

Forgiveness and Respect for Persons

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The concept of respect for persons is often rejected as a basis for understanding forgiveness. As many have argued, to hold your offender responsible for her actions is to respect her as a person; but this kind of respect is more likely to sustain, rather than dissolve, your resentment toward her (Garrard & McNaughton 2003; 2011; Allais 2008). I seek to defend an alternative view in this paper. To forgive, on my account, involves ceasing to identify your offender with her wrongdoing, and this requires a corresponding affective change on your behalf. While there are different ways this may happen, I argue that respect for your offender as a person can play a significant role in the process.

“You’re neglecting me, Grimm, but I forgive you. When the first intoxication of your brilliant success has worn off and you begin to feel its emptiness, I hope you will come back to me.”

—Rousseau¹

Many philosophers agree that an account of forgiveness must meet two conditions. First, the account must explain how your forgiveness can be *articulate*. We would hesitate to say you forgave your offender if you forgot about the wrong you suffered, or if you stopped caring about it in order to move on in life.² If your forgiveness is genuine you must be able to provide a reason for overcoming negative feelings like resentment. At the same time, not every reason to forgive will be a good one. As a victim you might think you have no right to complain against mistreatment, or worse, that you deserve it. But genuine forgiveness must not reduce to this; it must not compromise your self-respect. Secondly, then, a philosophical account must explain how your forgiveness can be *uncompromising*.³

¹ Rousseau (1782/2000, p. 361).

² If I fear the risks of high blood pressure, for example, I could offer “health” as my reason to forego resentment. But it would be odd to say I have forgiven anyone, since here I am not even thinking about my offender. In forgiveness I need what Garrard & McNaughton call an “object-focused” rather than an “attitude-focused” reason (2003, pp. 51-52).

³ I am borrowing the “articulate” and “uncompromising” conditions from Hieronymi (2001).

A number of writers have argued we can satisfy these two conditions by turning to an outside factor: the offender's sincere apology.⁴ An offender who apologizes for his misdeed attempts to readdress his offense, the source of your resentment. If the offender made a degrading claim against your person, symbolically saying, "I count but you do not,"⁵ then his apology can be an attempt to retract that claim, to say, "I was wrong, you do count." In light of this retraction you have articulate grounds to foreswear resentment that do not compromise your judgment of the offense, the offender, or yourself. As Pamela Hieronymi puts it: "Once the offender himself renounces the deed, it may no longer stand as a threat to either the public understanding of right or wrong, or to one's own. It has been cut off from the source of its continued meaning. The author has retracted his statement, and anger loses its point" (2001, p. 548).

This is a compelling but, in my view, limited solution. If forgiveness amounts to nothing more than acknowledging your offender's apology, then it is unduly passive. Forgiving would not be something we can say you "do," beyond that of merely reporting upon your offender's good behavior.⁶ This calls attention to a third condition an account of forgiveness should meet: it should explain your agency as a forgiver, what we might call an *agential condition*. I think Hieronymi and others are unable to satisfy this condition because they assume a model of forgiveness that requires the offender's repentance first, what I will call the Report View. Whatever virtues this model has, it is unable to explain how forgiveness can be something you choose or commit to. Likewise it is unable to explain how you could truly forgive those who are unapologetic for their misdeeds.

This introduces a fourth condition I think an account of forgiveness should meet: it should explain how it is possible to forgive the unrepentant, what we might call a *unilateral condition*. In saying this I want to counter a tendency I see in the majority of the philosophical literature: namely, to make the offender's reparative activity a necessary condition for genuine forgiveness.⁷ Forgiving your offender without his apology has struck many as compromising in its very structure, as if it

⁴ In this paper I will sometimes speak of "reparative activity." Apology belongs to this broader category (as does making amends and repenting). As Macalester Bell explains: "In all its forms, reparative activity attempts to undo the moral, psychological, material, and relational damage wrought by wrongdoing" (2012, p. 206).

⁵ See also Murphy (1988, p. 25).

⁶ As Aurel Kolnai observes, forgiveness here risks collapsing "in mere redundancy, or the mere registering of moral value in the place of previous disvalue" (1973, p. 98).

⁷ A dominant trend in the literature is to make repentance a condition necessary for genuine forgiveness. See, for example, Murphy & Hampton (1988); Richards (1988); Wilson (1988); Lang (1994); Novitz (1998); and Griswold (2007).

would force you to obscure beliefs you have about his culpability, the extent of his wrongdoing, or your standing as a victim. But I would like to consider another possibility in this paper. I believe that once we have a correct understanding of what you do in forgiving someone, meeting the agential condition, we can see how genuine forgiveness does not have to be warranted by your offender's apology, meeting the unilateral condition.

