Forgiving While Resenting: Justifying Elective Forgiveness

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Abstract. Philosophers have proposed accounts of forgiveness in which the victim is warranted in forgiving only if the wrongdoer makes amends for the wrong done. According to such an account, forgiveness is made rational by the wrongdoer apologizing. But this account creates a puzzle because it seems to render cases of undeserved elective forgiveness (where there is no apology or repentance) unjustified. My aim in the present contribution is to argue that electively forgiving unrepentant wrongdoers can be justified if we accept as genuine a minimalist form of forgiveness, according to which a victim can forgive and still resent. Further, I suggest that undeserved elective forgiveness can be admirable if we extend our conception of reasons to include non-desert-type reasons, such as reasons of altruism, generosity or reasons of social context.

Keywords. Elective forgiveness, apology, resentment, reasons

I. Introduction: Transactional, Elective and Minimalist Forgiveness

Forgiveness is typically portrayed as a 'transaction' between the victim and the wrongdoer. This 'transactional' model of forgiveness (Nussbaum 2016) involves two elements. First, forgiveness must always be earned by the wrongdoer, typically through apology or remorse (Murphy 1988; Griswold 2007; Kolnai 1973; Swinburne 1989). Second, an apology undermines the justification for continued resentment, so blaming negative feelings towards the wrongdoer should be totally overcome in forgiveness. According to this traditional understanding then, it is impossible to forgive and still resent.

There are two problems with this conception of forgiveness. The transactional model cannot justify *undeserved* forms of *elective forgiveness*[1],

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where forgiveness is offered to an unapologetic wrongdoer. If forgiveness can be earned and justified only if the wrongdoer apologizes for the wrong done, then the transactional model creates a puzzle because it seems to make cases of undeserved forgiveness unreasoned and unjustified.

Secondly, assuming that forgiveness always overcomes retributive reactive attitudes towards a wrongdoer is a mistake, as it does not take into account cases of grave wrongs[2], where the victim claims she has forgiven, even if she cannot psychologically or morally overcome all her negative feelings.

Nevertheless, we can solve these two problems if we extend our conception of forgiveness to include cases in which forgiveness is bestowed on a wrongdoer who does nothing to merit it, and cases where a victim can forgive even if she is not able to overcome all her negative feelings towards a wrongdoer. This account, of course, presupposes a certain pluralism about forgiveness.[3] If we consider the attitudes and emotions overcome in forgiveness, we will have *reconciliatory forgiveness*, whereby a victim forswears resentment (by eliminating it) and reconciles with the wrongdoer, and *minimalist forgiveness*, whereby negative feelings are privately maintained even after one has forgiven. On the other hand, if we take into account the reasons that can earn and justify forgiveness (in the sense of providing permissive reasons), we will have two further varieties: *earned forgiveness* through apology (or remorse), and *undeserved elective forgiveness*, which is not justified by desert-type reasons, but instead by different sorts of ethical considerations.

My purpose here is to argue that *minimalist* forgiveness can both explain and justify *undeserved elective* forgiveness. By *undeserved elective forgiveness* I mean two things. The victim is not required to forgive her wrongdoer – forgiveness is not something that can be owed, but it is freely given. In this sense, I believe that all cases of forgiveness are elective. Secondly, this type of forgiveness is not conditional on the wrongdoer's apology, but it depends on different types of reasons not related to what

the wrongdoer deserves. However, even when forgiveness is freely given, it is still the type of thing we do for reasons; it is a norm-governed practice. We need reasons for forgiveness since we need to (i) be able to distinguish forgiveness from other similar responses to offences, such as forgetting about the wrong done, excusing the wrong or morally condoning it; (ii) to say why it is permissible to forgive, especially in cases where the wrongdoer has not apologized to the victim; (iii) reasons for forgiveness can also tell us the difference between merely permissible cases of forgiveness and praiseworthy ones.

Undeserved elective forgiveness is often criticized for two reasons. First, philosophers have argued that, unless the wrongdoer apologizes, we are wrong to forgive since this would mean that we fail to take morality seriously, by failing to condemn wrongdoing. Secondly, forgiving unapologetic wrongdoers amounts to a lack of self-respect on the part of the victim.[4] Recently, Alexandra Couto (2016) raises another criticism worthy of serious consideration. She reformulates the self-respect concern in an interesting and persuasive way, by arguing that overcoming resentment in the absence of an apology renders forgiveness unjustified since it fails to satisfy the resentment's demand for the affirmation of respect for the victim. Resentment implicitly demands respect for the victim. Thus, eliminating it in the absence of an apology (which would perform the role of answering the demand for respect, by affirming the victim's violated recognition respect), is unjustified for this is a basic demand. Couto concludes that undeserved elective forgiveness is thereby unjustified.

I will argue that elective forgiveness can nevertheless be justified. First, I draw a distinction between *being justified* and *being earned*.[5] I will show that there are reasons that can justify forgiveness, without actually earning it, since only a proper apology can perform this role. Second, I propose a minimalist account of forgiveness whereby one can forgive by restoring a generic moral relationship with the wrongdoer (and perhaps by relinquishing feelings of hatred and revenge), but without eliminating all resentful feelings. If this is possible – if we agree that one can forgive and

still resent – then the victim does not relinquish her right to demand an apology from the wrongdoer, since she decides to continue with her resentment. Elective forgiveness can thus be justified, but it will not become earned until the wrongdoer apologizes, that is, until she completely restores a certain balance of moral respect. My conclusion will be that one can electively forgive undeserving wrongdoers in a minimalist way, and thereby one's forgiveness will remain justified because one continues to demand that the wrongdoer affirm the violated norms of respect.

