The Charity Account of Forgiving

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Abstract.

In this paper, I argue that the dominant contemporary accounts of forgiving do not capture what forgiving most centrally is. I spend the first parts of the paper trying to elucidate what it is that these accounts miss about forgiving, and to explain why I think they miss it. I spend the latter parts of the paper suggesting an alternative, which I call "the charity account." This account draws much of its theoretical framing from the work of Thomas Aquinas, presenting forgiving as something importantly volitional and essentially loving.

§I. Outline

My aim here is to offer and defend an account of forgiving, which I call "the charity account": *to forgive is to declare an enemy a friend (with respect to some wrong)*. That phrase employs a few technical terms that will have to be clarified, but the nutshell idea is this. An insult, injury, or injustice causes a divide between the one who commits it and the one who suffers it. Forgiving, fundamentally and in the first instance, is a way to bring someone back over that divide, insofar as it is in the victim's power to do so by fiat. It is a movement of what I will call *friend-love*—a tendency of the will to pursue someone's good and the proper sort of closeness with her—for someone who seems to deserve just the opposite. It is to perform an act in which the forgiver foregoes treating someone as an "enemy" (the sort of person whom she might properly avoid or wish ill) in favor of treating her as the sort of person to whom she might properly wish to be closer, for whom she might rightly wish good things. It is, in a manner of speaking, making an enemy a friend.

This account departs from other influential accounts of forgiving in a few ways. It emphasizes the other-focused nature of forgiving, presenting it as a matter not primarily of changing yourself, but of changing what someone is to you. It also emphasizes the volitional nature of forgiving, as something you do rather than merely undergo, as primarily a way of acting rather than of feeling. And it also emphasizes the connection between forgiveness and love—hence "the charity account."

It will be the work of §IV-V to expand on that gloss and make the account more precise, first by outlining the broadly Thomistic account of love on which my account of forgiving depends in §IV, and then by introducing the technical terms in our definition in §V. I will conclude by noting a few salient applications of the account in §VI.

But before that, I will need to explain in §II what I mean by "an account of forgiving," since I want as much as possible to avoid verbal disputes. I will then give two arguments in §III to explain why I think the major contemporary accounts of forgiving have not yet captured the right phenomenon successfully. These arguments, I hope, will bring out the differences I just mentioned between the charity account and its alternatives, and motivate the need for something that at least shares the charity account's general tenor.

§II. Forgiving as Answering Wrongdoing

II.A. A Difficulty.

There is broad disagreement in the literature about whether the term "forgiveness" picks out one concept or several. Some who think there are many "forgivenesses" disagree about which concepts are part of the group. Even those who think there is only one "forgiveness" disagree about its conceptual core, how best to characterize it, what the paradigm cases are, and which phenomena count as forgiveness.[1] The result is that it is impossible to say "forgiving is…" without a high risk of talking past someone. My hope is to avoid as much of that confusion as possible by offering multiple characterizations of my subject. I have already said my interest is in forgiving, and the reader will already have some pretheoretical notion of what that is. I would like to give the reader a second notion to hold up next to it. So, in this section, I will offer an initial characterization of forgiving as a certain *answer to wrongdoing*.

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[1] For differing kinds of skepticism about the univocity of "forgiveness," see Santiago Amaya, "Forgiving as Emotional Distancing," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 36, no. 1 (2019): 6-26, at §V; Christopher Bennett, "The Alteration Thesis: Forgiveness as a Normative Power," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 46, no. 2 (2018): 207-33, at 217; Miranda Fricker, "Forgiveness: An ordered pluralism," *Australasian Philosophical Review* 3, no. 3 (2019): 241-60; William Neblett, "Forgiveness and Ideals," *Mind* 83, no. 330 (April, 1974): 269-75; and possibly, depending on how she is to be interpreted, Marilyn Adams, "Forgiveness: A Christian Model," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 8, no. 3 (1991): 277-304, at 294. To give examples of the other sorts of disagreement I have mentioned would involve citing work at random—but I take it Pamela Hieronymi, "Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62, no. 3 (May, 2001): 529-55; Vladimir Jankelevitch, *Forgiveness*, trans. Andrew Kelley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), orig. *Le Pardon* (Aubier-Montaigne, 1967); Martha Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), at ch. 3; David Owens, *Shaping the Normative Landscape* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), at ch. 2; Glen Pettigrove, "The Forgiveness We Speak: The Illocutionary Force of Forgiving," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 42 (2004): 371-92; and Robert C. Roberts, "Forgivingness," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (October, 1995): 289-306, exemplify the major differences of approach.

This characterization serves two purposes. First, it gives the reader a way to determine whether my account hits its mark that does not depend on the way either of us uses the word "forgiving" (or on how I present my account in §IV-V). My subject is, at least, a certain answer to wrongdoing. If my account is not a good account of something in that category, then it has not succeeded. Second, it helps explain how the charity account diverges from other accounts of forgiving. "Diverges," because it may either be a genuine disagreement or a misalignment of subject matter. (I expect it differs case by case.) But starting with a characterization of "an answer to wrongdoing" allows me to argue that other accounts don't capture *that*, without having to say whether or not they are supposed to. In that way, my arguments against those accounts in §III will be conditional. They will apply to any given account only if it was meant to capture forgiving (as I use that term).

If the reader suspects this characterization fails to capture every (or any) use of the English word "forgiving," he or she is welcome to take what follows as a limited stipulation: whatever I pick out when I use this word "forgiving," it must at least be an answer to wrongdoing. That way, we can set questions about word usage aside.

II.B. Answering Wrongdoing.

The first element of the picture is the observation that wrongdoing, as I will put it, means something to the victim. We might liken it to a claim or a challenge. This claim can be understood, speaking very generally, as an expression of *opposition*: a wrong signifies to the victim that the wrongdoer is, in some (perhaps very minor) way, against her. A wrongdoer appears as a sort of *opponent*, and her act as a sort of *opposing*. I do not mean that every wrong is a wrongdoer's attempt to "speak to" the victim. Quite often, that the wrongdoer does not see the victim as someone to be spoken to is precisely the problem. I mean only that, speaking generically, wrongdoing does have this oppositional character. And although I do not want to commit here to anything more specific than that, the general idea is nothing new in the literature.[2]

The next element of the picture is the observation that wrongdoing calls for (i.e., makes appropriate) an *answer*. I do not have an analysis of what this "answer" is. In fact, I will even leave it open what category it fits into—whether, for example, it is an action or an attitude. (I will argue later

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[2] See especially McKenna's "conversational" model of holding responsible, which has done much to develop this idea: Michael McKenna, *Conversation and Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Michael McKenna and Brandon Warmke, "Moral Responsibility, Forgiveness, and Conversation," in *Free Will and Moral Responsibility*, ed. Ishtiyaque Haji and Justin Caouette (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013), 189-211. Also noteworthy, especially in our context, is Hieronymi (2001, at 546). (Of course by "wrongdoing" I mean the directed kind—i.e., wronging.)

that it must be the former, but I want to defend that claim, not just assume it.) For now, it will be enough to give two necessary conditions:

    i) an answer must be addressed to the wrongdoer, and

    ii) it must fit the wrong.

(We can think of the address condition as establishing a link between the answer and the wrongdoer, and of the fit condition as establishing a link between the answer and the wrong.)

The *address* condition smuggles in three presuppositions. First, an answer is *meaningful*: it is the kind of thing that could mean something to someone.[3] Second, an answer is *directed* at the wrongdoer, in the sense that the wrongdoer is its target or object. And third, it must be addressed to the wrongdoer *as such*—i.e., *qua* wrongdoer. Taking these presuppositions together, we might say—and this is a decent paraphrase of the address condition—that an answer to wrongdoing is a way of treating the wrongdoer as a sort of opponent. (This implies treating her as the kind of thing that can be addressed, and therefore manifesting something like a Strawsonian subjective attitude or a Darwallian second-personal stance toward the wrongdoer.)[4]

The *fit* condition smuggles in two presuppositions. First, for an answer to fit a wrong, it must *correspond* to the wrong. It must be that the nature of the wrong (*qua* wrong) determines what that answer ought to be. That is, the nature of the wrong determines what it takes to give an appropriate answer of a certain sort—what standards an answer of that kind should meet (though not necessarily what kind of answer ought to be given). Second, as with the address condition, that an answer fits a

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[3] If the "answer" we are looking for is an attitude, then it will matter whether the attitude can be communicative in some sense. And many writers do hold that reactive attitudes are communicative in this way (attending especially to blame). For example, Christopher Bennett, "The Expressive Function of Blame," in *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, ed. D. Justin Coates and Neal A. Tognazzini (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; Miranda Fricker, "What's the Point of Blame? A Paradigm Based Explanation," *Nous* 50, no. 1 (2016): 165-1; Victoria McGeer, "Civilizing Blame," in *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, ed. D. Justin Coates and Neal A. Tognazzini (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) at 179-81; Coleen Macnamara, "Reactive Attitudes as Communicative Entities," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 90, no. 3 (May 2015): 546-69; Angela Smith, "Moral Blame and Moral Protest," in *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, ed. D. Justin Coates and Neal A. Tognazzini (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) at 39; and Gary Watson, "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme," in *Responsibility, Character and the Emotions*, ed. Ferdinand David Schoeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) at 122. These authors will agree, then, that reactive attitudes are (so far) candidates for answers to wrongdoing.