Taken together I now face the following challenge. Can we frame an account of forgiveness that is (1) articulate and (2) uncompromising, and that also explains (3) your agency as a victim and (4) how you can exercise this agency toward an unrepentant offender? With this challenge in view, I will sketch a new model of forgiveness in this paper, what I will call the Avowal View. By speaking in terms of avowal, I want to encourage the idea that forgiveness is a practical activity at its core. Forgiveness, I shall claim, is more a matter of committing to a disposition than reporting upon a body of evidence; more a matter of willing than knowing. To forgive, on my account, involves ceasing to identify your offender with his wrongdoing, and this requires a corresponding affective change on your behalf. While there are different ways this may happen, I will argue that respect for your offender as a person can play a significant role in the process. After presenting this alternative (sections I-III), I will address a few objections to it (section IV). Then I will show how my account meets all four conditions (section V).

Before getting started, there is one objection I should address right away. Those familiar with the literature will know that respect for persons is often considered and rejected as a basis for understanding forgiveness. The line of argument is normally something like this. To hold your offender responsible for his actions is to respect his standing as a person; and this kind of respect is more likely to sustain, rather than dissolve, your resentment. But if resentment is an appropriate response to an offender you hold in moral regard, it is difficult to see how respect by itself could motivate your forgiveness. As some have put it, respect for persons is merely a "background condition for the possibility of forgiveness or of the refusal to forgive" (Garrard & McNaughton 2003, p. 53). This claim poses a serious threat to my account. However, I believe the threat goes away once we see that respect for persons needn't only serve as a background condition for negative reactive attitudes. It can also be *foregrounded* by the victim in an effort to acknowledge her offender's dignity.⁸

⁸ I am limiting my focus in this paper to acts of forgiveness, but what I say is open to a broader account of "forgiveness" as a virtue of character. As Robert C. Roberts explains, a core aspect of forgiveness is "an ability to transcend, or detach ourselves from, our own position as one who has been harmed," as well as an ability to detach and separate our offender from his position as perpetrator of harm (1995, p. 298; see also Roberts 2013, p. 199). My account lends itself to the

I.

If someone mistreats you, you will likely feel disrespected, and this feeling may rise up as anger or disappointment. But there is a positive side to this very common experience. You are upholding a view of yourself as someone who deserves better treatment: you are affirming your moral standing. Notice, too, that you are affirming the standing of your offender. After all, we have no reason to resent those who lack responsibility for their actions. We have no reason to harbor negative attitudes toward the very young or the mentally unfit. Thus, your resentment says, “I shouldn’t be treated this way,” but it also says, “You shouldn’t act like this.”⁹ To resent another is to hold her in moral regard. It is to recognize her as a person, as someone free and responsible for her actions.

Suppose, for example, that a colleague seriously violates your trust. You may no longer see her as a friend, and so treat her with an air of suspicion or refuse to speak with her. By persisting in your resentment you are not excusing her, that is, considering her less than responsible for her actions. You are not attempting to let her off the hook. And that is why you continue to feel the way you do. As much as your reaction is a form of protest for how you have been abused (“I deserve better than this,” “I shouldn’t have been treated this way”), it is also a protest against her behavior (“You are better than this,” “You shouldn’t have acted this way”).¹⁰ Your resentment affirms a kind of respect for your colleague as a free and responsible agent.

One way to understand this aspect of resentment is by introducing a distinction Stephen Darwall draws between *recognition respect* and *appraisal respect* (1977). Consider the former first. Recognition respect on its own is a way of acknowledging that someone is a source of value simply as a person, i.e., a value to be honored, respected, and affirmed. Here Darwall is building from an idea central to the Kantian tradition of moral philosophy—that a person is of incomparable worth (or “dignity”) by virtue of having a will, and that in respecting persons we must always take that fact into consideration, never treating them in ways that undermine (directly or indirectly) their freedom. This kind of respect is foundational in the sense that it does not come in degrees, and it does not rest on an individual’s character, ethnicity,

idea of a forgiving person who makes this separation from respect for her offender’s dignity.

⁹ For a fuller defense of the claim that reactive attitudes are “communicative entities,” see Macnamara (Forthcoming).

