cast them in terms of their frequency over time, especially when describing the deficiency of forgivingness in a character. One who *never* forgives is usually described as petty, mean-spirited, resentful, begrudging, hardhearted; vicious resentfulness can be seen as self-indulgent of one's hurts to an extent that inappropriately harms others. Interestingly, the extreme of excess comes in for much more debate among philosophers who are usually united in the view that forgiveness admits of deficiency. The nature of excessive forgiveness is sometimes similarly described as a matter of frequency, as philosophers debate the Christian commandment to forgive and the adage that to understand all is to forgive all; most theorists are no more comfortable with a frequency of one hundred percent than they

are with zero (Hampton 1988; Murphy 2002). Yet the excess tends to come in for more complex treatment; its dimensions have variously been described as a ready tendency to be lenient toward offenders, to recommit to relationships no matter their worth, to extend oneself to accept wrongdoers at risk to one's safety or self-respect, or to condone culpable harm, to be hasty, to overlook, to be "other-indulgent" in the extreme at one's own expense.

Most of these failures involve the moral agent's inattention to context, to moral circumstances that require more respect, deliberation, or time than the forgiver has permitted. Many philosophers note the parallel arguments in Aristotelian and Nietzschean value theory that to bear any insult is slavish, but most forswear a prone slavishness as a vice of excessive forgiveness. Forgiving at least implies that one is cognizant of a harm that occasions enough bad feeling to call for forgiveness, and the doormat does not seem to exhibit even this much. It seems more accurate to describe being "too forgiving" as the disposition to be overly disposed regardless of the particulars—experiencing anger and acting in the right way, at the right time, toward the right persons, with "essential good judgment"—or too ready to rush through the processes that recovering from harms may require (Griswold 2007). Virtues require knowledge of the particulars to be exercised appropriately in different situations, and an excessively forgiving person may be inclined to proceed as though all harms are minor or trivial, or involve less than fully responsible agents.

To this emerging picture of the virtue of forgiveness, I wish to add a further distinction. Robin Dillon's excellent work on self-forgiveness includes the notion of "preservative self-forgiveness," as opposed to forgiveness for past incidents that requires transforming one's feelings about an offense (Dillon 2001). While the latter sort of forgiveness is backward-looking, pertaining to recovery from past harms, preservative forgiveness is forward-looking, a preparation to be deeply and abidingly accepting, with three features. The first is a view to humans "both optimistic and realistic," as "basically decent and aiming to be good, capable of moral self-improvement and of regaining their bearings if they get off track, and on the other hand, as inherently fallible and liable to get even far off track." The second is a flexibility in one's standards, an avoidance of being "dominated by standards [persons] must not fail to meet," compatible with lofty ideals and strong principles. Third, such a forgiving person has qualities of patience and tolerance which are compatible with anger, but which indicate "an ability to see their faults and wrongs and still value" persons (Dillon 2001). Dillon likens preservative forgiveness to the sense in which we say a surface is forgiving, so that a dropped glass may bounce instead of shatter (Dillon 2001). In light of Dillon's metaphor, I shall be using the term *forgivingness* interchangeably with preservative forgiveness.

It may seem that a forward-looking disposition does not fit neatly into the framework of a virtue, at first. Preservative forgiveness does not wait for knowledge of particulars to inform one's attitude toward what others may do. However, such forgivingness has an instructive parallel in Aristotle's account of the mean between the two extremes of angry behavior, which he refers to as a virtue with no name. Aristotle suggests that the virtuous person "seems to err more in the direction of deficiency, since the mild [virtuous] person is ready to pardon, not eager to exact a penalty" (Aristotle 1999, 1126a1). Philosophers generally agree that forgiveness is

compatible with punishment and distinct from pardon, so a disposition to pardon is not identical to a disposition to be forgiving. Yet, just as the virtuous person is inclined to pardon prior to knowing particulars, the forgiving person may be one inclined to reaccept and recommit to others prior to their offenses. Consider it a commitment to maintaining relationships, and a particular method of locating responsibility, punishing, or rectifying wrong, a method that presupposes the fallibility, the worth and the capabilities of offenders with whom one is prepared to continue to live. The latter may sound too much like reconciliation, which many theorists prefer to distinguish from forgiveness, yet in the context of environmental ethics, I suggest that we should take reconciliation to be an inevitable outcome of forgivingness; until we have the choice to live elsewhere, we must be reconciled to living with fellow residents of the planet.