So, what kinds of reasons do we need for forgiveness? My proposal is that forgiveness paradigmatically presupposes judging that the wrongdoer is culpable for what she has done, with no excuses or justifications for her actions, which could negate or fully eliminate her culpability.[6] Secondly, in cases of undeserved elective forgiveness, the fact that the victim continues to blame and thus demand an apology from the wrongdoer is what renders underserved forgiveness permissible. Finally, there are non-desert type reasons for forgiving undeserving wrongdoers, which can make this kind of forgiveness nor only permissible, but also praiseworthy.

In the next section I will offer some independent reasons as to why we should defend minimalist forgiveness. I argue that minimalist forgiveness is a genuine form of forgiveness. It can justifiably be granted in two situations: in cases of undeserved elective forgiveness, when an apology is not forthcoming and in cases of grave wrongs, when the wrong is too serious and the victim cannot psychologically overcome all her hurt feelings.

II. Minimalist Forgiveness

It is common to define forgiveness in terms of 'wiping the slate clean', as a result of undertaking a 'change of heart' toward the wrongdoer (Calhoun 1992). This 'change of heart' is understood in terms of overcoming all blaming attitudes towards the wrongdoer[7], such as indignation, anger, revenge, resentment and hurt feelings. I propose that we move beyond

the traditional 'resentment-based vision of forgiveness' (Digeser 1998), and make room for a *minimalist* form of forgiveness, in which the victim does not overcome all negative feelings towards the wrongdoer. The victim might persist with her justified condemnatory attitudes and, instead of repairing relations and reconciling with the offender, might choose to offer a minimalist form of forgiveness. I understand minimalist forgiveness in terms of deciding not to let blame feelings influence the way one behaves towards the wrongdoer (or talks about the wrongdoer with others) in future interactions.[8] This minimalist form includes two elements. First, a civil relationship is re-established between victim and wrongdoer. So although we are not willing to reaccept the offender back into our lives as friends or lovers, for example, we do continue to see the offender as someone who deserves recognition respect.[9] Second, minimal forgiveness involves trusting that the other person can change their behaviour; in forgiving, we give the offender a chance not to do that same thing again, not to repeat the wrongful act. So it places certain expectations on both the wrongdoer and the victim. The victim is expressing a commitment not to hold the wrongdoer in contempt, not to act in a blaming manner (although, of course, private feelings of blame and resentment are still justified), and the wrongdoer is expected to eventually provide evidence that she has changed by repenting.[10] A question may be raised over the importance of re-establishing a minimal civil relationship with the wrongdoer by offering the kind of recognition respect that is already owed to all human beings. What is then the point of bestowing minimalist forgiveness upon the offender and what does it achieve? I believe this kind of forgiveness is especially important in situations where the victim is somehow stuck with the wrongdoer, perhaps because they are family members, or work colleagues, and so she has good reasons to maintain a civil relationship with the wrongdoer. The victim might find the relationship useful and hope that further cooperation with her colleague in a non-confrontational manner might be beneficial and may even bring the wrongdoer to eventually admit her fault, while retaining a private feeling

of resentment until the offender makes amends. Forgiving while maintaining private resentment is more than just giving the recognition respect owed to all people, since it allows both parties to move forward in their relationship in a civil manner, instead of all their interactions being conditioned by the wrong.

Brandon Warmke (2016) puts it very nicely when he says that after forgiveness has been granted, certain blaming interactions between the victim and the wrongdoer become impermissible – interactions (or modes of treating the wrongdoer) which were made permissible by the wrongful behaviour of the offender (689). For example, the victim is not anymore entitled to blame or to hold a grudge against the wrongdoer. What is made impermissible as a result of granting forgiveness will vary with the context, and it is thus not something fixed. Factors such as the relationship between the wrongdoer and the victim, the seriousness and the significance of the wrong, whether the wrongdoer has apologized, will determine how one should treat an offender after she has forgiven. In the account of minimalist elective forgiveness I defend, it is still permissible to blame the wrongdoer and to demand an apology from her, precisely because the wrongdoer has not yet apologized. Nevertheless, other modes of interaction will become impermissible and the victim, in forgiving, renounces her right to engage in certain types of overt blaming behaviours (seeking revenge and retribution). Paul Twambley (1976) claims that, when you are wronged, "You are within your right to resent his action. In forgiving him, you relinquish that right, you readjust your relationship to one of equality" (see Warmke 2016, 689). In offering minimalist forgiveness, however, one may never *justifiably* relinquish one's right to resent. But one does relinquish other blame-related feelings and one's right to act on these feelings.

So the question I aim to address is the following: can one forgive and still resent? Is it conceivable to imagine someone granting forgiveness without attempting to surrender her resentment entirely? Digeser (1998) draws our attention to the literary example of *The Vicar of Bullhampton*

(1870), in which the miller Jacob Brattle decides to forgive his daughter for becoming a prostitute. He says:

> "I will bring myself to forgive her. That it won't stick here," and the miller struck his heart violently with his open palm, "I won't be such a liar as to say. For there ain't no good in a lie. But there shall be never a word about it more out o'my mouth, – and she may come to me again as a child" (see Digeser 1998, 704).

What I find interesting in this literary example is the fact that for the miller forgiveness involves a certain decision, the success of which depends on him not mentioning the wrongdoing to his daughter, and not on the purity of his heart. Indeed, if he were to bring the wrong up again in future conversations it will mean that he has not forgiven after all. So he takes forgiveness to be compatible with having certain negative feelings towards the daughter, but incompatible with expressing them or acting on them.