¹⁰ In what follows I will be assuming that another’s standing provides the condition for “intelligible moral address,” to use Gary Watson’s expression. As he explains, reactive attitudes are like ways of communicating to the other: they make sense “only on the assumption that the other can comprehend the message” (2004, p. 230). See also Wallace (1994; 2010).

social standing, or even her moral track record. A vicious criminal, for example, is still deserving of our recognition respect.¹¹

Of course, Darwall knows that we do not always speak of respect in this way. Very often when we say we respect another we mean we admire her for some perfection or excellence. This is what Darwall calls appraisal respect. As he explains: “To have recognition respect for someone as a person is to give appropriate weight to the fact that he or she is a person by being willing to constrain one’s behavior in ways required by that fact” (1977, p. 45). But this is different from appraisal respect. “The latter is a positive appraisal of an individual made with regard to those features which are excellences of persons. As such, it is not owed to everyone, for it may or may not be merited” (1977, p. 45). If you think someone’s character is lacking in integrity (as with your colleague), then you may feel she is no longer worthy of your respect, but again, what you mean to say is that she fails in your eyes to manifest certain virtues. Feeling this way is compatible with holding an attitude of recognition respect for her.

What can we take away from this? To start with, it cannot be the case that when you forgive someone you recognize-respect him for the first time. You must have done so already in order to resent him. Instead, when you forgive someone you must let go of the appraisal that informed your resentment, i.e., your appraisal of his misdeed. Looking ahead, I want to say that when you forgive your offender you must change your affective stance by ceasing to view him under the aspect of his wrongdoing.¹² One way you can do this, on my account, is by attending to those features that give your offender dignity. Attending to such features would not be a matter of appraisal-respecting your offender, nor would it be a matter of changing beliefs you held about his wrongdoing. It would be a matter of foregrounding the kind of respect you had for him all along, i.e., your recognition-respect.¹³ Contrary to a wide-spread view in the literature, then, I will argue that respect for persons can be a powerful tool for understanding forgiveness, especially for understanding unconditional forgiveness.¹⁴

¹¹ So Kant writes: “I cannot deny all respect to even a vicious man as a human being; I cannot withdraw at least the respect that belongs to him in his quality as a human being, even though by his deeds he makes himself unworthy of it” (1797/1998, p. 580).

¹² On the concept of an “affective orientation,” see Hurley and Macnamara (2010).

¹³ I am following Roberts (1995) in defining forgiveness as a choice to “foreground” or “make salient” features of the offender that supplant negative emotions with positive ones. However, in Roberts’s otherwise exhaustive list of salient features (repentance, excuses, suffering, moral commonality, and relationship) we do not find personhood. This is where I see my account moving in a new direction.

¹⁴ One might object, however, that in viewing others as moral agents we merely bestow them with a thin, formal status, much like viewing someone in her official capacity as a judge. But how could

As we will see, the concept of respect for persons can also help us understand cases where the victim chooses to forgive an offender who caused irreparable damage. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela considers such cases in her book on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), where she recounts stories from people who lived through Apartheid in South Africa. One story she relates is of Pearl Faku, a woman who confronts the covert police operative who murdered her husband. It is understandably difficult for us to conceive how a woman like Pearl Faku could overcome resentment toward her offender, even after his sincere apology. And yet she does, saying after their meeting: “I hope that when he sees our tears, he knows that they are not only tears for our husbands, but tears for him as well... I would like to hold him by the hand, and show him that there is a future, and that he can still change” (Gobodo-Madikizela 2004, pp. 14-15). I will return to the example of Pearl Faku’s forgiveness in section III below.

II.

There is a potential problem I must first address, however. If your offender is responsible for causing you harm, then your resentment is an appropriate response. So recognizing your offender’s standing as a person (as someone who is culpable for his actions) does not seem to warrant forgiving him. This is why many philosophers have argued we must frame forgiveness in terms of the offender’s sincere apology. If your offender repents or apologizes for his misdeed, he works toward retracting the claim his action made on you. Since your negative attitude is largely a response to that claim, his apology works toward cutting off your resentment at its source. You then have an articulate reason to forgive (to foreswear resentment) that does not compromise your judgment of him, the offense, or yourself.