Going about moral assessment with a predisposition to reconcile is undoubtedly familiar to parents and educators, who hold the well-being and the ongoing trust of particular individuals in their hands, and who presumably commit to their trusting dependents over long terms that exceed the occasions on which offspring and students may culpably err. It is less obvious whom we have in mind when we commit to preservative forgiveness in environmental ethics and politics; whom are we preparing to forgive? Environmental harms are not always discreet and easily identified, with beginnings and end-points; locating culpability for wrongdoing is further complicated because environmental harm is often the result of aggregate effects of the actions of sometimes random, sometimes formal collectives. If culpability entails guilty knowledge, then even when identifiable discreet harms can be traced to individuals, it is not always clear that those individuals know what they are doing, or fully appreciate the consequences of their acts. Ignorance and deep-seated denial are often considered candidates for excuse rather than forgiveness. Last, environmental harms are global; the actions of some can affect the lives of people on the other side of the world, and one may never know the sources of one's diminished well-being, so the trustee relationship has no obvious parallel in environmental relationships.

To clarify my view in light of such complexities, I return to the attitude Dillon described, the view "both optimistic and realistic," of humans as "basically decent and aiming to be good, capable of moral self-improvement," and, I would add, capable of moral repair and change in behavior. This need not be a view of humans as unlikely to do wrong; it does not entail thinking, for example, that people would never buy bottled water, but it does hold that people are capable of increasing their awareness and decreasing their purchases of bottled water—as indeed they have (Martin 2008). Preservative forgiveness is a possibility for anyone with the ability to deliberate about their attitude toward the worth of those human beings who are and will be responsible for environmental harms. We need not know the extent of individuals' blameworthiness in order to reflect on how we are disposed to behold responsible persons (depending on the form of responsibility). Humans are likely to be culpable for future harms, and it need not be the case that each member of humanity is equally to blame in order for us to generalize about our attitudes toward humans' errors. Peter French argues that rather than focus on the extent of each member's responsibility within a collective, we should attend to the power the

members have in their group to be able to move a group to action or inaction (French 1992). That is, instead of demonstrating a lack of responsibility for past harms, group members should demonstrate a lack of power to rectify or call attention to those harms and prevent future ones. Similarly, Margaret Walker urges our attention toward questions of moral repair, capacities for responsiveness, rather than questions of precision in blameworthiness (Walker 2006). Therefore, we can better account for reported attitudes in journalistic accounts toward whole groups and whole nations. One may sensibly say that one is disposed to hold particular attitudes toward "America" for heavy reliance on fossil-fuels, or toward "China" for increased sport-utility vehicle purchases. We can and do possess moral attitudes with respect to the responsibilities of groups and of humanity in general.

Since attitudes toward groups or humanity can be morally wrong or consequentially bad, it is perhaps an attractive option to say we should not cultivate any moral dispositions to see whole groups or all humans as culpably environmentally harmful, but I suggest this is not the route to take. Just as Strawson says it is neither rational nor desirable that we can renounce participant reactive attitudes, I would suggest it is neither productive nor possible to avoid having any beliefs or feelings about humankind's propensity to harm the environment, although one may hold these unreflectively (Strawson 1993). When one's beliefs lend one to certain attitudes and practices, such as withdrawing from environmental repair efforts or engaging in indiscriminate condemnation, then one may exhibit vices of incivility, apathy, or hopelessness. For those of us who have become or feel in danger of becoming such withdrawn or disengaged agents, preservative forgiveness, which takes the view that humans are both fallible and capable, is to be recommended insofar as it lends us to practices of continual recommitment to each other, in order to live with each other as we locate responsibilities and, more importantly, identify the powers that groups and members have to move each other to improve environmental practices. When beliefs about human culpability do not lend one to withdrawal and disengagement, preservative forgiveness may be unnecessary or out of reach and not worth further personal energy. One with a jaundiced view of humanity who still continues to plug away may persist without forgivingness; the rest of us, however, may find that without cultivated commitment to relationships with humanity, what begins as self-protective preparation to be disappointed slides into hopelessness and surrender. I am not the first philosopher to observe that disgust with my fellow human beings can incline me to apathy; close on the heels of the thought that someone is not worth saving is the thought that I need not bother.