Another form of forgiveness defended in the literature, which likewise does not seem to "[…] rest on an uncertain interrogation of the heart" (Digeser 1998, 704) is performative forgiveness. Someone might say, for example, "I'm am still angry with you, but I forgive you anyway" (Norlock 2009, 97). In uttering "I forgive you", the victim may do more than simply report how she feels; she may also intend to change the relationship between her and the wrongdoer, by waiving her right to seek retribution. Kathryn Norlock (2009) puts it very well when she argues that the utterance "I forgive you", sometimes does more than merely "reporting, truly or falsely, how one feels […it] may also perform an act that sets something new in motion, and changes the relation between wrongdoer and victim" (2009, 96).

Forgiveness therefore does not count as 'genuine' only when one has overcome negative emotions and then reports this fact to the wrongdoer, but it can also be 'real' in its performative dimension.[11] I believe illocutionary forgiveness constitutes a minimalist form of forgiveness[12], where

the victim chooses to bestow forgiveness on the offender while she may still maintain some negative feelings towards her. In this way, the victim restores a minimal moral relationship between her and the wrongdoer by making a commitment to treat the offender in ways that are compatible with an attitude of minimal good will and trust. If, for example, you see the wrongdoer as totally rotten and incapable of redemption, then these attitudes will rule out any type of forgiveness.

Many recent writers have argued that the 'transactional' form of forgiveness is the basic or paradigmatic case (see, for example, Fricker), and that other types of forgiveness may be understood or explained in terms of this canonical form. It might be the case that in our everyday practices, and especially in close relationships, we might expect this kind of forgiveness: one in which the wrongdoer sincerely apologizes to us, promises never to repeat the moral offense, repents, and in which we are able to offer our forgiveness in return by totally 'wiping the slate clean' and reconciling with the wrongdoer. No further anger, resentment, disappointment or blame are appropriate on our part, and we can know for sure we have managed to overcome all retributive feelings before making an offer of forgiveness. Anything short of this will be a disappointment for both parties. Although I am not going to argue against this picture here, one thing I would like to avoid is the excessively common assumption in the literature that one form of forgiveness always has to be the genuine type or the best kind of forgiveness. In this sense, Walker says:

> Philosophers know that different people have different ideas about what to call 'forgiveness'. Yet there is a tendency in philosophers' accounts to speak of 'true', 'real', or 'genuine' forgiveness, or about the 'essential', 'central', or 'necessary' elements of it. This can imply either that there is one real process that alone deserves that name, or that if there is more than one kind of forgiveness, one of them is the 'best' or 'truest' case of it. I have come to find it odd to think of there being a single correct idea of forgiveness, in the way that there is a correct theory of the structure of the DNA (2006, 152).

I start by describing this exemplar form of transactional forgiveness in order to see how other cases of forgiveness approximate to this model and in what aspects they are different. I argue that the 'non-paradigmatic' forms are *genuine* cases of forgiveness, are equally *reason-based practices*, and involve some *change in how the victim behaves towards or sees the wrongdoer as a person*, so they all share an affective and attitudinal component.

I take as my starting point the definition of forgiveness encountered in the work of Murphy (1988). He claims that forgiveness involves forswearing resentment for good moral reasons. However, he also argues that understanding forgiveness as the overcoming of resentment involves a certain puzzle. It is not always the case that overcoming resentment is something good. So for Murphy, forgiveness is puzzling because it involves forswearing resentment even when overcoming resentment is not always desirable. Drawing on the work of Butler, Murphy argues that resentment is a noble emotion, which defends us against injustice and injuries, and it "[…] expresses respect for the demands of morality (particularly […] for the demands of self-respect)" (1988, 22). Why is it good then to overcome such a useful and "even therapeutic emotion"? (Hampton 1988a, 35). Trudy Govier asks the same question: "If resentment helps us to defy insult and defend our self-respect, would that not show that resentment is constructive and good?" (2002, 53) So why would overcoming resentment be desirable?

Murphy's solution to the puzzle is that overcoming resentment is not always desirable as this could harm the victim. We should thus continue to resent our wrongdoers on occasion. Nevertheless, his conclusion is that maintaining resentment means that we have not forgiven. My solution is to say that forgiveness counts even if we still have *justified* negative feelings towards the offender; it is not always desirable to overcome resentment, despite the fact that we have granted forgiveness. Forgiveness is not puzzling in the way Murphy suggests because it does not always involve forswearing our justified resentment. How is it possible then to forgive and still harbour resentment?

In what follows I will draw on some considerations from Joseph Butler's seminal work on resentment and forgiveness. Butler defends two claims regarding resentment and forgiveness: (i) resentment is not in itself a vindictive response; and (ii) forgiveness does not forswear all resentment, but only its abuse and excess in the vices of 'malice' and 'revenge'. I am particularly interested in his claim that it is desirable to maintain a certain kind of 'virtuous' resentment[13] even after we have forgiven. Resentment's function, according to Butler, is to fight injustice, to demand punishment, and to "protect us against future injury". It "[…] is a weapon put into our hands by nature, against injury, injustice and cruelty" (2006, viii; 93). Nevertheless, Butler warns us that resentment can be abused when we are personally wronged, since it is easy to imagine the injury done to us as much worse than it actually was. When this happens, we may experience an "[…] extravagant and monstrous kind of resentment", since we are not always capable of impartially thinking about the wrong done to us, and we tend to make too much of it (2006, 93).