My worry, as I mentioned earlier, is that in attempting to meet the articulate and uncompromising conditions, this account renders forgiveness unduly passive. On what I have called the Report View, your forgiveness resembles an exercise of theoretical rationality: You are appraising your offender’s efforts to make amends. But if this is the case, there is nothing left for you to “do,” no choice to make or commitment to form. There is no sense in which you are active in forgiving, in

such a status motivate a victim’s forgiveness? While a detailed reply would take me beyond the scope of this paper, I intend to use a “thicker” conception of personhood. For an illustration of this thicker conception, consider Ralph Ellison’s character of the “invisible man.” The invisible man feels outrage from the lack of recognition respect others display toward him, respect he has a claim to legitimately as a person (1952). However, what he desires is not that others assign him a formal, abstract status. He desires that others recognize his personhood in the deepest possible sense (as an end in himself). For an insightful discussion of Ellison’s character, see Honneth (2001). Thanks to an anonymous *APQ* reviewer for raising this objection.

offering a “gift” so to speak, beyond that of evaluating your offender’s change of heart. As Hieronymi observes: “It now looks as if forgiveness amounts to merely acknowledging the truth of the moral situation: the offender has repented, and the offended must now acknowledge that fact. But why should this acknowledgment be given the lofty title of ‘forgiveness?’” (2001, p. 549).

In answer to this question, Hieronymi draws attention to the limited power of apology. The offender can respond to his misdeed with remorse, and he can present himself to the victim and attempt to restore trust. Yet the meaning of his action, its claim on the victim, continues to have a social nature. It made a statement on the victim, and that statement persists in the space of our public understanding of right and wrong. While the offender can work to distance himself from his past action, his change of heart still needs “ratification” by the victim or by the moral community at large. And that is what forgiveness can offer. As Hieronymi puts it: “If the one offended trusts the sincerity of the offender’s apology, she might now see it within her power to change the significance of the past event by joining forces with the offender. In accepting the apology, the offended in some way ratifies, or makes real, the offender’s change in heart” (2001, p. 550).

But does this meet the agential condition? I fear that Hieronymi has only identified a possible effect of forgiveness, without speaking to its active dimension. This reflects what I take to be a deeper problem with the model of forgiveness Hieronymi assumes, the Report View. If your forgiveness is warranted only after your offender apologizes, then your forgiveness becomes a kind of passive appraisal of his behavior: You forgive him without compromising yourself when you see he has made a commitment to repair relations with you. But then you are merely acknowledging that your need to protest—to highlight his wrongdoing—is no longer necessary. Even if your choice to forgive can have the effect of ratifying his apology, we are still left to wonder how you are active in making the choice itself. So the original worry has not gone away: “forgiveness” seems more like registering the truth of the moral situation and less like an exercise of will. I am still not sure this is deserving of so lofty a title.

There is a simple way to overcome this problem if we think of how you might see your offender separately from his offense. On my account you are active in forgiving when you draw this separation yourself—as I want to say, when you *avow* seeing your offender in a new light. Once we understand forgiveness in this way, meeting the agency condition, we can begin to see how you could forgive your offender in the absence of his reparative activity, meeting the unilateral condition. As a step in this direction, consider why a sincere apology can have a powerful effect. It allows the offender to distance himself from his wrongdoing; it shows that he no longer identifies with his past action. At the same time the apology foregrounds his moral agency; it shows that he has taken responsibility for his misdeed. As a result, it is

easier for you to disassociate him from what he has done to you. You may then feel your resentment is no longer appropriate, not because you have nothing left to protest, but because you can see your offender differently from his misdeed.

My basic point is that you can take up this affective stance independently of what your offender does. By shifting attention to your offender's personhood, you can appreciate those capacities that give him dignity—choice, reflection, autonomy, and with these, the possibility for moral change—and that may have an impact on how you feel toward him. You may feel that his dignity permits a new emotional response, a change in your affective stance, just as you would in acknowledging his repentance or apology. Thus, without needing to register evidence of your offender's repentance or apology (the Report View), I am suggesting you can avow seeing you offender in a better light by viewing him separately from his wrongdoing (the Avowal View). In the case I have in mind, you can avow seeing your offender under the aspect of his humanity, foregrounding the kind of respect you had for him all along.

To be clear, I think all forms of forgiveness require the victim to separate her offender from his wrongdoing. This includes conditional forgiveness as well. Apologies can be powerful, in my view, when they foreground the offender's moral agency, i.e., when they show that he no longer identifies with his past action yet takes responsibility for it all the same. Apologies can be powerful when they do part of the work required for forgiveness to occur, drawing a line, as it were, between the offender and his wrongdoing. But again, the claim I want to defend is that it is possible for a victim to draw this line and make this separation without her offender first having to apologize, repent, or display remorse. It is possible for the victim to foreground her offender's worth as a person and to change her affective stance toward that worth—to forgive him—just as she would if her offender had worked to make amends.