[4] Peter F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962): 187-211; and Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). As an aside, Darwall (page 72) seems to endorse the kind of "attitude view" that I discuss below.

wrong requires that the answer be *directed* at the wrong. Taking these presuppositions together, we might say—and this is a decent paraphrase of the fit condition—that an answer to wrongdoing is a way of treating an act as a wrong. (I cannot answer a wrong by treating it as an accomplishment, or a mistake, or a fluke of nature.)[5]

I have been speaking rather abstractly so far, but really, this phenomenon I am trying to mark—"answering wrongdoing"—is quite familiar and mundane. To see how our two conditions might be applied, consider first an answer to wrongdoing other than forgiveness: retaliation. Derry smashes Brigid's sandcastle, and Brigid smashes Derry's in return. Brigid's act is clearly directed at Derry, and it is directed at him insofar as he is (in our terms) opposed to her. We know this much from the fact that what she does is ultimately guided by how it will hurt him. Brigid's act is also meaningful to Derry—he understands immediately (though probably implicitly) that Brigid is objecting to what he did to her—and this is part of why Brigid does it. This all makes sense only because Brigid (implicitly) understands Derry as capable of receiving the message. So, then, Brigid's act satisfies the address condition: it is *addressed to Derry*. And it also clearly *fits the wrong*. Brigid's act is directed at Derry's in the sense that Derry's act is (we might say) what Brigid's own castle-smashing is about. It is also meant to correspond to Derry's act: smashing Derry's sandcastle occurred to Brigid as an appropriate thing to do because it is the same thing he did to her. A retaliatory response is fitting because it can (and should) correspond to the nature and severity of the wrong it is a response to.

Or suppose Brigid reacts less drastically, by shouting "Hey—jerk!" at Derry. This, too, is obviously directed at Derry—the shout is *at him*—in a way that manifests Brigid's view of him as (in some way) against her. The message of the shout, though it comes across differently, is more or less the same as that of the vengeful castle-smashing. And in this case Brigid's act is even more obviously communicative, so again her act is a way of treating Derry as capable of understanding it. The fit condition is satisfied too, albeit differently this time. Brigid is protesting Derry's smashing her sandcastle—*that* is what her shout expresses. Had she shouted about something else (say, Derry's distasteful snorkeling goggles), it would not have been directed at the wrong. And if it had meant something else (had it expressed, say, surprise or gladness), it would not have been appropriate. Her

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[5] Although these are only necessary conditions for an answer to wrongdoing, perhaps a reader will wonder what to say about a case in which a wrongdoer asks what she has done wrong, and someone tells her. Is this answer an "answer to wrongdoing"? It does seem to meet our conditions at first glance—but at second glance, notice that to answer this question is not to address the wrongdoer *qua* wrongdoer. This answer is addressed to whoever asks the question, and (so long as it is purely a way of passing along information rather than of communicating blame) it does not matter whether that is the wrongdoer herself.

shout is fitting, then, because it is a way of treating what Derry did as wrong. So this, too, is a way of answering a wrong.

Now, there are many things you can do after you have been wronged that do not amount to answering the wrong. You might forget about it. You might come to think it wasn't wrong after all (or that the supposed wrongdoer didn't actually do it). You might refuse to treat it as requiring an answer, perhaps because your attitude about the whole affair is a sort of great-souled contempt, or perhaps because the wound is so old it hardly bothers you anymore. You might adopt a sort of flight response by avoiding the wrongdoer (treating her merely as a danger, not as someone to be answered). You might offer no answer because you would rather just accept the wrong, perhaps from a deep sense of shame. These are all ways of abandoning the conversation, so to speak.

One way of not answering a wrong is of particular interest in our context. Suppose a victim grows weary of her anger. She comes to see it as a poison sapping her life and her time, and she takes steps to rid herself of it. She takes up meditation, she has several long conversations with a caring friend, she pours energy into a new hobby, and eventually she finds that the old animosity is no longer burning at the edges of her mind. This is certainly a good thing for her, and it is certainly a practice we all recognize. Most popular talk of "forgiveness" is about precisely this kind of bitterness therapy. We are always hearing things like, "Forgiveness isn't for *him*—it's for *you*." But no part of this "bitterness therapy" is addressed to the wrongdoer, nor does it fit the wrong (in our sense). It is not an answer to wrongdoing. And it is therefore not a subject of this paper.

To answer wrongdoing requires treating it as such, and the wrongdoer as a sort of opponent. For our purposes, it does not matter what the other possible answers to wrongdoing are—but forgiving, whatever else it is, must be one of them. And now we can consider whether the major contemporary accounts of forgiving (understood as an answer to wrongdoing) are successful.

§III. Contemporary Accounts of Forgiving

III.A. Attitude Views.

Most accounts of forgiving are, as I will call them, "attitude views." On an attitude view, forgiving is the forswearing or overcoming of a reactive attitude—typically resentment, though some writers substitute anger, or blame, or negative reactive attitudes in general. (Note that these are not to be confused with accounts about an attitude called "forgiveness." These are accounts of *forgiving*, put in terms of some relevant attitude.) Lucy Allais, for example, has a straightforward and elegant attitude view, on which forgiving is a "forgoing of personal retributive reactive attitudes in which, while maintaining her belief in the perpetrator's culpable wrongdoing, the victim ceases to let the wrongdoing count in her feelings towards the perpetrator as a person, and thus ceases to have towards

the wrongdoer the personal retributive reactive attitudes that her wrongdoing supports."[6] Not all attitude views take up Allais's emphasis on the separation of sinner from sin; some restrict the way in which a forgiver can overcome or forswear an attitude, or her reasons for doing so; some understand the attitude(s) in question differently.[7] But these variations on the schematic attitude view will not matter for our purposes here.

Much about these views is appealing. In particular, they make easy sense of the obvious connection between forgiving and negative reactive attitudes, and therefore of the relevance of forgiving to responsibility and blame. They also naturally suit the experience of forgiving on which most popular discourse and psychology literature focuses, in which a victim reflects on a wrong over some extended period of time, and finally banishes her feelings of hostility.

III.B. The Act Objection.

But attitude views seem to face a difficulty with the question, "what kind of act is forgiving?" (That is, do we classify forgiving among decisions, or judgments, or attitude-acquisitions…?) On an attitude view, forgiving must centrally involve a change in how one views the wrongdoer or the wrong (whether emotionally or otherwise)—either because it is the *bringing about* of a change in view, or because it simply *is* the change in view. But both options are problematic. On the first option, forgiving is objectionably self-manipulative. On the second, forgiving is non-voluntary and is subject to the wrong class of reasons. I will explain those two claims in turn.

Pamela Hieronymi's work gives us an instructive starting point. She is right when she says an attitude view must be "articulate": it must *articulate* the rational grounds on which one might forgive.[8] After all, one does not forgive by taking "forgiving pills," or by some other kind of circuitous attitude-

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[6] Lucy Allais, "Wiping the Slate Clean: The Heart of Forgiveness" *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 36, no. 1 (winter 2008): 33-68, at 62-3.

[7] For restrictions on the manner or rationale for overcoming attitudes, see e.g. Charles Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), at ch. 2; Margaret R. Holmgren, "Forgiveness and the Intrinsic Value of Persons," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (October, 1993): 341-52, at §II; and Jeffrie G. Murphy, "Forgiveness and Resentment," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (1982): 503-16, at 508. For differing views of the attitude forgiving opposes, see e.g. Hieronymi (2001, p. 546); Nussbaum (2016, ch. 2-3); Derk Pereboom, "Forgiveness as Renunciation of Moral Protest," in *Forgiveness and its Moral Dimensions*, ed. Michael McKenna, Dana Kay Nelkin, and Brandon Warmke (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021); Norvin Richards, "Forgiveness," *Ethics* 99, no. 1 (1988): 77-97, at 79; and Eve Garrard and David McNaughton, "In Defence of Unconditional Forgiveness," In *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 103, no. 1 (June, 2003): 39-60, at §II.2 (though it is unclear whether the lattermost endorse a strict attitude view).

[8] Hieronymi 2001, p. 529-30. See her work for a fuller defense of this claim than I give here.

wrangling. Neither do we simply will our attitudes away. Resentment (like other emotions) is a response to the world as it seems to the resentful person—and forgiving must likewise be a rational response to the world as it seems to the forgiver. Hieronymi's own solution is to ground the relevant change in attitudes on a change in judgment about the wrong, and that seems to be the right way for an attitude view to go. In any case, forgiving is not a matter of *making oneself* see things differently.

So, on a view like this, what sort of thing is forgiving? Perhaps it is the change in judgment that (on Hieronymi's view) grounds the resulting shift in attitudes, or a shift in the attitudes themselves, or a combination of the two. In any case, it is a change in view, whether affective or doxastic (or both).

But forgiving exhibits many characteristics not found among judgments or attitude changes, so *change in view* cannot be the right classification. To make the point, I will mention two of these characteristics: forgiving is voluntary, and it is subject to practical reasons.

Judgments and attitude changes are not voluntary. They can be manipulated indirectly, of course. I can make myself judge that there is a plum tree in the woods by selectively gathering evidence and nursing my pro-plum biases—or just by planting a plum tree. But I do not simply and voluntarily change my judgments and attitudes. They represent the world as it presents itself to me, without needing my say-so. But forgiving is not like that. Someone might beg my forgiveness with profusions of tears, trying the tensile strength of my heartstrings, over the most menial offense. And though I fully appreciate that she is eminently and unmistakably forgivable, I might still refuse. No amount of her appearing a certain way to me can constitute my forgiving her. It is only when I choose to forgive that I forgive. (It is true that not everything voluntary is easy, and forgiving is famously difficult, but it is voluntary nonetheless.)