This is where forgiveness finds its place. Forgiveness corrects for the 'excess and abuse' of the natural feeling of resentment. We should forgive so that we can bring down the excess of our resentment to the level where the resentment we feel is again proportional to the injury done to us. So forgiveness is compatible with continued resentment, since proportional resentment is compatible with an attitude of benevolence towards the wrongdoer, and thus, with forgiveness: "We may therefore love our enemy, and yet have resentment against him for his injurious behaviour towards us" (Butler 2006, 99).

Why then is it good to retain some form of resentment, even after we have forgiven? Resentment, according to Butler, defends three different values: self-respect, self-defence and the moral order. By resenting:

(i) We condemn the wrongful actions (so we maintain our self-respect).
(ii) We protect ourselves against future injuries as we tend to be more cautious (self-defence).

(iii) We seek just punishment out of concern for justice, out of respect for the moral order (Garcia 2011).

So maintaining resentment shows a 'reasonable concern for our own safety'; without resentment, we would be completely vulnerable to our wrongdoers, especially when we are justified in believing that they may harm us again. Butler's account recognizes how difficult it is to overcome our malice and hatred, and this is why forgiveness is a virtue; but he also recognizes that sometimes it is simply not safe for us to overcome our resentment.

Something important to notice in Butler's account is the fact that malice and revenge are never justified attitudes to have towards a wrongdoer. When we are personally offended, we misperceive what has happened and we tend to see the other person as totally reduced to this particular wrong: "[…] the whole man appears monstrous, without any thing right or humane in him" (Butler 2006, 101). But this is not a justified attitude to have, and we should always treat people with decency, respect and generosity. Forgiveness then essentially overcomes *unjustified* feelings of malice and revenge. But these are feelings we should not have had in the first place.[14]

Butler is not alone in arguing that forgiveness overcomes unjustified retributive feelings while being compatible with some form of resentment. Bennett (2003) and Hampton (1988) defend a similar view of forgiveness, and I believe their accounts are Butlerian in many ways. For instance, in Hampton's account, forgiving involves seeing the wrongdoer as "still decent, not rotten as a person" (1988a, 83). Hampton argues that resentment tends to evolve into moral or malicious hatred; the victim starts to regard the offender as bad at the core and totally rotten as a person. As a result, forgiveness involves changing morally inappropriate emotions and beliefs about the wrongdoer, such as moral or malicious hatred.

Bennett (2003) defends a conception of elective *personal forgiveness*, according to which one may forgive an unapologetic wrongdoer by

changing her morally inappropriate attitude towards the wrongdoer and by continuing with her blame. The negative feelings overcome in personal forgiveness are feelings that one should not have had in the first place.

Both accounts further support Butler's claim that one can forgive and yet maintain some form of retributive feelings. In Bennett's account, one can offer this type of forgiveness by continuing with blame. In Hampton's account, while feelings of resentment, moral and malicious hatred must be overcome, there is a suggestion that we may retain some form of moral indignation, even after we have forgiven:

> Suppose they do transcend this emotion. They will still experience *indignation* about the wrongdoing if they drop their defensive posture but sustain their opposition to the action. But I can remain emotionally opposed to someone's action, and still come to be supportive of, even reconciled to, *her*, if I am able to disassociate her from the action and reapprove of her" (1988b, 148; italics mine).

Let me summarize what we can say about minimalist forgiveness so far. It involves:

(i) A certain change in view about the wrongdoer as a person. We start thinking of her as a decent person, a person worth associating with.
(ii) Forgiveness may also overcome *unjustified negative* feelings, such as revenge or hatred.[15]
(iii) One may continue to blame the wrongdoer for what she did, feel moral indignation towards her actions, or feel a virtuous type of resentment.

We should thus allow for a type of forgiveness, which is indeed compatible with condemnatory attitudes, whether they manifest in resentment, indignation, or blame. In forgiving in this way, we reestablish the minimal civil moral relationship with our offenders. By bestowing on them minimalist forgiveness, we reaccept them back into the moral community by treating them with the appropriate respect owed to decent fellow human

beings. We show that we care about them as persons despite what they have done and we give them another opportunity to show that they can be capable of moral transformation and redemption.

According to this minimalist proposal we ought to maintain the right kind of resentment, a healthy type of resentment, especially when we have good evidence to believe that the wrongdoer will wrong us again. However, when we forgive we do commit to put the wrong behind us in the sense of not bringing it up again in future conversations, not disparaging the wrongdoer in public, or seeking revenge against her. So in forgiving, we relinquish our right to express blaming attitudes toward the wrongdoer (or to act on them), concerning that particular offence, while we might still maintain a 'virtuous' type of resentment, which can promote our wellbeing.

One may wonder why it is good to have such a minimalist form of forgiveness. I believe that minimalist forgiveness makes both psychological and normative sense. In cases of grave wrongs, it recognizes how difficult it can be for victims to overcome all negative feelings; thus, instead of denying their claim to forgiveness, we could trust their moral testimonies. Furthermore, it recognizes that it is not reasonable to demand or expect victims to let go of all their retributive emotions. Norlock points out that the "overcoming all negative feelings model" makes perfect sense when we forgive very minor wrongs, but it does not always make sense when we discuss serious wrongs for "[…] the imagined perfection of a state in which one overcomes the last drop of one's anger seems counter to experiences with serious wrong, and perhaps amounts to an undesirable goal" (2009, 106).

Minimalist forgiveness can protect victims from future injustice, as Butler suggests. There is very little assurance the wrongdoer will not offend again. By maintaining some minimal form of moral condemnation, we avoid risk and harm to our wellbeing. In addition, as I will demonstrate below, it plays an important role in reaffirming violated norms of respect. Furthermore, minimalist forgiveness is reasonable to offer and

morally praiseworthy. We are seldom sure if a wrongdoer is totally rotten to the core or incapable of moral transformation, so we have epistemic license to offer forgiveness even in the absence of remorse. Minimalist forgiveness encourages us to be generous in our final judgments about people's inner moral states and characters and appreciate the potential moral goodness in all of us. Finally, minimalist forgiveness answers the criticisms aimed at undeserved elective forgiveness. By continuing with our condemnatory attitudes, we continue to defend and affirm our sense of self-respect, our wellbeing, and we also avoid moral condonation of the offense.