III.

The Avowal View I have presented is similar to a model put forward by Lucy Allais (2008), but there are differences between my account and hers worth highlighting. Allais claims that forgiveness involves changing the way you “affectively view” your offender (2008, p. 51). This allows her to show how you can forgive your offender without revising your judgment of him, the offense, or your standing as a victim. To forgive is to change, not what you believe, but what you feel. One advantage of Allais's account is that it meets the agential and uncompromising conditions in a single step. Forgiveness is the activity of changing your affective view of your offender; and because this view is not a matter of belief to begin with, it is compatible

with thinking that you have suffered personal wrongdoing.¹⁵

Right away, however, we must ask when changing your affective view is warranted. When someone has caused you harm, it is appropriate for you to take offense. You have not been treated with respect, and you have every right to resent this. When you resent your offender, you thereby give him a negative appraisal: based on his actions, you no longer deem him worthy of your trust or friendship. What reason can you then articulate to forgive him? Despite the fact that affective attitudes are not answerable to evidence in the same way that beliefs are, they cannot be formed or rejected arbitrarily. There must be conditions of entitlement that would allow us to say, if only generally, when your emotions are reasonable and when they are not.¹⁶ Forgiveness may be like a gift, as Allais supposes, but not all gift-giving is warranted; not, for example, when it is blind or reckless.

Now Allais is saying that making a negative appraisal of your offender carries practical weight—and I agree. When you no longer deem your offender trustworthy or friendship-worthy you are guiding yourself in light of his actions, treating him in ways you see fitting for his misconduct. “He abused my good will,” you might think, “so I won’t trust him anymore.” Yet the entitlement conditions of forgiveness are far less clear. If your offender repents for the wrong he caused you, he will have made himself an appropriate object of your forgiveness. He will have provided you with sufficient evidence to appraise him differently, and so to change your affective view of him (2008, p. 63). Yet suppose things turn out differently. Suppose he remains in the end unrepentant and unapologetic. On what grounds would you be entitled to forgive him? The problem is that on Allais’s account we seem forced to say forgiveness is warranted only if there is evidence supporting your change of affective view, i.e., evidence of your offender’s reparative activity. We would then have to deny that genuine forgiveness can be unconditional, and this would fall short of the unilateral condition.

Allais works to avoid this outcome in her paper by separating the offender’s actions from his character (2008, p. 60). So far we have been considering the Report View in terms of what the offender does and does not do, what we might call an Ac-

¹⁵ Allais is committed to a form of non-evidentialism about affective attitudes. Roughly, this view states that affective attitudes are (sometimes) epistemically permissible, even when they lack evidential support. For related arguments, see Jones (1996), as well as Preston-Roedder (2013). My commitment to non-evidentialism is stronger than Allais’s, however. For her, your warrant to forgive comes from the limited epistemic access you have to your offender’s character. For me, this warrant comes from your recognition of your offender’s standing, which is non-epistemic to begin with. For an excellent overview of evidentialist and non-evidentialist theories in epistemology, see Chignell (2010).

¹⁶ Allais is not alone in believing that entitlement conditions differ between belief and emotion. See also Roberts (1988; 1995); Feagin (1996); and Goldie (2000).

tion Report View. But Allais draws attention to the fact that people are more than what they do on any specific occasion. What people do is related to their characters, how they are disposed to act in various ways, across different situations. So we can appraise someone's character in normative terms, as praiseworthy or blameworthy. This supports what we might call a Character Report View. By shifting focus to character, Allais wants to show that you can never know for certain whether someone is praiseworthy or blameworthy. You are thus in a position of "epistemic humility": someone's actions do not provide you with sufficient evidence to decide whether he is good or bad *overall* (2008, p. 61).

This is a key move in Allais's argument. She uses epistemic humility to show that you can almost never appraise someone's actions in a way that demands a final judgment of his character. In effect, you can almost never be epistemically mandated or forbidden from forming affective attitudes toward him separately from his actions. Reconstructing this part of Allais's paper, what we might call the Argument from Humility runs accordingly:

- (1) You can almost never have conclusive evidence of another's character.
- (2) Without conclusive evidence, you cannot claim to know another's character, i.e., as praiseworthy or blameworthy.
- (3) Without knowledge of this sort, your affective attitudes cannot be epistemically mandated or forbidden.
- (4) Therefore, changing your affective attitudes cannot be epistemically mandated or forbidden.