Forgiving is also subject not to theoretical reasoning but to practical reasoning. Theoretical reasoning is reasoning about what is true—that is, about matters of fact. For example, that Alva gave an excellent speech is a reason for me to think she is a talented speaker. Practical reasoning is reasoning about what to do. That Bjorn's birthday is tomorrow is a reason for me to give him a gift, because it points out (in part) why getting him a gift would be a good thing to do.[9]

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[9] This distinction has a long history of controversy. My argument invokes only the distinction itself, and not any specific view or articulation of it, but even that has been the focus of much debate. I cannot enter that debate here, so instead I refer the reader to discussions of the distinction that I have found helpful, in G. E. M Anscombe, *Intention* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957) at §33-35, and Schwenkler's commentary, from which I pilfered some of the language I am using here (John Schwenkler, *Anscombe's Intention: A Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019) at 117 and the rest of ch. 5); St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics,

On this dimension, forgiving is like gift-giving. Suppose I ask Alva why she forgave Bjorn. She might reply, "I wanted to free us both from the past," or "I missed being friends with him," or "to show him God's love." These responses indicate practical reasons to forgive, which point out that forgiving is *good* (because it is freeing, or restorative of a friendship, or revelatory of God's love). Alva could also give reasons that do not wear a practical structure on their sleeves, such as "His apology seemed sincere." Though it seems clear to me that we should read this practically—as citing a condition relevant to the goodness of forgiving (as in "I ate the plum because it seemed ripe")—perhaps others disagree.[10] In any case, it is evident that forgiving is at least sometimes the result of practical reasoning. But reasons that favor a certain judgment or attitude are not practical.[11]

In summary, on an attitude view, forgiving is either itself a change in view or a way of bringing about a change in view. If it is itself a change in view, then it is neither voluntary nor subject to practical reasons. And if it is a way of bringing about a change in view, then it is a kind of self-manipulation. But forgiving *is* voluntary and subject to practical reasons, and it is *not* a kind of self-manipulation. Neither of these possibilities captures what sort of thing forgiving is.

Someone might reply that the "self-manipulation" point was too quick—that, though the term itself is less than ideal, forgiving *is* a kind of "self-manipulation," merely in that it is an exercise of a certain control over one's retributive attitudes. But, if the objector is really thinking of an exercise of a kind of attitude control, then I suspect she is thinking of something other than an answer to wrongdoing. (Perhaps she has in mind the "bitterness therapy" I mentioned at the end of §II.B.) An answer to wrongdoing, we said, must be addressed to the wrongdoer. Controlling one's own attitudes fails every part of that condition. It is not the kind of thing that has a meaning to anyone, oneself included; it is paradigmatically *not* a way of treating someone as the kind of thing that can be

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1981), at I q. 77-83, on the powers of the soul); Pamela Hieronymi, "Controlling Attitudes," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 87 (2006): 45-74.

[10] There is an extended sense in which theoretical reasons can favor communicative actions by favoring the truth of what they mean (because a good communicative action communicates what is true). For example, "I told you the plum was ripe because it was soft." The same is plausibly true of forgiving.

[11] More precisely, I am making two contrasts here: forgiving is i) a *product of reasoning*, and ii) subject to *practical* reasons, while judgments etc. are neither. But it is sufficient (and simpler, and less contentious) to focus on (ii).

Though I think these distinctions that I have been relying on are straightforward, some—like doxastic voluntarists, perhaps—will be skeptical. I refer those readers to an argument from Brandon Warmke which is similar to this one in spirit, but which takes a less action-theoretic angle: Warmke contends that forgiving is a normative power, and is subject to a certain kind of norm (Brandon Warmke, "Articulate Forgiveness and Normative Constraints," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 45, no. 4 (2015): 1-25; and Brandon Warmke, "The Normative Significance of Forgiveness," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 94, no. 4 (2016): 687-703).

addressed; and it is directed, if at all, only at oneself. Perhaps there are interesting phenomena of this sort that resemble forgiving, but they are not answers to wrongdoing, so they are not my subject here.[12]

III.C. The Grammar Objection.

The dominant general approach in the literature, both for attitude views and for other kinds of view, is to describe what forgiving is by describing a certain change, to realize which is to forgive.[13] That is, just as we could say cooking is preparing raw food, or basket-weaving is making wicker into a container, we say forgiving is *doing A to B*.

I think this is a worthwhile approach. But once we take it, we ought to maintain agreement between the formal structure of forgiving, so described, and that of the account we give.[14] If forgiving has a formal direct object, for example, then *what it is to forgive* should have the same object. And, if we are to take our usage of the word "forgive" as a guide, it does. We say, "I can't forgive her for that"; "forgive those who wrong you"; "please forgive me"; "I forgive you." I think it is clear enough on reflection that, here, language captures the truth. The object of *forgiving*—the thing one forgives—is *a person*. If that is so, then our account of forgiving must admit that fact. Similarly, if *forgiving* has a formal indirect object (say, *a wrong*) or subject (say, *a person*), we should accommodate those too. Our analysis should preserve the structure of *forgiving*.[15]

An analysis of the form *to forgive is to φ* should therefore yield a sensible translation between, for example, "I forgive you" and "I φ you." *You* should play the same formal role in both cases—and so φ should be the kind of thing that could have *you* as its object.

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[12] One could also avoid this objection by accepting doxastic voluntarism, or by some positions that allow practical reasons for adopting certain strategies in theoretical reasoning. I assume enough of my audience would consider these options non-starters that, for brevity's sake, they can be left unguarded.

[13] "Dominant approach" may be an understatement. I do not know of any exceptions. But I should emphasize that I am only speaking of accounts of what forgiving *is*. Much work on forgiving is only about what it *involves*, or *does*, or *requires*. And of course, forgiving *involves* (etc.) much else aside from what it *is*. These other accounts do not meet the standard I have set here only because they are not meant to.

[14] If you prefer, by "formal," I mean "logical," or "grammatical" if we can give the term a Wittgensteinian flair. Hence the objection's name—though it does not actually rely on any specially Wittgensteinian machinery.

[15] My point here is not that the *word* "forgive" has a person-word as its direct object. Sometimes it does not (e.g. "please forgive my rudeness"). Nor am I holding the operative verb in our proposed definition of forgiving to that standard. My point is about the *act* of forgiving, and what one is acting *on* when one forgives. In the same way, eating has food as its object, and stealing has property as its direct object and a person as its indirect object.

Attitude views do not meet this standard. Take *overcoming resentment* as an example. Clearly I cannot *overcome resentment you*. Perhaps we could say I *overcome my resentment toward you*. But this means I *overcome <resentment toward you>*, not that I *overcome resentment <toward you>*—the object of the overcoming is resentment of a certain sort, not a person. Well, what if we tried "I *un-resent you*"? At least this formulation has the right construction in English, so perhaps this is the best way to represent the formal structure of the account. But now we have left the sheltering fold of ordinary language, and we have to ask what *un-resenting* is. It cannot be some unresentful attitude. Then we would have an account of forgiveness the attitude, not forgiving. It cannot be *avoiding resenting*, nor *ceasing to resent*. That would take us back to where we started. It cannot be *not resenting* (or *not-resenting*), because that has no determinate form at all. (Winking, planting, giving, and many other things are all not resenting.)[16]

In the end, there's no clear way to make this account fit the "grammar" of forgiving. But that is unsurprising—*overcoming resentment* already has the standard "doing something to something else" form, but the "something else" is an attitude, not a person. What marks an attitude view, in fact, is the form *to forgive is to φ A*, where *A* is a reactive attitude. And, although my concern is primarily with attitude views, we could say similar things about *canceling a debt*, *refusing to punish*, *giving up certain normative powers*, and so on.[17] On each of these accounts, what I do in forgiving has something other than the wrongdoer as its direct object. (On many accounts, if it has an indirect object at all, it is not the wrongdoing.) I do not know of a contemporary account of forgiving that clearly has the right structure.

I have been speaking, of course, of the formal structure of an *act*, forgiving, not of the English word "forgiving." But perhaps someone will suspect that my claims about the grammar of forgiving are swayed too much by the English language, and that forgiving itself—the act, not the word— might not have the formal structure I've said it does. But if so, I suspect the objector is thinking of

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[16] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pushing me to clarify that the example here is *overcoming resentment*, not *resenting*. Clearly enough, resentment itself *does* take a person as its object. *Overcoming resentment* does not.

[17] See, respectively, Dana Nelkin, "Freedom and Forgiveness," in *Free Will and Moral Responsibility*, ed. Ishtiyaque Haji and Justin Caouette (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013), 165-88; Leo Zaibert, "The Paradox of Forgiveness," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 6 (2009): 365-93, and Bennett (2018). Nelkin's phrasing of her account often suggests "*releasing someone from a debt*" as the better reading, but then it does not have the wrong in the indirect object place. Now, just as "I cease to resent" can be recast "I un-resent [you]," it will be possible in general to restate any of these accounts so that its surface grammar—the mere English—matches that of forgiving. ("*I declare you a person-no-longer-in-my-debt regarding that wrong*," for example.) At that point, as before, we must ask whether the new English statement makes sense, and whether it preserves the spirit of the original account. I will not insist that no contemporary account could survive such a readjustment, but I do not know any that could.

something other than an answer to wrongdoing. An answer, we said, must be addressed to the wrongdoer. Anything that meets this requirement has the addressee—the wrongdoer—as its direct object. We also said that an answer must fit the wrong. Anything that also meets this requirement has the wrong as its indirect object.

III.D. Addressing Self-Manipulation.

At this point, readers who are sympathetic to an attitude view may have two reservations. I will consider them in turn. Each will be useful for clarifying the aims of the positive work of §IV-V.

Here is the first. I said in §III.B that self-manipulative acts are not addressed to anyone, including oneself. And I said in §III.C that *overcoming resentment* is not to be reconstrued as *overcoming resentment <toward you>*. So it seems that a defender of an attitude view can avoid both the act objection and the grammar objection if only she is willing to say that, on the contrary, self-manipulation *can* be addressed to someone. And perhaps it can be. Suppose you are a close friend of mine, and, although my alcoholism has pained you deeply for years, still, you have always been there for me. Suppose I know what it would mean to you if I quit drinking. And suppose I finally work up enough gratitude and strength to enroll in a rehabilitation program. This attempt of mine to rehabilitate myself is self-manipulative in the relevant sense. But, plausibly, I could do this *for you*— hoping it will express my thankfulness for your unfailing friendship over the years. And at that point, doesn't it seem right to say my rehabilitation is *addressed to you*? Then why not say the same about overcoming resentment?