In short, dispositions to blame come with personal and moral risks, although I grant that personalities vary and some of us end up at greater risk than others. Because surrender and inaction are outcomes both possible and worth avoiding, I suggest that preservative forgiveness is a virtue worth cultivating in anyone capable of acting on attributions of blame for environmental harm. The question as to who has standing to forgive is much more vexing in discussions of incident-forgiveness, in which philosophers debate who counts as the direct victim of particular discreet wrongs. Preservative forgiveness, in contrast, is an option for anyone who can reflect on what attitude to take towards fellow fallible persons (although some of us have this option more readily available than others). Virtues may be more

incumbent on us in some domains than in others; those in roles that require them to establish or publicly evaluate environmental policies are predictably tested more often in their abilities to be deeply and abidingly accepting of the worth and potential of other persons, and to see individuals as more than the sums of their acts (Badhwar 1996).

If preservative forgiveness is practiced virtuously, then it must be exercised toward the right people and at the right times. Yet some are inappropriately approached with an attitude of forgiveness; if they are victims of environmental harm, or causally involved but powerless to do otherwise, there is nothing to forgive because there is no culpable wrongdoing. Still others may arguably be undeserving of forgiveness, for example, if they unrepentantly and knowingly pursue environmentally harmful practices because they are highly motivated by personal monetary gain. If forgiveness of victims or criminals is arrogant or hasty, then one might object that other virtues would seem to be more critical to environmental civil life, such as humility or a vigilant sense of justice.

I do not wish to deny that victims and wanton perpetrators of environmental harms exist; there certainly seem to be more victims than not, if indeed half of all humans live in poverty and therefore have few choices as to how to live decently (United Nations Human Development Report 2007/2008). For constrained victims of dire harm, sympathy and care are more appropriate dispositions to motivate aid; for reckless, overtly evil perpetrators, condemnation and attention to their punishment may be obviously attractive alternatives. However, I suggest that preservative forgiveness is the appropriate attitude to take to many, even most, fellow humans, that is, to those who are neither moral innocents nor moral monsters as they conduct their environmental lives. Most Americans, for instance, live in suburbs and continue to drive cars on a daily basis, a development neither entirely of their making nor entirely unchosen. Most American households own computers now, and academics fire them up to write about the recent surge in our consumption of fossil fuels; offices boot up across the country every morning, such a staple of the workplace that its environmental impact is obscured by its ubiquity. Unlike incident-forgiveness for past acts, preservative forgiveness does not entail attributions of full moral condemnation to individuals for particular acts. Instead, preservative forgiveness expects that those of us faced with choices are likely to err, as Dillon says, to go even far off track, for reasons that are mixed, even mysterious, generating consequences that are sometimes transparently foreseeable, sometimes not.