So far I have argued that minimalist forgiveness is possible and sometimes justified. In the next section I will show why the minimalist form of forgiveness is warranted in cases of undeserved elective forgiveness. Briefly, by continuing to blame or resent wrongdoers, a victim never gives up her expectation and her right to demand an apology. Therefore, the victim manages to preserve her self-respect, proportionally condemn the wrongdoing, and demand that the offender offer her apologies.

III. Elective Forgiveness and Self-Respect

I have not yet said how resenting is defending the value of self-respect. I will do so by proposing a certain view of wrongdoing, which has already been defended by Darwall (2006) and Adam Smith (1982), according to which moral wrongs are mainly wrongs to our person. That is to say, when someone intentionally wrongs us, they thereby disrespect us as persons.[16] In this sense, Adam Smith argues that when I resent someone for divulging embarrassing secrets about me, which they were supposed to keep in confidence, my resentment is not aimed mainly at the disutility or inconveniences of that action – it is not merely about the fact that now everyone knows embarrassing things about me – but is aimed rather at the insult to my moral standing that her action implies. What most "[…] enrages us against the man who injures or insults us is the little account

which he seems to make of us […] that absurd self-love, by which he seems to imagine, that other people may be sacrificed at any time, to his conveniency" (Smith 1982, 96).

My proposal, then, is that resentment is directed towards an action of disrespect. So, *when someone wrongs another, their action expresses moral disrespect, and to that extent the wronged party is left with a deficit of respect.* This deficit of disrespect must be made good through a corrective affirmation of respect for the victim. I believe that the best way to counterbalance the deficit of respect is through an apology on the part of the offender. Thus, in admitting fault, the wrongdoer affirms that she should not have treated the victim in that demeaning way, that the victim deserves to be treated better, with the appropriate level of respect. This view of wrongdoing explains why apologies rationally undermine our resentment, so that forgiveness can be forthcoming. When an offender apologizes, she expressively makes good the deficit of respect, by retracting her claim of disrespect. She is thereby expressing her commitment to treat the victim better in the future and not repeat the moral offense. The offender has now *earned* her forgiveness, since the balance of respect was restored so that the offender and the victim are on a par again; they are equally morally worthy.

Things are different, however, with elective forgiveness, where no apology is given. There is still a deficit of respect between the victim and the wrongdoer, which needs to be made good. Unless the wrongdoer apologizes (which I understand as an expression of remorse), she will not be able to earn her forgiveness. However, I want to claim that another type of forgiveness may be warranted, even if it is not properly earned or deserved. So what are the reasons that could justify one's forgiveness, despite the fact that it will not be properly deserved?

Most philosophers who defend redemptive forms of forgiveness focus very narrowly on apology and remorse as the only acceptable grounds (or they add some extra conditions; see Griswold 2007). On a redemptive understanding of forgiveness, the wrongdoer has to prove

that she has changed, has to prove herself to be 'morally reborn' in order for one to be able to reassociate oneself with her and accept her back into the relationship. Even if I agree that forgiveness may take this form, I will propose here a different picture of forgiveness. When I forgive I do not wait and expect the other to show she has changed; instead, I trust that she is still a decent person, capable of redemption and moral transformation, and thus I decide to see her in a better light, perhaps despite the evidence to the contrary. And I do this for good moral reasons, perhaps because I want to give the wrongdoer another opportunity.

The transactional/redemptive model of forgiveness assumes that, in the absence of an apology on the part of the wrongdoer, we would be wrong to forgive because we would fail to take morality seriously and we would even manifest a lack of self-respect (Swinburne 1989; Kolnai 1973; Murphy 1988; Griswold 2007). So how can we justify (in the sense of offering permissive reasons for) undeserved elective forgiveness? My claim is that elective forgiveness is warranted if the victim continues to proportionally resent the wrongdoer (until apologies are offered). Further, there are ethical considerations in favour of forgiving unapologetic wrongdoers, which render such forgiveness morally praiseworthy.

Now I need to say something about why continuing with our resentment answers the two worries raised against undeserved elective forgiveness, and, in particular, why it solves Couto's[17] scepticism about elective forgiveness.

Following Adam Smith and Pamela Hieronymi, I understand resentment as a form of protest against the disrespect expressed in someone's action. In resenting a wrongdoer, the victim represents herself as wronged, as someone who may not be treated in that manner. So, by resenting, a victim implicitly makes a claim of respect – she demands to be treated better. It is implicit in resentment that the victim's rights have been violated in some way, that certain interpersonal norms of 'recognition respect' have been violated (Darwall 2006). Even if the disrespectful claim is not retracted (the offender continues with her disrespect and thus the balance

of respect between victim and offender still has the victim in deficit), the victim continues to demand that the offender address the wrong by apologizing and she therefore also continues to re-assert her respect.

My claim is that resentment expresses respect for the victim so as to counterbalance the disrespect expressed in wrongdoing. You wrong me and I defend my moral standing by affirming that I do not deserve to be treated in that manner. But, of course, the fact that resentment corrects in some way for the balance of respect does not defeat the need for an apology on the part of the wrongdoer. The job of affirmation of respect needs to be done by all parties involved, especially the wrongdoer. If someone wrongs me and I resent her, I have made a certain expressive correction of the disrespect involved in the wrongdoing. However, this has not changed the fact that I still want my wrongdoer to make correction for the wrong done by apologizing to me. Because of this, elective forgiveness can never be deserved or earned unless the wrongdoer apologizes to the victim.