I suppose it is an empirical question how often those who rid themselves of anger or resentment do it in this way, as part of some encompassing action that is addressed to a wrongdoer. I suspect it is less common than fighting an alcohol addiction for the sake of a worried friend. Either way, as far as attitude views are concerned, this communicative "encompassing action" is no essential part of forgiving. As with fighting an alcohol dependency, I can rid myself of resentment without doing it as part of some symbolic gesture. (Of course we could build it into the objector's view that it only counts as forgiving when it is relevantly analogous to our rehabilitation case, but then this view would capture hardly any real-world cases of forgiving.)

And that, I think, points us to a deeper insight. We are looking for an account of what it is to forgive. When we say that forgiving is "addressed," and therefore that *what it is to forgive* must also be addressed, we are not saying merely that *what it is to forgive* must be something that could be put to the purpose of addressing someone. Rather, we are saying that forgiving itself is the *kind* of act that is addressed to a wrongdoer—and if to forgive is to φ, then φ-ing, too, must be the kind of thing that is addressed to a wrongdoer. Of course there is a loose sense in which any act (hopping, whittling, spilling tea, etc.) could be addressed to someone. Just do it in a game of charades. But that

isn't what we are after. As with rehabilitation (and hopping, and whittling, and spilling tea), it is no part of overcoming resentment in itself that it be addressed to anyone. What we want is an account on which *what it is to forgive* is, in itself, an answer to wrongdoing.

III.E. Attaining a Forgiving Attitude.

But here is the second route an attitude theorist might take. Suppose forgiving is a shift not only *away* from resentment (or whatever else) but *to* a distinct *attitude of forgiveness*. Perhaps this attitude could have the right form to avoid the grammar objection. Then one could deny that forgiving (the thing one does) must have that form, strictly speaking, without wholly shrugging off the force of that concern—instead we find the form we are looking for in forgiveness, the attitude. Similarly for the act objection, perhaps one could simply deny that forgiving is voluntary (though maybe it manifests some kind of epistemic agency) or subject to practical reasons (though it may be subject to theoretical reasons that look practical at first glance). And if the forgiving attitude might plausibly meet our conditions for an answer to wrongdoing, then perhaps, in some sense, the shift to that attitude could inherit that role. So here we have a certain kind of attitude view, on which forgiving is a shift to an *attitude of forgiveness*, and forgiving does its "answering wrongdoing" work by way of its connection to this forgiving attitude.[18]

To make room for our reply, let us distinguish two roles that forgiving might play. We noted in §II that wrongdoing signals a kind of opposition, and marks a wrongdoer as a kind of opponent to the victim. For as long as the wrongdoing goes unanswered, there is a tension between wrongdoer and victim—a pressure to do something about the wrong that has been committed, to bring the opposition between wrongdoer and victim to an end, one way or another. There is, to borrow a term from Vladimir Jankelevitch, a kind of dissonance that needs to be resolved.[19] We can ask, then, how forgiving relates to this resolution of dissonance. There are two options: either it *initiates* resolution, or it is a *response* to resolution. That is, either forgiving has resolution as its purpose or end, or else forgiving has resolution as one of its conditions and something else as its end. We can say that, when

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[18] It may also have occurred to an attitude theorist to simply deny that forgiving is voluntary and subject to practical reasons (and so avoid the act objection) without positing any special attitude of forgiveness. This might be Hieronymi's view (see 2006 p. 74, note 49). If this is to give us an account of an answer to wrongdoing, then no longer resenting (etc.) a wrongdoer must be enough to fill the communicative role of an answer. In other words, on this view, the lack of resentment must do the work that the attitude of forgiveness does on the "attitude of forgiveness" view. Perhaps that is defensible, though I suspect *no longer resenting* has no determinate meaning to it apart from the attitude that takes resentment's place. I am addressing the "attitude of forgiveness" view directly because I find it more plausible, though my remarks could be adapted to either view.

[19] Jankelevitch 1967, p. 18.

forgiving has resolution as its end, it plays an *initiative* role; and when it has resolution as one of its conditions and something else as its end, it plays a *responsive* role.[20]

On the version of the attitude view we are considering, the role that forgiving plays most comfortably is responsive, because attitudes themselves are fundamentally responsive. Resentment (for example) might play an initiative role by disposing us toward certain actions, but what it does always and essentially is represents the world to us.[21] And if forgiving is a shift to an attitude of forgiveness, then forgiving, too, will be fundamentally responsive. In fact, that is precisely what we want if we think forgiving's job, as Hieronymi says, is to "ratify an offender's change of heart."[22] If we think of forgiving as primarily a way of affirming that an apology has successfully cleared away the enduring threat of a past wrong, then we will be happy to say forgiving is a response to resolution. But the fundamental role of an answer to wrongdoing is initiative, not responsive. An answer to wrongdoing, in fact, just *is* an attempt to resolve dissonance. Responding to a sandcastle smasher by smashing his own castle in return is (presumably) a way of reestablishing a kind of balance that somehow compensates for a wrong. Shouting names at him is (we can suppose) a way to call him out for what he has done, in hope that he might repent of his dark past. So an answer to wrongdoing *aims* at resolution. What it *responds* to, of course, is wrongdoing.[23] Our new version of the attitude view still does not secure a good account of an answer to wrongdoing.

Of course, responding to resolution is certainly something we do, and it is certainly something we sometimes call "forgiveness." I expect it happens quite often following sincere apologies for wrongs that have been sufficiently atoned for. But there is also something we do that does not rely on resolution, that is available immediately in the face of an injury, that can either follow an apology or initiate resolution all on its own. There is room, that is, for something that fills this role I have called "answering wrongdoing." I have argued that standard contemporary accounts are either

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[20] This is not quite the familiar distinction between conditional and unconditional forgiveness. Whether the two distinctions overlap extensionally depends on whether repentance (and only repentance) accomplishes some kind of resolution prior to forgiveness.

[21] Presumably, in that it represents someone as somehow in the wrong—though, of course, there is controversy here. At any rate, this again is a claim I will have to presume rather than defend. Suspicious readers can find helpful discussions in Aquinas (*ST* I-II q. 46); Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), especially §2.3 and 3.3; and Christine Tappolet, "Emotion and Perception" in *Emotions, Values, and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), at ch. 1.

[22] Hieronymi 2001, p. 550.

[23] That is not to say an answer to wrongdoing becomes impossible after a good apology. Brigid can obviously still smash Derry's sandcastle, for example, even if he is sufficiently sorry. That is just Brigid resolving the situation in a way Derry was trying to avoid.

unsuccessful accounts of forgiving (so understood), or else accounts of something else. What remains is to ask what forgiving (so understood) is. That is where I will turn now.

§IV. Love

IV.A. Good and Union.

At the beginning, I said that to forgive is to declare an enemy a friend, and now I would like to explain what I mean. But before we can understand "declare," or "enemy," or "friend," we have to understand love.

The charity account borrows heavily from the moral-psychological framework of Thomas Aquinas, and especially from his accounts of love and will.[24] On a Thomistic view, love has *a twofold tendency toward* i) *the appropriate sort of union with the beloved, and* ii) *her good.*[25]

"Tendency" here is to be understood very broadly. Tendencies can be manifest in a variety of mental attitudes, including—importantly—*passions* (especially desires and emotions) and *volitions* (choices, wishes, intentions, etc.).[26] So Alva's tendency toward Bjorn's good may show itself in a

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[24] Readers already sympathetic with Aquinas will know that he says far more about charity as a *theological* virtue—as friendship with God—than I will. I do not invoke that part of his account here simply because it would introduce complications and controversy, and my arguments can be understood without it. Consequently, my use of the term "charity" is somewhat at variance with traditional English renderings of Aquinas's Latin on which "charity" is reserved for a specifically theological virtue, opting instead for neutrality on what the substance of charity is. (In this I am taking my cue from Aquinas's merely linguistic remarks in *ST* II-II q. 26 a. 3.) A more properly theological approach would certainly be helpful in another context—it is simply not my approach here.

[25] This characterization is very similar to Eleonore Stump's Thomistic account of love. She says, "love requires two interconnected desires: the desire for the good of the beloved, and the desire for union with the beloved" (Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), at p. 91). She draws this from Aquinas's own claim that love has a twofold tendency, toward the beloved's good and toward the beloved (Aquinas, *ST* I-II q. 26 a. 4). Aquinas's original formulation has several advantages, especially in making it clear that what one loves is *the beloved*, not, say, a relationship or an attribute. But Stump's formulation is illuminating about what it takes on Aquinas's view to want *a person* (as such)—and so I borrow from it here in order to elucidate some of the features of forgiving. This way of putting the conditions is also importantly influenced by the work of Michael Sherwin (Michael Sherwin, *By Knowledge and by Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005)).

[26] On Aquinas's account, acts of love (*amor*) are appetitive functions of the soul at any of its levels. We have very basic "vegetative loves"—the same kind of inclination that a plant has toward sunlight. We also have "sentient loves"—passional loves of the kind one person might have for another, but also for tea or traveling. Finally, we have "volitional loves"—inclinations to seek the good of others for their own sakes. Though habits

number of ways: she might *be saddened* when he loses his favorite cloak, or she might *decide* to do something kind for him, or she might *wish* he had a more fulfilling job. Furthermore, this inclination does not require the absence of its object. Alva can want Bjorn to have a fulfilling job even if he already does (in which case her "tendency" is manifest in a sort of gladness).