Yet certainly, the power and responsibility of different individuals may vary depending on context. Those who enjoy reasonably secure lives and enough wealth to permit choices of lifestyle may be held to higher standards of environmental awareness and responsibility, though here, again, comfortable people will regularly fail to meet those standards. If anything, knowledge of their comfort and wealth may incline us to be unforgiving. In a frustrating reversal of the saying, "To understand all is to forgive all," many of us who live in industrialized and developed nations know quite well the details of our robust environmental options and consequent culpabilities; while we may excuse those far away whose sufferings and constraints we do not fully know or share, knowledge of particulars close to home tax our

dispositions to forgivingness of fellow citizens. Again, the virtue may be called for in some domains more than others. Because the very preconditions of exercising virtue, such as knowledge of particulars and opportunities to act, may also make the virtue of forgivingness more difficult to live up to, I suggest that preservative forgiveness is especially critical in our domestic political and civil lives, that is, in those contexts in which we know all too well what we must do collectively and how we fail to do it. In my conclusion, I outline evidence for forgivingness as conducive to social engagement, which I suggest is most pressingly necessary at those times when we'd rather do the opposite of engage, when we'd rather give up and leave citizens to their fates. As Herman Melville says, at those times when our dispositions toward our neighbors is most taxed, we'd sooner do the opposite of social engagement; we'd rather hang it all and take to the sea than reconnect with people, and at such times "it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off" (Melville 2008). Yet abandoning one's community does not contribute to solving environmental problems requiring collective action. In the next section, I consider alternatives that lie between forgivingness and moral exit.

Part Two: Considering Counterarguments for Rational Pessimism

To environmental philosophers, preservative forgiveness may not seem called for, especially given Dillon's recommendation to be flexible in one's standards. Concerned and observant people may see the U.S. as suffering from deficiencies of environmental justice rather than forgiveness. To many, forgiveness further connotes a reluctance to punish—note that one with Aristotle's virtue of mildness is not "eager to exact a penalty;" it is reasonable to object that any disposition that promotes ignoring past harm is undesirable. Environmentally harmful practitioners are scarcely held accountable often enough as it is, one could point out, and so a more pessimistic disposition to expect offenders to be unrepentant, and to hold wrongdoers to their acts, is strategically superior to an optimistic view of humans as willing to change and worth continual reacceptance and recommitment. Although a more pessimistic disposition does not preclude future occasions for incident-forgiveness, one with a predisposition to be forgiving would seem overly inclined to think better of environmental wrongdoers than they deserve, or better than past behaviors would give good grounds for holding.

A pessimistic view need not be cynical, as Lynne McFall demonstrates in her defense of bitterness. While acknowledging that bitterness can be, and generally is, harmful to oneself, McFall argues that there are circumstances in which "active bitterness is not always bad for its host" (McFall 1991). Bitterness may be rational and justified, according to McFall, and in its active form can include "intense animosity or virulence of feeling;" these are appropriate as responses to the culpable harms inflicted by human agents from whom one had legitimate hopes of better treatment (McFall 1991). Similar to unforgiving anger, bitterness exceeds merely being unforgiving by seeking retribution, even by being vindictive, but McFall suggests this is a justified response when one must actively "move away

from self-deception" toward such responses as "truth-telling and bearing witness;" in some cases, one ought to want vindication (McFall 1991). As Susan Brison points out, bearing witness is an optimistic act, entailing the belief that one is or will be in a position to be heard (Brison 2002). Bitterness rebukes, and rebuke entails an audience.

So described, bitterness may not be an optimistic disposition but a pessimistic disposition that allows room for optimistic acts and hope for change. Bitterness declares one's worth and asserts an implicit demand for something better. With its source in past disappointments and harms, bitterness may be both unavoidable and rational for those in the worst of circumstances, but because it sometimes promotes justice-seeking actions, McFall defends it as preferable to cynicism. Cynicism involves seeing one's hopes for better treatment as false; the adage that "life is unfair" is McFall's example of the cynical position (McFall 1991). Like preservative forgivers, cynics take the view that humans are fallible and likely to err, but cynics would disagree that most are also basically good and capable of (or likely to) change. Because cynics accept the unfairness of life and take the inevitability of human error for granted without hope of better, they effectively let environmental wrongdoers out of responsibility to rectify harms. Cynics cannot build a better nation if it is one in which we cannot expect better of citizens than unceasing environmental destruction; cynicism amounts to an environmental vice, failing to promoting environmental values and human flourishing. Seen this way, bitterness may hold out more hope for the future, since in its active form it could include correcting the course of a society and reminding us to learn from environmental evils. I will conclude with some reasons to prefer preservative forgiveness to bitterness, but before I do so, a more thoroughgoing and complicated variety of pessimism must be considered.