By accepting that forgiveness can come about in the minimalist form I am proposing here, it follows that it can be justified even if it does not meet a certain demand for respect implicit in resentment – that of reaffirming that both parties are equally morally worthy through apology, or, as Couto puts it, the re-establishment of reciprocal recognition respect. The victim can continue to insist on her demand for the reaffirmation of respect by continuing with her resentment until the wrongdoer apologises. Once an apology is offered, then undeserved elective forgiveness becomes earned forgiveness.

Granting elective forgiveness, therefore, does not cancel the demand for making appropriate reparations. One of my claims is that undeserved elective forgiveness is not an unconditional gift offered to an unrepentant wrongdoer[18], as it depends (in order for it to count as appropriate) on the victim's continued attitude of resentment (or moral condemnation). Undeserved elective forgiveness approximates to the transactional model in that it involves seeing the wrong as an unexcused, unignored, and unjustified

moral offense. Nevertheless, the victim continues to have *some justified* retributive feelings, while renouncing others (such as seeking revenge or dwelling on the wrong), which would be incompatible with a forgiving attitude.

In conclusion, if we accept that forgiveness may come in more minimalist forms and that sometimes a certain degree of blame feeling (such as resentment) can still persist, then elective forgiveness can be defended against the two charges mentioned above (the moral condonation and the lack of self-respect worry[19]).

Still, even if we agree that the victim can genuinely offer a minimalist type of forgiveness to unapologetic wrongdoers, one might legitimately wonder if this type of forgiveness is praiseworthy. Gamlund, for example, argues that any supererogatory act (he sees undeserved elective forgiveness as a paradigmatic case of an act that is beyond the call of duty) should include three elements: "[…] it must be permissible; it must not be obligatory; and it must be good or praiseworthy, that is, it must have a certain moral value" (2010, 541).

So far, I have demonstrated that it can be permissible. I want now to argue that it can be praiseworthy and that the reasons in its favour do not have the power to oblige the victim to forgive.

It is worth pointing out at this juncture that my strategy for defending undeserved elective forgiveness is different from most accounts of elective forgiveness. Other accounts try to vindicate it by either saying that we are never obligated to feel resentment towards the wrongdoer, even if we are justified in our resentment (Allais 2008; 2013), or by arguing that forgiveness can be 'gracious', that is, it can be bestowed as an unmerited favour on an undeserving wrongdoer (Pettigrove 2012). My strategy is different for two reasons. First, we need to say what makes forgiveness permissible, if we want to offer a good reply to critics who claim that there is something problematic with undeserved forms of forgiveness, since the victim either fails to condemn the wrong enough or shows a lack of self-respect. Second, specifying the considerations in favour of forgiving can allow us to distinguish admirable forms of forgiveness from those that are less admirable.

IV. Reasons in Favour of Elective Forgiveness

I have argued that continuing with one's resentment is necessary in order for the victim to reaffirm her self-respect. Nevertheless, this is not enough to explain why minimalist elective forgiveness can be morally praiseworthy. Let me now propose a conception of reasons, which can make it intelligible and morally good for a victim to forgive her undeserving wrongdoer electively. Furthermore, although these reasons can explain why forgiveness can be admirable, they do not have the force of a moral obligation.

Overcoming Vindictive Responses

One of the reasons for forgiving unrepentant wrongdoers might be a certain moral view of the world the victim may have. For example, the victim may be the type of person who believes that the less anger there is in the world, the better the world is. In this care, the victim's reasons are about a certain social good that will be achieved by her avoiding vindictive attitudes, although not entirely, as some form of condemnatory attitude towards the wrong may still persist (the form of virtuous resentment I mentioned previously). Such a victim might agree with Nussbaum's (2016) recent criticisms of the transactional model of forgiveness, which always requires the wrongdoer to abase herself by apologizing – although, of course, I do not share this view of apology since one can surely apologize without the desire to see the other person humiliated. She may also think, as Nussbaum does, that anger is tied to an unjustified desire to cause the wrongdoer to suffer. Nussbaum argues that anger is vindictive, since it displays a 'payback mentality', which is combined with a focus on rank and moral status. Anger is about getting back at the wrongdoer, making him suffer in order to elevate oneself above the wrongdoer. It is a self-indulgent emotion displaying insecurity, which encourages one to see "[…] everything that happens as about oneself and one's own rank"

(Nussbaum 2016, 28). The desire for payback is always unjustified because making another person suffer by seeking retribution will not make things better and will definitely not undo the harm. We should adopt a more forward looking view instead of the 'inquisitorial and disciplinary' mentality involved in transactional forms of forgiveness, and focus on future welfare.

While I do not share Nussbaum's view on anger and apologies, I can see how this moral view of the world can count in favour of forgiving wrongdoers. So, on this view, although the victim sees the wrongdoing as unjustified and unexcused, and despite the fact that she expresses her moral disapproval and protest of his actions, nevertheless, she decides to forgive the undeserving wrongdoer because she is confident that focusing on forward-looking issues such as personal and social welfare, instead of vindictiveness or retribution, makes for a better world to live in. She thus decides to trust the offender and see him as a decent human being, despite his wrongdoing; she does it from an altruistic motive, because she justifiably believes it would benefit both parties, and it would create more noble interpersonal and social relations. What she does is praiseworthy because a certain social good may be achieved by focusing on issues of future welfare, on building trust and hope, instead of letting feelings of hate and anger dominate the relationship.