"The beloved's good" is meant in a broad sense that encompasses all the ways in which the beloved can flourish: her happiness, her virtue, the fulfillment of her important desires, pleasure, beauty, convenience, capability, and so on. To seek the beloved's good is to seek what falls under these headings not merely accidentally or instrumentally, but *because they are good for her*. (That is, a lover seeks her beloved's good as such, and as a final end.)

Union with the beloved, to borrow Aquinas's phrase, is "fellowship in life"—a sharing of life with someone.[27] What parts of life are to be shared, and how, depends on the relationship between lover and beloved (hence "appropriate sort of union"). A mother shares knowledge and resources with her child; a reader seeks to share her favorite author's way of thinking; companions may contribute together to a shared activity; a husband and wife might share a nice dinner.

IV.B. Minimal Love, and Charity.

All these loving relationships require at least a minimal form of union, which Aquinas calls "union of affection."[28] Every lover tends to seek her beloved's most basic goods—survival, company, peace of mind, etc.—and tends *not* to seek what is bad for her. And every kind of union requires, at a minimum, that this tendency be mutual. Both lovers must love in a way that is responsive to the other, to what she is like and what she is doing. If Alva and Bjorn send each other countless love poems but neither ever opens the other's letters, there is no *mutual* correspondence—only two fountains of sentiment spouting into the anonymous ether. This responsiveness, in turn, requires that there are two people involved who each seek each other's good from an independent will. If Bjorn feels affection toward Alva only because she slipped him a potion, there is no *mutual* affection, only Alva seeking her own good via Bjorn. Every love, then, aims at least at this *minimal union*—this

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always involve interconnected acts of passion and will, properly speaking, it is volitional love on which the habits of friendship are built. Hence, for Aquinas, friendship is primarily a matter of willing good to another (see *ST* I-II q. 26 a. 3-4). This—what I call "friend-love"—is what I am concerned with here.

[27] *ST* II-II q. 25 a. 3, referring to—but, I think, generalizing—Aristotle (*Ethics* VIII.5). Though I have been speaking here of love for another, love's tendencies need not always be about others. Self-love has the same structure. Stump has an excellent discussion of what it is to desire union with oneself in *Wandering in Darkness*, ch. 6.

[28] *ST* I-II q. 28 a. 1.

mutuality of affection. Every love must therefore be at least a *minimal love*: a tendency toward the beloved's most basic goods (and not what is bad for her), and toward minimal union.[29]

An ordinary human person at the appropriate stage of development will have this minimal love for everyone, at least by default.[30] She will be glad to hear of others coming into good fortune, sad to hear of their suffering, inclined to help them when they need it, and bothered by unnecessary breaks in minimal union between her and others. From this beginning, she will develop, to some degree or another, a disposition that governs how she loves. Insofar as it is excellent, this disposition is a virtue, and is given the name "charity." Hence "the charity account," since (as I will claim) forgiving is an act of love, so charity is the virtue to which it belongs.[31]

§V. Friends, Enemies, and Declarations

V.A. Friends and Enemies.

Let us now clarify that phrase, *to forgive is to declare an enemy a friend, with respect to some wrong*.[32] To begin with, "friend" and "enemy" here signify not relationship types, but ways of thinking of someone. A friend of mine is someone for whom I have *friend-love*: one to whom I wish good, and with whom I wish to have the appropriate sort of union. (What counts as "appropriate union" will vary depending on the kind of loving relationship at issue.) An enemy of mine is someone for whom I have *enmity*: one to whom I wish ill and separation from me because she deserves it.[33]

Note that these are weaker terms here than in ordinary English. For one thing, the friend-love at issue here is common to all the familiar forms of interpersonal love, like that between spouses, parents and children, siblings, coworkers, and so on. All of these are variations on what we are calling

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[29] Note that it is minimal union, not love itself, that requires this mutual well-wishing. I might love you even if you do not wish me well even to this minimal degree, though I wish you did.

[30] Or perhaps for everyone she knows. And of course, plenty of people develop a deep distrust of others, and perhaps even a sort of default enmity. But clearly that is a sad flaw, not the natural course of a human life.

[31] Aquinas counts forgiving among charity's "deeds of alms," alongside acts such as comforting the sorrowful, counseling the uncertain, and giving to the needy (*ST* II-II q. 32 a. 2). Interestingly, he places the direct moderation of retributive emotions and behaviors in the domain of temperance (*ST* II-II q. 157).

[32] Because my account of forgiving depends heavily on the following explanations, and not on its three central words themselves, if the reader thinks my remarks in this section inadequately characterize *friend*, *enemy*, and *declaring* as ordinary concepts, he or she is welcome to read them as stipulative for purposes of the argument.

[33] I am using "wish" here to designate intention in Aquinas's sense (which is almost certainly not the contemporary sense). For our purposes, consider it a limitation of "tendency" to the volitional case. Note also that enmity, understood this way, does not require wishing someone ill *as a final (or part of an ultimate) end*.

"friend-love." Neither does friend-love always involve the intensity or complexity we would typically expect from the best of these loves (including what we normally call "friendship"). At its lowest limit, it requires only the "minimal love" that I mentioned in §IV.B. And a similar point goes for enmity. As I am using the terms here, one could have an enemy, or have enmity for someone, in far less dramatic situations than we would typically reserve those words for.

For another thing, "friend-love" refers to only one side of relational friendship. In order for there to be a friend-relationship, some degree of the union desired in friend-love must be *actual*. In other words, a friendship in the relational sense is *mutual*: Alva loves Bjorn, and Bjorn Alva, and each love is responsive to an interpersonal connection by which these two loves are interdependent. The nature of this interdependence is a difficult matter. It seems to require that each party apprehend the other's love—Alva must know that Bjorn loves her, and vice versa, not just as a matter of fact but from personal experience. And it also seems that each love must be sensitive to this knowledge—the good Alva wants for Bjorn, for example, must be conditioned by the relationship they bear to each other in virtue of their reciprocal love.[34] Unfortunately, we must leave these details unexplored here. The point is that friend-love, by contrast, is not necessarily mutual, though it does *aim* at union. Thus what forgiving restores *immediately* is friend-love—though it thereby aims to restore friendship.

Note also the slight asymmetry between friends and enemies. To my friends I wish good *simply*, but to my enemies I wish ill as a matter of *desert* or *justice*. This is to distinguish enmity from hatred or cruelty, and enemies from those to whom I wish ill for just any old reason. Someone is only my enemy if I want what is (apparently) bad for her, and separation from her, because she has (apparently) done something that warrants it.

Finally, note that these are twofold tendencies, not sets of two independent tendencies. You are not my friend if I wish you well but do not want union with you, and similarly for enemies. Again there is more to be said—the word "twofold" denotes more than that both conditions are necessary—but we can leave those matters aside for now.

V.B. With Respect to a Wrong.

One person can be a friend to another in some respects but not in others. And these "respects" may vary widely in scope. Alva might have a certain friend-love for Bjorn with respect to a birthday present he just gave her. (This is one way to characterize gratitude.) Bjorn may have friend-love for Alva just insofar as they share an interest in a game. Or perhaps Alva and Bjorn each see the other as a good teacher, but not as a good traveling companion. In the case of forgiveness, the relevant respect is the

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[34] Stump has a detailed discussion of mutuality in *Wandering in Darkness*, ch. 6.

domain of goods and ills that one could properly desire for another in response to some wrong she has done.

I clarified earlier that "enemy" and "friend" (as I use the terms here) may not necessarily pick out the concepts a given real-life victim of wrongdoing would explicitly attach to those words, but rather particular ways of representing other people. We might call them "forms of thought." "Wrong" picks out a form of thought in the same way. And just as "friend" and "enemy" are relativized to the one thinking—for me, to represent someone as a friend is to represent her as *my* friend—the same is true of "wrong." To represent something as wrong, in the sense we are concerned with here, is to represent it as a wrong done to *oneself*. (For this reason, I cannot ordinarily forgive wrongs insofar as they are done to others, even if I am harmed in the crossfire—although I will mention a few complications in §VI.E.)

It is clear enough what it is to treat someone as an enemy with respect to some wrong. It is to pursue what is bad for the wrongdoer and separation from her (as such, as a final end) because the wrong (apparently) warrants it. We might call this sort of response "*retributive*." Revenge is the obvious example—that it is bad for the wrongdoer is the whole point of it. I will not go into detail about the variety of possible retributive responses, but it is worth quickly pointing out that retributive behavior is far more common, and often far more subtle, than we typically realize. People have vast underground arsenals of clever, plausibly deniable ways to hurt each other: glares and cold shoulders, sighs and snickers, faux-innocent comments and tersely worded replies, ignoring greetings we would usually answer, denying favors we would usually grant, pretending to be busy or unimpressed or interested in someone else, and so on. But forgiving requires treating someone as not an enemy, and so it requires shunning retribution. All of it.[35] That is not to say we always realize these behaviors are retributive, nor that forgiving is only sincere if the forgiver "acts it out" perfectly. I imagine it is common for us to genuinely forgive and then, perhaps from ignorance or weakness, to find ourselves indulging in some petty vengeance. Still, if a strong and consistently forgiving person recognizes these little forms of payback for what they are, she will avoid them.[36]

But on the charity account, to forgive is to declare an enemy a *friend*, not simply *not an enemy*. This, in itself, is a way of willing someone's good and union with her, and is therefore an act of love.

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[35] "All of it" with respect to some wrong, that is. It is possible to forgive someone for one thing and not another. Admittedly, there is a certain strangeness and a psychological tension in forgiving someone for only one of several wrongs. But I suspect this tension comes from the structure of love, and not from the structure of forgiving in particular, and that makes it a subject for a deeper inquiry than this one.

[36] I also do not say forgiving requires not punishing. Some think punishing need not be retributive, and I do not mean to assume a position on that here.