Although bitterness may be pessimistic in outlook but allow for optimistic acts, one may also have good reason to be pessimistic and hold *no* hope of realizing the changes one seeks. Lisa Tessman eloquently describes the social and political activism of pessimists with no hope of attaining that for which they struggle, adding, "If one sets one's sights high—on something highly desirable but highly improbable—one has little reason to expect success in attaining the object of one's striving," that is, little reason to predict that achieving one's goals is likely (Tessman 2009). Tessman does not specifically discuss environmental activism; I extend her concern for the well-being and persistence of particular oppressed people, who maintain a claim to flourishing that they have no hope of realizing for themselves, to the dispositions of those who aim for ambitious environmental policies that can realistically be achieved only after their own lifetimes are over, if at all. Note that the environmental goals need not be foolishly lofty to be unattainable; on the contrary, if, say, progress toward irreversible effects of global warming is too far along, then even aspirations for minimally requisite reduction of carbon emissions within a constrained time frame may be both highly desirable and highly improbable. Environmental activists are not all oppressed persons (although many victims of oppression are also environmental activists), yet I recognize many activist friends in Tessman's description of "those whose expectation for success (and perhaps also whose hope) is vanishingly small because their sights are set on

the high aim of radically transforming oppressive societies and they realistically accept the heavy knowledge of the improbability of attaining this aim" (Tessman 2009).

So far, I have considered only *predictive expectations*, that is, predictions inferred from evidence, probability, or expressed intentions (Walker 2006; Tessman 2009). Tessman focuses on the loss involved in having neither predictive expectations nor *normative expectations*, that is, "expectations that people will act as they *should*" and that "embody a sense of *entitlement* to what we expect, and not merely an anticipation of it," even absent predictive expectation (Walker 2006; Tessman 2009). Tessman argues against Margaret Urban Walker's observation that when we have no predictive expectation, we still must have hope that normative expectations will be met, informed by basic trust in fellow human beings, "the real *possibility* (non-zero probability, less than certainty) of what is hoped for, in the estimate of the one who hopes" (Walker 2006). As Tessman argues persuasively, "sometimes one can realistically predict that there is essentially *no* possibility of success" (Tessman 2009). Yet sometimes cynics with neither hope nor trust in fellow humans persist in activism, and it is these activists Tessman and I seek to understand; their continued resistance give me reason to consider that my arguments for forgivingness are arguments for something quite possibly consequentially good but ultimately unnecessary.

The above constitute compelling reasons to reject preservative forgiveness toward fellow environmental actors. First, arguments that bitterness is rational and compatible with optimistic acts suggest that, in the absence of reasonable expectations of reciprocal commitment or acknowledgment of harm, publicizing rebuke would go further toward locating responsibility for environmental harm, and move third parties to punish those actors who persist in wrongdoing. As an especially vigilant variety of anger, bitterness may be most appropriate for those for whom others fail to stand up, asserting one's own outrage at injustice in a sustained and persistent way in order to assert one's own worth in the face of wider silence. For example, considering the linked environmental and social injustices suffered by residents of New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, it would be unreasonable to urge residents to take optimistic views of the likelihood of excellent governmental responses to their losses.

Second, accurate predictive expectations that needed environmental goals cannot be achieved may be too compelling to comfortably coexist with optimistic views of humans as capable of change. More precisely, negative predictive expectations suggest it is more rational to see humans as capable of personal and behavioral change, even basically good, but outmatched by the seriousness of the problems we face. Consider the concern voiced in some quarters that melting polar ice may have already reached a point of no return. If so, then once again pessimism seems rationally called for to an extent that seemingly overshadows the usefulness of preservative forgiveness, and one is left with a retreat to "developing adaptive preferences, that is, preferences for what is within the range of options that are available," such as goals to reduce carbon emissions slightly and over the course of a decade or two, making a bad situation more livable rather than striving for highly desirable, flourishing states (Tessman 2009).