Reasons of Beneficence and Care

A victim might also decide to forgive out of sheer generosity, motivated by the desire to help a certain disadvantaged member of the moral community who is in need of a second chance, even if he has not yet come around to share the moral point of view of the victim and thus remains a wrongdoer. This is the case for the main character in Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables*, where Jean Valjean is given another opportunity to remake his life, despite his wrongdoing – Valjean is convicted of theft

and sent to prison. Bishop Myriel decides to forgive the ex-convict, Jean Valjean, when nobody in the moral community is prepared to accept him back as a member of equal standing who can be trusted again. Valjean is astonished and grateful by such altruistic behaviour. The generosity shown in forgiving Valjean inspires and changes his character. Indeed, Valjean undergoes a complete moral transformation after the encounter with the bishop, which would have been impossible without the bishop's kindness and generosity. Such generosity is important for our moral life, and showing generosity might bring the wrongdoer to feel remorse about the wrong done and change her ways.

Why is this a case of genuine forgiveness and why is it morally praiseworthy? It is a case of forgiveness since, although the bishop is within his right to denounce Valjean to the police[20], to ignore his wellbeing and to be angry with him, he decides to waive this right for good moral reasons. He sees him as a decent person worth giving another opportunity. Moreover, he does not make excuses and does not rationalize Valjean's actions. He continues to see them as morally wrong and condemn them. Nevertheless, he decides to forgive him by trusting that he can change and repent. What the bishop does is morally praiseworthy, as it is an act of kindness motivated by the need to help Valjean, which is definitely beyond the call of duty.

But this does not imply that he gets away with the wrongdoing, as Valjean is in a sense in the bishop's debt and still needs to make up for his wrongdoing by repenting. One implication of this is that although the account of forgiveness I am proposing is elective, it is not totally unconditional. Even if the bishop electively decides to forgive Valjean by waiving his right to openly protest wrongful behaviour and act on his resentment, Valjean still has a moral debt towards the bishop, that is, he has to make up for what he did by taking steps to repair the moral wrong. In this sense, elective forgiveness is different from earned forms of forgiveness, where it seems to be the case that after the offender has apologized and was granted forgiveness, he is no longer in his victim's debt.

Nevertheless, the bishop does not base his forgiveness on desert-based reasons, rather he is motivated by reasons of beneficence and kindness, which makes his forgiveness morally admirable. Furthermore, even if forgiveness in this case is the best thing the bishop could have done for Valjean (since he really needs another opportunity), the bishop is still within his right not to forgive.[21] Given that he was wronged, forgiveness is not something owed to Valjean as a matter of duty.

We should thus distinguish between reasons that provide moral obligations, and permissive reasons, which merely count in favour of performing a certain action. As the literature on moral obligations (Darwall 2006; Stern 2014) and supererogation (Dreier 2004[22]; Horgan and Timmons 2010) suggests, not all reasons in favour of doing something have the power to generate moral obligations. I may have good reasons to take out health insurance – so that my family does not go bankrupt paying medical bills – but I am not morally obligated to do so. I may be criticized for being careless and foolish when I refuse to get insurance, but I do not deserve the kind of blame and punishment that would be appropriate were I to violate the moral obligation not to kill innocent people. Thus, being justified in performing an action is not the same as being obliged to do that action.

The Reason-Giving Power of the Community

So far I have concentrated on interpersonal cases of forgiveness. One may wonder, however, whether all this can apply to forgiveness for grave wrongs that affect an entire moral community. Thus, how can one forgive an unrepentant offender for serious acts of wrongdoing, under oppressive conditions? While I do not have the space to discuss this important issue at length, I would like to briefly suggest that reasons for forgiveness might also come in a collective form. For example, I believe that reasons of social context (community-based reasons) played an important role for Babalwa Mhlauli, who, in her testimony to the South African Truth and

Reconciliation Commission (TRC), expressed her desire to forgive the unrepentant killers of her father.[23] How can we even make sense of her behaviour, and can it be morally admirable?

Pamela Hieronymi argues that in cases of merited forgiveness, the apology removes an existing threat to the victim and corrects for the wrong done to her, so now she feels safe to forgive. I suggest that in certain cases of grave wrongs, the community can also remove this existing threat to the victim by showing solidarity with her, such that she can feel safe and empowered to forgive her wrongdoer. Therefore, the community's moral support can serve as an analogue reason to apology, as they can achieve similar things: that of removing the threat and repairing the wrong. This idea receives some support from Hieronymi when she claims "Perhaps unilateral forgiveness (forgiveness of the unrepentant) is possible in cases in which the one offended receives strong community support" (2001, 552).

So how can we justify and explain Mhlauli's behaviour? We can understand this if we consider the role that the TRC had in vindicating the victim of injustice, by affirming her standing and by showing solidarity with her, even if the wrongdoers did not apologize to the victim.[24] The TRC marked and recognized the terrible atrocities committed as wrongs and gross human rights violations. The TRC therefore served as a symbolic way of taking the wrongs and their victims seriously. In forgiving, the victim expresses her acknowledgment that enough has been done collectively to show her the proper respect she deserves, and this makes it safe for her to forgive. Thus, there is enough recognition of the wrongs done to her by the community since even if not the perpetrator, others in the community are redeeming the level of respect owed to her. The community therefore rationalizes and justifies her forgiveness. This gives the victim a justificatory counterpart reason to apology – it is the socially disseminated moral solidarity and reaffirmation of the victim's moral status, which allows for forgiveness of the unrepentant to be morally justified. Of course, I am not claiming here that apologies are no longer due.