We mentioned a "minimal love" that is required in all cases of loving: a desire for another's most basic goods and for union of affection. That provides a necessary condition on forgiving. But, although forgiving is at least an act of minimal love, it may often be an act of greater love. There are several ways in which that can happen—several ways to love someone with respect to a wrong. I will mention just one example.[37]

In response to suffering, love takes the form of compassion.[38] In the case of forgiveness, the compassionate response to wrongdoing begins with the recognition that the wrong had a sharp point at both ends—the wrongdoer suffered too, albeit differently. In many cases, this suffering is obvious and ordinary. Guilt is perhaps the clearest form it takes. But wrongdoing also tends to backfire in creative ways: I strike you and hurt my hand; I insult you and lose the respect of a mutual friend; I commit murder and am slowly driven into a consuming delirium until I am finally exiled to Siberia. What's less obvious, though it is present in every case, is what Plato saw when he said that the tyrant betrays his own soul, and what Aristotle saw when he said that vicious acts are quite literally what unhappiness is made of. Consequences aside, wrongdoing *itself* is bad for the wrongdoer.[39] (For this reason, compassion is always an available response to wrongdoing.) Any suffering that is connected in these ways to a wrong may ground compassion, and therefore may also ground forgiveness.

Hopefully we now have a sense of what it means to be a friend or an enemy to someone with respect to a wrong. But that is not to say that just any act of compassion (or love in general) in response to some wrong counts as forgiving. We have not spoken yet of declaring.

V.C. Declaring.

"Declare" is sometimes used synonymously with "disclose," "assert," or "announce"—e.g., "Alva walked right up and declared her love." It may also signify a way of changing things in the world, often by a speech act—e.g., "I declare Bjorn an outlaw!" The latter sense is the one that concerns us

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[37] Other candidates include a hope for redemption, and something like what Aquinas calls "fraternal correction." I am unsure whether the latter can be a forgiving response, or else is always an alternative to forgiving. (See *ST* II-II q. 33; cf. q. 32 a. 2, where "reproving sinners" is another deed of alms.)

[38] Aquinas counts compassion as one of charity's three "interior acts," along with joy and peace (*ST* II-II q. 30). Here I understand compassion as one shape which the friend-love that operates in forgiving may take on.

[39] E.g., Plato, *The Republic*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Hackett, 2004), at book IX; or Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). In Aristotle's case, "said" was perhaps a strong term—I am referring to his overall picture of the relationship between happiness and action. But see, e.g., Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, trans. J Solomon, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, ed. Johnathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1922-85, at 1215a20; and Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, ed. Johnathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1729-867, at 1100b32.

here. On the charity account, declaration (at least in the case of forgiving) requires a particular kind of *commitment to a practical reorientation*.[40]

By "practical reorientation," I do not mean anything unfamiliar. I simply mean a change in the way one acts toward some person or thing. I am practically oriented toward something when that thing is an end of mine (i.e., of my actions), and away from something when avoiding it is an end of mine. To *practically reorient*, then, is just to act (or intend to act) in a way contrary to the way one was acting (or was inclined to act) with respect to some potential end.[41] One might do this by adopting a new end, by abandoning an old one, or by replacing one with another. So, for example, I might "practically reorient" myself away from a piece of pumpkin pie. At one point, I was eating it—i.e., my act of eating had, as its end, the pie. But now I am beginning to feel sick. I decide I will not finish the pie, I stop eating, and I push the plate away.

Sometimes, when we practically reorient, we commit ourselves to the courses of action toward which we orient ourselves. Commitments have two further features that will be important for our account of forgiving. First, committing is a way of altering norms. Committing to something is a way of giving oneself reason to do that thing. Committing *to someone* to do something is a way of giving that person standing to hold you to your commitment (in certain appropriate ways). And second, commitments aim at permanence. To commit to a course of action is to commit to it indefinitely, and to immunize it (to some extent) against possible future reasons to turn away from it.[42]

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[40] I only say here what declaring *requires*, not what it *is*. I think the real nature of declaring is something like *practically reconstruing something as something else, by a communicative commitment*—but that is needlessly opaque. For now, it will suffice to explain what is involved in declaring. I take the conditions I will mention to be necessary in all cases of declaring, and sufficient at least in the case of forgiving.

[41] I say "*potential* end" because the minimal case of a practical reorientation does not require that I take something as the end of some action I= have decided on, but only that I recognize it as something I could pursue. In Aquinas's terms, it must be an end *in intention* (understood as good in some way, and attainable) but not necessarily *in consent* (the end of an action that one recognizes as a means one may take). (See *ST* I-II q. 12 & 15, and Sherwin 2005, p. 84.) For example, suppose I might either read or have lunch. I recognize reading as something I could pursue, so in one sense I recognize it as an end. But in another sense I have not *taken it as my end* until I decide to read. Still, I can "practically reorient" away from reading just by adopting a contrary end, e.g., by choosing to have lunch, if I do so in part to avoid reading.

[42] I do not mean that every commitment is to an indefinite course of action. I mean that a commitment to a given course of action is limited in time (if it is) only because the course of action itself is limited in time. In other words, temporality is a feature of the object, not the form, of a commitment. Something like "I commit to bringing you soup every day this week" is best understood, "I commit to *bringing you soup every day this week*," not "I commit this week to *bringing you soup every day*." I will not say anything here about whether this commitment is a matter of justice—something *owed*—or else something weaker.

But I said a declaration requires a *particular kind* of commitment to a practical reorientation. The distinguishing mark of a declaration is that it changes the world in some way. In declaring Bjorn an outlaw, the sheriff makes Bjorn an outlaw. The same goes when the word "declare" is absent: "I christen this ship the *HMS Bluebell*"; "You're invited"; "I now pronounce you husband and wife"; "I do."[43] And in order for a declaration to do the world-changing work it does, it must be that one can sometimes change *what something is* (in some sense) in changing *how one treats it*.

Sometimes this is so simple and mundane that we would not look twice at it. If my friend gives me a new mug, I might decide on the spot that this will be my "cider mug," setting myself a plan to use it for cider and thus making it a particular sort of mug. Other declarations are a bit more interesting. Consider what happens when Alva hires Bjorn to help her in the shop. In doing so, she changes what he is: he is now her employee. She also thereby commits to treating him in certain ways. She will now assign him work, for instance, and pay him for it. Bjorn, for his part, is committed to doing the work he is assigned. And Alva and Bjorn are each warranted in expecting the other to hold up his or her end of the deal. Now, Alva can hire Bjorn only with Bjorn's agreement, of course. So we can think of her declaration in one of two ways. Either Alva makes a *bilateral* declaration with Bjorn to hire him, or Alva makes a *unilateral* declaration in which she offers Bjorn the job, which Bjorn may then accept (or perhaps Bjorn has already done something in virtue of which he accepts the job automatically upon Alva's offer). In this way, hiring can be construed either as a bilateral declaration that one person can make halfway, or as a unilateral declaration that calls for an answer.

Friendship works in the same way. You are my friend in the psychological sense when I have friend-love toward you. You are my friend in the relational sense when I share a mutual friend-love with you. Of course, one cannot simply declare one's way into a friend-relationship—so, instead, we can think of declaring someone a friend as either halfway making her a friend in the relational sense, or unilaterally making her a friend in the psychological sense (which constitutes an invitation to relational friendship).[44] Neither can one "practically reorient" one's passions and desires, so this declaration must be a matter of volitional love—of wishing, intending, willing, etc. not what is bad for someone, but her good, and union with her.

One other characteristic of declarations is worth noting. Declarations are *communicative*. They are like speech, or music, or traffic signals, or facial expressions. They are not always speech acts

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[43] Christening a ship is a well-known example from J. L Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 2nd edition, ed. J. O. Urmson and M. Sbisá (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

[44] My phrasing of the charity account opts for the latter construal, but I take it this is a matter of preference.

(verbal or otherwise), and they need not always be successfully communicated.[45] They may even be made privately (much like speech, or music…). But they are ways of communicating nonetheless.[46]

V.D. Love and Enmity Both.

I will finish this sketch of the account by considering an objection which will help to clarify one final point. I explained *declaring an enemy a friend* in terms of a "practical reorientation" to friend-love. But I also said that forgiving is an act of charity—something done from friend-love. So it seems that forgiving both *comes from* and *causes* friend-love. But how can I come to love Alva out of love for Alva? Isn't this an impossible circle?[47]

We should first note that such appearances of circularity are not always problematic. For example, suppose I am practicing Irish by speaking it. In a way, I am both *acting from* my knowledge of Irish and *producing* my knowledge of Irish. But despite that paradoxical way of putting it, everyone knows there is really no *sui generis* witchcraft here. Before practicing, I know Irish in one way, and afterward, I know Irish in another way. The knowledge of Irish that enables my practicing is not the same in all respects as the knowledge of Irish that arises from it.

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[45] This point—that the possibility of a "private declaration" need not imply that declaring is not communicative—has been at least assumed in other similar contexts (especially in discussions of blame). Macnamara (2015, esp. §4) and Pereboom (2021, p. 10) discuss it explicitly.

[46] This discussion—especially my mention of declarative and commissive elements of forgiving—may remind the reader of accounts of forgiving as a speech act. Pettigrove, for example, offers a view on which "I forgive you" can serve any of three illocutionary functions (including declaration and commitment), though forgiving at its best involves expressing present positive regard (and a lack of hostility), and committing to the same in the future, and to acting in a way that manifests goodwill appropriately (Glen Pettigrove, *Forgiveness and Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), at 18-9).