Arguments for the rationality of pessimism constitute serious objections to the appropriateness of preservative forgiveness toward fellow environmental actors, for some people. Yet to return to the framework of virtue, Tessman persuades me that the appropriateness of pessimism varies with the circumstances of moral agents, specifically with their positions of power and their personal resources, and in the case of the varieties of environmental activism with which I'm concerned, with the obstacles they face or the advantages they have in asserting their social and political power to move others to collective action. Although victims of serious harm and oppression can have an overabundance of evidence that pessimism is warranted, less constrained agents have reason to believe they are well positioned to be effective in bringing about the conditions that make some environmental goals attainable. Many Americans have the money, leisure, and political freedoms necessary to reduce their own energy consumption; some Americans have considerable influence and opportunities to persuade others to do the same. Since the United States is by far the greatest contributor to global environmental problems, the choices of its most privileged citizens would make a great deal of difference in what it means to say particular environmental goals are attainable. Therefore, accurate negative predictions are contingent upon our behaviors, changes that further depend upon our beliefs about whether or not changing our behaviors will be efficacious. Since behavioral change will only be efficacious *en masse*, it is incumbent upon the very citizens who enjoy most of the benefits of a wealthy country and attendant high energy consumption to cultivate a disposition to see themselves and their fellow citizens as capable and willing to change environmental behaviors. If we do not believe we are capable of collective action, we will have no motivating expectation to act. And indeed, the more advantages we each have individually, the more reason we have to think that we are capable of influencing each other and affecting policy. Some of us are more capable than others.

Aristotle notes that a life of good fortune is supportive of living virtuously, and that serial and serious sufferings tax our ability to live according to certain virtues (Aristotle 1999, 1100a8–9, 1101a6, 11–12). Although happiness is not identical with prosperity, Aristotle points out that a happy and virtuous life consists in activities that require some external goods in order for it to be possible that those activities can be exercised (Aristotle 1999, 1099b7–8). I prefer, for the current purposes, to argue the obligations of virtue also run in the other direction: Given the preconditions for virtue found in a blessed and fortunate life, we can rightly hold lucky people to the expectation that they cultivate dispositions that will incline themselves and their fellows to excellent environmental citizenship, that is, to forgivingness and its optimistic view of humans as both fallible and capable of, even eager to, be better environmental actors.

Conclusion: Preservative Forgiveness for Self-preservation

In light of the argument above that bitterness is appropriate when it promotes rebuke and resists silence, I suggest that those who do *not* suffer in silence, those with rather more powerful voices, whom it is reasonable to expect will have a receptive

audience, act virtuously when they avoid bitterness and instead cultivate optimism. When one *can* expect the attention of fellow citizens, one ought to exercise well-founded normative expectations of others' engagement. On such an argument, the most powerful members of our society are doing exactly what they ought, and not acting supererogatorily, when, for instance, Vice President Al Gore raises awareness of global warming.

Further, empirical evidence increasingly suggests that moral agents who cultivate forgiving dispositions are more likely to persist in prosocial behavior, by which I mean a pattern of voluntary helping behaviors in interpersonal and collective settings, a willingness to contribute to social or political goals beyond one's required role; prosocial behavior implicitly involves seeing the relationships involved in such behaviors as having value (Eisenberg and Mussen 1989; Bowler and Brass 2006). Now, contribution to collective effort is observable of many agents who are not forgiving, and I am not arguing in the scope of this paper that prosocial behavior requires a forgiving disposition. Indeed, I do not believe forgivingness is a necessary condition of all engaged and helping behaviors. I am instead pointing to the positive evidence that at those times, and in advance of those times, when collectives and groups experience conflict, agents with dispositional forgivingness typically cope skillfully with disappointment, relational setbacks, and the internal stresses involved in conflict; a tendency to be forgiving "typically serves as a resilience factor that promotes well-being," and the maintenance of relationships over the course of one's contribution to collective effort (Ysseldyk and Matheson 2008; Strelan and Covic 2006; Worthington 2006; Snyder 2001). Forgivingness is both interpersonally and intrapersonally beneficial, and it is the latter that specifically interests me (Denton and Martin 1998). My concern throughout this essay has been with the internal disposition to have low expectations of others, to be pessimistic to the point of reasonably considering that one should not bother acting at all. Given the focus of my attention, it is compelling to me that research shows those with "highly forgiving dispositions" are "inclined to endorse coping strategies that are typically considered to be adaptive, such as problem solving and cognitive restructuring," that is, looking for what one has learned from the situation in order to continue better contributing to the group (Ysseldyk and Matheson 2008). Forgiving dispositions also indicate, in multiple studies, "a reduced propensity to …rumination and wishful thinking," which tend to be maladaptive, resulting in disengagement with others and cessation of efforts, especially efforts in the direction of prosocial activity (Ysseldyk and Matheson 2008).