The perpetrators ought to show the appropriate respect for the victim and forgiveness will not be earned otherwise. Forgiveness is unearned in relation to the wrongdoer, but conditional on the community redeeming the level of respect and affirming the victim's standing. The community makes it intelligible, rational, and good for the victim to forgive, since otherwise she would be stuck in the past without being able to move on with her life.[25]

V. Conclusion

I have argued that the 'transactional' model of forgiveness, which requires apology or repentance, is too limited to capture all those instances of forgiveness in which we forgive for many other ethical reasons. Furthermore, the transactional model proposes that victims should overcome all blaming reactive emotions in order for that action to count as forgiveness. However, this proposal does not always acknowledge the experiences of moral agents, especially in cases of grave wrongs, where these agents may grant forgiveness without forswearing many of the negative reactive attitudes occasioned by the wrong they suffered. An account of forgiveness should be fluid enough to include those cases in which we grant forgiveness in the absence of apology or remorse, and those occasions when we express our forgiveness performatively, despite our inability or unwillingness to overcome all our resentful blame feelings.

My main aim has been to defend an account of minimalist elective forgiveness. I argue that undeserved elective forgiveness, despite the fact that it is not earned by the wrongdoer's apology, is a morally justified and praiseworthy phenomenon. This is due to two reasons. First, by continuing with resentment, the victim affirms her moral standing by demanding respect for herself. Second, there are non-desert based considerations in favour of forgiving unrepentant wrongdoers, which render such forgiveness morally praiseworthy.[26]

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NOTES

1. Philosophers who defend elective forgiveness include Allais (2008; 2013); Garrard and McNaughton (2003); Pettigrove (2012); North (1987); Govier (2002); Calhoun (1992).

2. For an excellent discussion of forgiveness for grave wrongs, see Norlock and Rumsey (2009).

3. For other pluralist accounts, see Walker (2006), Bennett (2003), and Fricker (MS).

4. For a development of these criticisms, see Swinburne (1989); Kolnai (1973); Murphy (1988); and Griswold (2007).

5. I have argued for this distinction in Roadevin (2017).

6. Although this assumption is not entirely uncontroversial. Cf. Gamlund (2011), who argues that forgiveness is not always aimed at culpable wrongdoing.

7. For this view, see Murphy (1988); Allais (2008); Griswold (2007); Holmgren (1993); Fricker (MS); Hieronymi (2001).

8. Cowley (2010) similarly understands forgiveness as a conscious decision to "[…] prevent one's morally legitimate resentment from influencing one's thoughts about the offender" (558). I agree with him here that forgiveness involves a decision, but one that can be characterized in terms of not acting on one's resentment, although resentment may still influence one's private thoughts.

9. I use 'recognition respect' in the way Darwall (2006) and Walker (2006) use it.

10. Insofar as the victim has not completely given up on the wrongdoer, some form of amends are still in order.

11. For performative accounts of forgiveness, see Pettigrove (2012); Haber (1991); Warmke (2016).

12. By calling it 'minimalist' I do not mean to imply that it is a less desirable form of forgiveness. In certain contexts, this will be the best form of forgiveness one can offer.

13. Garcia (2011) has recently defended this interpretation of Butler, suggesting we call resentment that is not vindictive, 'virtuous resentment'. For a similar interpretation of Butler, see also Scarre (2004).

14. Because of this, Butler takes the view that forgiveness is morally obligatory. We should always regard the other person as a decent human being and never as a monster incapable of moral transformation. Garcia (2011) also seems to agree with Butler that forgiveness is an unconditional moral obligation, which we ought to offer even to the worst moral offenders – so nobody is truly unforgivable (Section V, 12-16).

15. Although, of course, feelings of hatred and revenge may sometimes be justified (Murphy 1988).

16. I defended this view of wrongdoing in Roadevin (2017).

17. It is worth pointing out that Couto would disagree with my interpretation of forgiveness, since she believes that genuine forgiveness overcomes all retributive emotions.

18. For the 'gift' view, see Fricker (MS) and Pettigrove (2012).

19. Griswold (2007, 45); Murphy (1988, 17-18); Novitz (1998, 299). For a convincing reply to the self-respect objection, see Pettigrove (2012, 111-117). The condonation objection is discussed in detail by Bennett (2003).

20. It is worth pointing out that it would have been possible for the bishop to forgive Valjean as a human being while deciding to denounce him to the police as a criminal who should perhaps be punished. In this example, the bishop does both: he forgives and relinquishes his right to legally denounce him.

21. I assume here that despite the fact that Myriel is a bishop and may have certain obligations to be generous towards people, he is nevertheless entitled to blame wrongdoers, so it is up to him whether he forgives or not.

22. He claims that reasons of beneficence do not generate moral obligations since they so not have a moral requiring strength, so they only count in favour of performing a supererogatory action. Reasons stemming from justice, on the other hand, bring about moral requirements.

23. This example is discussed in Allais (2008).

24. Walker (2006) and MacLachlan (2008) likewise talk about how important it is for the community to offer moral support for the victim of injustice.

25. Hallich (2013) also proposes that we extend the category of the sorts of reasons that can make forgiveness desirable and virtuous. Among these reasons, he discusses prudential reasons related to improving the wellbeing of the forgiver. The case of Mhlauli is such a case, whereby her forgiveness is in her best interests, since it helps her overcome the wrongdoing by overcoming feelings of hatred, thus it has a cathartic value.

26. I would like to thank Chris Bennett, Adriana Clavel, Miranda Fricker, Glen Pettigrove and two anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments on earlier drafts.