Pettigrove criticizes views on which "I forgive you" is primarily declarative on the grounds that (i) their focus excludes the point of view of the forgiver, (ii) there is something dubiously godlike about just declaring away guilt or a moral debt, and (iii) they wrongly paint the ideal result of forgiveness as relief from a sort of detached negative moral balance, which has little to do with the victim herself (2004 §3, 2012 §1.2, my numbering). But the charity account does not face these difficulties. These criticisms apply only to views on which the declaration effects a removal of guilt or debt, whereas on the charity account, what is effected (directly) is friendship—a thing deeply relevant to both the forgiver and the forgiven, and which involves neither any godlike authority over moral debts nor any cold dismissal of the relationship between forgiver and forgiven.

The charity account also differs from Pettigrove's in other ways. It is not an account only of forgiving as a speech act—it is an account of forgiving as an act of the kind that can be (and perhaps ideally is) spoken. It is also stricter about the attitude manifest in forgiving: it is friend-love, not positive regard. But barring these points (and other more peripheral matters), the charity account and Pettigrove's agree on much.

[47] Thanks to several colleagues and anonymous reviewers for pressing various versions of this objection.

The question is whether we can say something similar about love. And we can. In fact, the respects in which the love forgiving requires differs from the love it causes are built into the account. In forgiving, one declares an enemy a friend *with respect to a wrong*. Forgiving does not require that the forgiver had (sans forgiveness) no friend-love for the wrongdoer in any respect. It is important that there be *some* respect in which the enemy is already a friend (i.e., an object of friend-love), otherwise there would be no love *from* which to forgive. So forgiving does not involve an adoption of *love in general*, as if there would have been no love of any sort without it. On the other side of the same coin, it is also important that, absent her forgiveness, the forgiver does not already see the other (entirely) as a friend *with respect to the wrong*. For example, to borrow from the discussion above, she must not already see the wrongdoer and her deed solely with the eyes of compassion.[48] Otherwise, by her lights, the wrongdoer is not an "enemy" in any way at all.

In any case, in order to forgive, there must be some disposition in the forgiver to act lovingly toward the wrongdoer, actualized (at minimum) in the forgiving itself. And there must also be some disposition in the forgiver to act against the wrongdoer, though it may never be actualized, which in forgiveness is exchanged for a disposition of friendship.[49] In this way, there is a change in a disposition brought about by that very disposition. But I do not think there is any great mystery in this. No more, anyway, than in a man who, loving his daughter, promises to do better by her in the future; or a

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[48] "Solely," because she *can* feel compassion and pity for the wrongdoer, so long as there is some other way in which she recognizes the wrong as a wrong.

[49] One anonymous reviewer points out a different objection that strikes at this same part of the charity account. If forgiving requires not wishing the wrongdoer well, then it seems forgiving will always be obligatory, because (plausibly) it is obligatory to always wish everyone at least certain very minimal goods—but forgiving cannot always be obligatory. Here, too, my response invokes this section's distinction. Forgiving requires seeing the wrongdoer as an enemy in one way (lest there be no sense in which she needs restoration to friendship) and as a friend in another way (lest there be no love at all from which to forgive).

The same anonymous reviewer points out a further way in which the charity account risks implying that forgiving is obligatory. Let us grant that forgiving requires seeing someone as one to whom one may rightly wish ill, but perhaps wishing someone ill is never just—and then forgiving would be required by justice. There are two things to say here. First, forgiving is not the only way to stop seeing someone as an enemy, so, if stopping were obligatory, that would not by itself make forgiving obligatory. But, second—to express a suspicion that I must here leave unfounded—if wishing someone ill were always unjust, then so would be every system of punishment (human or divine), all anger and resentment, and even every case in which we wish someone good *via* ill, as in "What she needs is a swift kick to bring her to her senses." These results seem to me very implausible.

woman who, in marrying her fiancé, changes the love she shares with him; or a student who speaks Irish in order to learn to speak Irish.[50]

§VI. Applying the Account

VI.A. *Summary*.

We can now update the brief characterization of our account that we gave at the beginning. To forgive is to declare an enemy a friend with respect to a wrong. An enemy is someone who, because of what she has done, is (apparently) the proper object of opposition—of avoidance or ill will. To declare an enemy a friend is to reorient oneself away from that oppositional course by declaring the wrongdoer a friend, that is, by adopting friend-love toward her. Friend-love is a tendency to pursue someone's good and union with her—at the very least, her most basic goods, and a minimal union in which each party mutually wills the other's good. This act is governed by charity, the virtue that governs all acts of love.

Forgiving, understood in this way, is an answer to wrongdoing: it is a response to a wrong which aims at resolving the dissonance it creates. It fits the wrong, and is addressed to the wrongdoer. It is not fundamentally a change in one's feelings, but rather a change in the will—in how one acts toward someone. It is a voluntary act, the sort of thing we reason about practically, but not a way of intentionally altering oneself. Rather, formally speaking, it is something one does to another person and (indirectly) to the wrong.

Despite the work that has gone into explaining it, the charity account does not make forgiving an especially complicated or unintuitive matter from the forgiver's own practical perspective. Suppose Derry has just smashed Brigid's sandcastle. When she notices what has happened, naturally Brigid will understand it as wrong, and she will understand Derry as an enemy (in our softer sense of the term). This understanding may be manifest in an attitude like resentment, or it may be straightforwardly cognitive—but it must be there in some form, or else (as far as she can see) Brigid has nothing and nobody to forgive. Then suppose it occurs to Brigid that she and Derry need not be enemies over this. Perhaps she will have this thought after Derry offers an olive branch by earnestly apologizing. Or perhaps Brigid generally likes Derry, and is unwilling to let littoral architectural disasters get in the way of their friendship. But she must see something good in Derry's friendship

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[50] Now, in the studying case, it is also true that the student's explicit aim is the disposition itself—her knowledge of Irish. In a sense there is an even more circuitous circle here than in the case of forgiving, which, though it *produces* love, does not have that very love as its object. Interestingly, Aquinas argues in the case of love that even that more circuitous circle would not be vicious. See *ST* II-II q. 25 a. 2, and also q 25 a. 4.

(in our softer sense), or else (as far as she can see) she has no reason to forgive him. At this point, Brigid can commit herself to treating Derry as a friend in this situation, not as an enemy—she can "declare him a friend," as we have been putting it. She might do this by telling him she forgives him, or by being conspicuously amiable the next time she sees him. She might do it just by "resolving to herself." But she must do something of the sort, or else she has only forgotten (or cooled down, or let it slide), not forgiven.

The charity account avoids the problems we raised for attitude views. As we said, it presents forgiving as something that can be done voluntarily and for practical reasons, and *declaring an enemy a friend with respect to some wrong* preserves the formal structure of *forgiving a person for a wrong*. It also meets the conditions we set in §II for an answer to wrongdoing: *declaring an enemy a friend* is a communicative act with the wrongdoer as its object, so it is addressed to the wrongdoer. And it is done with respect to some wrong, which determines what this act should be like—what it should be about and what it should express.

In the rest of this last section, I will consider what the charity account has to say on a few salient themes in the forgiveness literature: retributive attitudes, interpersonal norms, and self-respect. I will conclude by addressing an objection that has surely occurred to many readers—that forgiving does not seem to require loving in the way that the charity account implies—and by making a few remarks on the possibility of third-party forgiving.

VI.B. Resentment & Co.

My tone so far has deemphasized reactive attitudes because, given the conversation this paper is entering, it is important to be forward about the difference between attitude views and the charity account, and about the problems that I think attitude views face. I have argued that forgiving is not simply a change in view, whether in attitudes or in judgments. But I do not want to give the impression that retributive attitudes are not of central importance to forgiving. In another context, they might well have warranted the spotlight. And certainly there is some important insight behind attitude views. If the charity account could not countenance that insight at all, that would speak against it. So I want to mention two senses in which, on the charity account, forgiving involves an overcoming of retributive attitudes.

First, forgiveness responds to retributive attitudes. These attitudes are species of the passion that Aquinas labels "anger," which is a twofold representation: of a person as bad, and of retributive action as just.[51] It inclines us to seek someone's ill, and separation from her, because she deserves it—that is, it is a form of what we might call "emotional enmity." It is precisely in this way that people

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[51] *ST* I-II q. 46 a. 2.

typically come to see retributive behavior as appropriate or warranted. Bjorn knocks over Alva's garden gate; she construes this as a slight in becoming angry; her anger recommends retaliation; so she shouts at him. Normally, anger is what provides the "practical orientation" that one "reorients" away from in forgiving. To forgive is to do just the opposite of what anger (or resentment, or bitterness) suggests.[52] In that way, to forgive is to overcome anger.[53]

Second, retributive attitudes respond to forgiveness. We make much of the judgment-sensitivity of attitudes, but attitudes are also *action-sensitive*, albeit in a different way.[54] They tend to nag when they are indulged or ignored, but to diminish when they are spurned. A forgiving person quells anger (etc.), not by carefully brooding over it without letting it spill over, but by acting contrary to its inclination. She might hold her tongue at an opportunity to make an acid remark about the wrongdoer (or even compliment her instead), or ask her for an honest conversation, or pray for her, or tell her she forgives her. Perhaps she will do something like this only once, or perhaps many times over the course of years. But (if her psyche is functioning normally) she will thereby form a habit incompatible with anger, and her anger will eventually fade. In this way, too, to forgive is to overcome anger.

So, in fact, the charity account does acknowledge intimate connections between forgiving and anger (etc.). A person quells anger by forgiving, and she has no more enmity to oppose only when she has no more anger. I take it this helps to explain some intuitions that seem to support attitude views—for example, that someone who tries to forgive for years has only fully succeeded when she is no longer angry. On the charity account, that much is true.

VI.C. Normative Landscaping.