In arguing for the benefits of forgivingness to intrapersonal well-being, I hope I have shown that reduced stress, despair, and contempt are not merely self-regarding, but also inherently tied to one's social conduct and one's motivation to participate in collective ends. As Aristotle reminds us, in doing fine actions, the virtuous person benefits himself while benefiting his friends. To be a good citizen is also to be an excellent person; dispositions that lend the moral agent to be happy and virtuous also promote one's proper conduct in the polis. Therefore, it is consistent with virtue to be forgiving for one's own sake every bit as much as for others. Consider the contrast to the view, widely held among philosophers of incident-forgiveness, that forgiveness is not appropriate when done to make one feel better or to achieve

merely consequential aims. Aristotle's account of virtue gives us reason to believe that dispositions and practices like forgivingness that make us happy and feel good (or, at least, less bad in some sense), while relieving political conflict and promoting civil discourse, are proper to excellent lives and virtuous characters. Friends may be the best external good and membership in a polis may be part of an excellent life, but one must also live with oneself. Cultivating preservative forgiveness toward others may ease one's own internal stresses and make it easier to communicate with those one would otherwise condemn or cease engaging with in political coalition.

Forgivingness would seem to be virtuous even in the presence of negative predictive expectations. The optimistic normative expectation that humans will be forgivable is not dependent upon what we can predict about our actual chances for adequate environmental repair. After all, a virtue ethic is not sheerly consequentialist; one does not pursue virtue if and only if good policies really will result from one's actions. One lives a virtuous life for its own sake, in order to be happy and to flourish as one's own activities promote one's capacities to do so. Were we to discover that ambitious policies will not entirely succeed, we would be in something like the position Aristotle describes, of the man of virtue who comes upon misfortune; our abilities to pursue excellent environmental activities would be tested, ultimately impeded, but "even here what is fine shines through," not because we feel no distress, but because we are constant in our commitments to living well and working with others in pursuit of desirable environmental goals (Aristotle 1999, 1100b31).

My account of forgivingness presupposes that environmental actions are collaborative, and that our most pressing environmental problems have social and political valences. For environmental activities that can be pursued in isolation, forgivingness is arguably not necessary. One could pick up an aluminum can and drop it in a recycling container with a sort of glowing Kantian sense that one is doing one's duty regardless of whether or not anyone else recycles; indeed, on some (unconvincing) interpretations, recycling the can is most transparently morally worthy when one doesn't even want to recycle, let alone feeling motivated by optimistic expectations of others' recycling. Yet I wish to close with the pragmatic argument that it is not enough to practice solitary environmental acts from a good will that shines like a jewel in its own right. To flourish and to believe future generations will flourish is part of a happy life; a teleological virtue ethic makes sense of the inherent importance of environmental citizenship to individual happiness. Especially in countries that consume the most energy and produce the most waste, individuals and communities must come together to respond to massive environmental problems, which requires some willingness to believe in ourselves and in each other. Forgivingness, like Aristotle's virtue of mildness, inclines us to act, recognizing our own mutual depredations while committing us to cooperatively respond.

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