On the charity account, forgiving is not merely or essentially a way of altering interpersonal norms, but it does alter interpersonal norms. It does some of its norm-altering work in virtue of the commissive character of declaring. Forgiving makes it inappropriate for the forgiver to pursue retribution, whether in blaming behaviors, or purposive avoidance, or overt revenge, since she is

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[52] I do not say that *to love* is to do the opposite of what anger suggests. There are loving answers to wrongdoing other than forgiving. I am thinking especially of what Aquinas calls "fraternal correction" (see *ST* II-II q. 33 a. 1).

[53] I have brought in Aquinas's understanding of anger as an example because it makes the explanation for this connection between anger and forgiveness especially clear and elegant. But I think it is plausible that this connection exists however we articulate the nature of retributive attitudes.

[54] Here, again, is a claim over which there is controversy outside this paper's purview.

committed to not doing so. It also gives the wrongdoer standing to expect (with appropriate sensitivity) that the forgiver will avoid these things.

It does other parts of its norm-altering work in a far less interesting way, just in virtue of the forgiver's change in practical orientation. It makes it inappropriate for the forgiven to try to meet the forgiver's demands for satisfaction—by apologizing, or offering penance, or showing contrition—since there are no such demands. Similarly, it makes it inappropriate for the forgiver's friends to continue "taking her side" against the wrongdoer, since there no longer is any such "side." It also makes it appropriate for the forgiven to respond with gratitude, since what she received was a generous act of love.[55] And it makes it appropriate for the forgiven to seek a renewed relationship with the forgiver in certain ways that may not have been appropriate before, since she can now expect that the forgiver will be open to it (even if the renewed relationship will not be the same as it was before).

VI.D. Forgiving and Self-Concern.

I will end by considering three matters which the reader might think the charity account is not well-equipped to handle. The first is this. On the charity account, forgiving is an act of love for the wrongdoer. But love is famously generous, free, and selfless—and forgiving should not be *so* selfless as to be a form of self-neglect.[56] If it were, it might turn out to be a bad thing more often on the charity account than in reality. So how, on the charity account, does forgiving accommodate an appropriate kind of self-concern?

Suppose Alva "forgives" because, as she puts it to herself, "It's all right if Bjorn wrongs me like that—I have no right to expect any better." Note first that she must be serious about that word "wrongs." Otherwise, on the charity account, she has already missed one of the necessary conditions on forgiving. But to understand what Bjorn did as wrong is to understand it as a sign of opposition—as a break in the basic mutual affection necessary for minimal union. If Alva is truly treating Bjorn's wrong (*qua* wrong) as somehow appropriate, then she is thereby also treating separation from him as

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[55] This claim is only provisional, since the charity account on its own implies nothing about the electivity of forgiving. My own view is that forgiving is never owed to a wrongdoer, but that claim depends on considerations that would take us somewhat afield.

[56] This concern parallels an objection that is often raised against unconditional forgiveness. In that context, the worry is usually about forgiving betraying a lack of self-respect. (See e.g. Jean Hampton and Jeffrie G. Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), at p. 18.) It also parallels Hieronymi's requirement on "uncompromising" forgiveness that the forgiver not give up the judgment that she ought not be wronged (2001, p. 530). But I think the deeper concern (about my account, at least) is not about what judgments or self-image motivate forgiving, but what forgiving is in itself. It is that a forgiver, in her zeal to love another, may fail to love herself. Hence the slightly heterodox framing of the worry.

appropriate. In other words, if Alva's "forgiveness" is truly a way of accepting the wrong (as such), then it is an act *against* minimal union with Bjorn, not *for* it. And then it is not forgiveness.

But that is just the surface of a deeper point. I said above that union requires mutuality: *two* independent wills working together, each with a part to play. Self-denial to the point of self-destructiveness means the exclusion of one of those two wills, and is therefore incompatible with union. I also said that wrongdoing is bad for the party at each of its ends. And if to wish a person would act well is to wish for her good, then not only is love compatible with protesting wrongs and resisting abuses of power, it often requires it. In other words, hatred is not love's only opposite—shame and apathy have just as strong a claim to that title. It is possible to forgive badly, but the best acts of forgiveness require a joint effort of self-love and other-love.

VI.E. Forgiving Without Loving.

The second matter also pertains to my claim that forgiving is an act of love. Although technically all the view requires is just an instant of love, enough to ground a single act, it would be strange if that were ever all that grounded a real act of forgiving. Love does not just pop up, move a person once, and then disappear. But if that is so, is it really plausible that forgiving requires love? Don't we quite often forgive people toward whom we are entirely indifferent? Or even people we positively dislike?

My answer, I admit, is little more than an elaborate form of bullet biting. But I spent a good deal of time explaining "minimal love" as the limiting case of the love that grounds forgiveness, and it is worth remembering just how minimal it is. A desire for someone's most basic goods, and for the sort of union that consists in this desire being mutual, is quite a low bar. A normally functioning human being will have at least this sort of love for everyone, barring significant disruptions in her relationships.[57] This love is typically manifest in her discomfort with unnecessary breaks in minimal union (e.g., when someone dislikes her for no good reason), or in her willingness to help others when they are in need. In some of us our capacities to love are damaged, and most of us love some people more than others, so this minimal love is not always what is at issue. But the charity account does not rule out that I might forgive a stranger who shoves me in a crowd and never think of her again.

That, it seems to me, is enough in line with our experiences of forgiveness to forestall the worry. And at that point, I think the charity account's strong connection between forgiving and love is an advantage. Every view of forgiving must account in some way for the clear and oft-discussed character of forgiveness as something generous, gracious, restorative, self-sacrificial, and altogether very much like love. On the charity account, these connections are obvious immediately. The charity

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[57] "For everyone," or perhaps for everyone she knows at least well enough that her love can have an object. In scope, this sort of love is not unlike Strawson's "goodwill" (1962).

account also gives us a clear route to understanding the way forgiving aims to resolve the interpersonal "dissonance" I mentioned in §III.E—the tension of an unanswered wrong. In the case of forgiveness, resolution is part of reconciliation. And on the charity account, union is one of the two tendencies of love. So, though there is much more to be said about the charity account's explanatory power in these areas, we can already see that reconciliation will fall right out of the structure of forgiving.[58]

VI.F. Third-party forgiving.

The final matter I would like to consider is third-party forgiving. Is it possible, on the charity account, to forgive a wrong done to someone else? The over-simplistic answer is "no." I said in §V.B that to represent something as a wrong (in the sense involved in forgiving) is to represent it as a wronging of oneself, so one cannot declare an enemy a friend with respect to a wrong insofar as that wrong was done to someone else. But note that I am speaking *de dicto*, not *de re*. On the charity account, it is how things appear to me that determines whether I count as forgiving someone. If I declare you a friend with respect to a wrong you have not committed (though I think you have), then I do forgive you—though of course my forgiveness is inappropriate.

But there are complications, of which I will mention two. Though the charity account does not acknowledge a way to appropriately forgive someone who has not wronged you, first, it permits us to recognize that the difference between forgiving and its alternatives may be murky in practice, and, second, it is neutral on whether wronging one person can count (in some sense) as wronging another.

First, there are cases in which, although we really do see people as enemies in some way, we acknowledge that we are wrong. Perhaps I am offended by something you said, but I recognize that you did not mean anything by it, nor were you even being careless, and I know my anger is unjustified. Given my psychology, there are two possibilities. I can forgive you (albeit inappropriately in the way I mentioned above), or I can excuse you. To forgive, my action must have *an enemy* as its formal object. That is, I must see you as an enemy (*in forgiving you*) in order to count as forgiving you. To excuse you, on the other hand, my action must *not* have *an enemy* as its formal object. That is, in order to count as excusing you, I must (*in excusing you*) *not* see you as an enemy—i.e., as having wronged me, as deserving of what is bad for you, etc. That is precisely the point of excusing rather than forgiving. So, in cases like these, what I am doing depends on how I am thinking of it—on which view of you grounds the practical reasoning by which I forgive.

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[58] If the reader remains unconvinced, he or she is welcome to fix the problem by replacing *friend* with *not an enemy*. As far as I can tell, that view would still be coherent.

In life, it can be hard to know which of the two is happening, even for the forgiver (or excuser) herself. Our reasons can be messy, and opaque even to ourselves. In some cases, for example, the hurts we suffer are serious even though they are, properly speaking, collateral. It can seem as though we ourselves were wronged, usually in that our emotions present it to us that way, when we were not—and we are not being entirely unreasonable. It can be hard to know a person's mind in these moments. Especially because what these situations call for may be phenomenologically indistinguishable from forgiving, even though (if only technically) it is really something else. In these sorts of cases, the charity account, though it is clear enough on paper, is less clear in application. But I think that is unavoidable for any account.

Second, any account of love must recognize a sense in which a lover is united with those she loves. In one way it is obvious that, if my sister is cheated out of a significant portion of her savings by a sham doctor, it is *she* who is cheated, not I. Perhaps my own sense of hurt and hers should not be precisely the same. But we also must not wholly brush aside the way a wrong (even *as such*—not merely as a harm) can spread within the community of those who love the victim. We would miss something if we simply insisted that the wrong done to my sister is not, in any way or by any stretch, a wrong done to me. To be sure, these are difficult matters. Views of love differ on the nature and extent of the unity between lover and loved. And this union of love provides just one way in which it could happen that wronging one person counts (though maybe in a different sense) as wronging another. So we have here the possibility of another kind of so-called third-party forgiving—and whether we must acknowledge it depends not on our view of forgiving but on other views of other phenomena. The charity account might therefore have different implications depending on what views we take in these other areas. But again, that is true of any account.

In any case, whether the reader is impressed with the particulars of the charity account or not, I hope to have shown the need for an account of forgiving that aptly captures the phenomenon, understood as a kind of answer to wrongdoing. And I hope also to have motivated love as a central and organizing idea on which such an account could be built. Much else could be said to further our understanding of forgiving along these lines, but it will have to be left to future work.[59]