From (4), we can take a fifth step:

- (5) Therefore, forswearing resentment toward your offender can never be epistemically forbidden.

In other words, given (1)-(4), there is no epistemic mandate that would make your forgiveness irrational. If correct this would show how forgiveness can be both uncompromising and unilateral.

Unfortunately, the Argument from Humility raises a number of problems. First, premise (3) is undesirably general. It says you cannot be epistemically forbidden from changing affective attitudes toward your offender, because you cannot (for the most part) know his character overall. It follows from this, however, that you cannot be epistemically forbidden from sustaining *negative* affective attitudes toward him. Suppose you decide to resent someone because you judge his character is vicious. Allais's position is now exposed to a reductio. One might say that his overt attempts

to repent and apologize fail to constitute a basis for forgiveness. Such actions do not make his character transparent, and for all you know, his character may be corrupt. Given your ignorance of his true self, are you not equally entitled to think the worst of him?

One could try to avoid this *reductio* on Allais's behalf by saying epistemic humility only favors positive affective attitudes. But this would require a separate argument; for if epistemic humility does not support negative attitudes, why should it favor positive ones? The problem is that under the Character Report View you need to assume your offender is praiseworthy to some degree. You need to assume his character is at least *better* than his actions, given that his actions are reprehensible. On this basis you supposedly have grounds to change the way you feel about him. But how can this feeling be warranted, when you cannot know your offender's true character? This would be a case of wishful thinking, moving from (i) not knowing your offender's character, to (ii) assuming he may be good, to (iii) replacing negative affective attitudes with positive ones. Epistemic humility by itself does not support such optimism.

This draws another problem to the surface. If you realize you are not in a position to make final judgments about your offender's character, it seems more likely that your response will be, not forgiveness, but skepticism. You will perhaps be more ready to forgive, knowing that your offender's character might be better than his actions. But without knowing this, what reason could you have to forego resentment? Here you could waive all assumptions and try to infer the quality of your offender's character from his actions. But this will be rather tricky. Obviously you cannot limit your inference to your offender's single misdeed, for that would give you no reason to think any better of him. You would rather have to work toward a more comprehensive view of his conduct, looking to see if there is enough evidence to support a positive change in the way you view him. Setting aside worries about limited access (your offender's biography may be out of reach), the more obvious problem with this line of thinking is that it risks making all genuine forgiveness conditional.

Relatedly, we now have to stomach the following conclusion: that forgiveness is only warranted for those we can praise on some level, people who have (by our inferences) a good character. Yet it is not clear why good character should be the only object of warranted forgiveness, since this does not capture our intuition that bad people need forgiveness too. On reflection it also fails to capture the sentiments voiced by victims during the TRC hearings which Allais discusses in her paper (2008, p. 66). When Pearl Faku speaks of the police operative who killed her husband during Apartheid, she does not indicate his character is praiseworthy on a level unknown to her. She speaks of wishing him to know that the tears she sheds are for loved ones, and for him as well. Her tears are shed in sorrow, and in forgiveness. "I would like to hold him by the hand," she says, "and show him that there is a

future.” She wants this, we may suppose, not because she thinks he has a good character, but because she thinks there is a possibility for him: the possibility of moral change.

In my view Allais is right to define forgiveness as an activity of changing your affective attitudes. But I think her reliance on epistemic humility can only get her so far.¹⁷ To review my objections, it is not clear why your ignorance of someone’s character should be taken as a reason to think he is better than his actions. In the absence of his repentance or apology, then, it is not clear you can warrant changing your affective stance toward him. Finally, it is not clear why praiseworthy character should be the only object of genuine forgiveness. For if that were true, we would not be able to explain how someone like Pearl Faku could extend forgiveness and hope to her offender, hope that he can change.¹⁸ By shifting appraisal respect from the offender’s actions to his character, Allais has tried to make room for unconditional forgiveness; but it is not clear the Character Report View, as I have called it, can accomplish this.

IV.

Rather than modify the Report View further, my aim in this paper has been to put forward an alternative model of forgiveness. On what I have called the Avowal View, forgiveness involves a commitment to see your offender separately from his offense; and I have suggested one way you can do this is by foregrounding the respect you have for your offender as a person. This model is still a sketch, but even so, there are a few objections one might raise against it. Before concluding, I would like to address two rather serious ones.

¹⁷ One might reply that Allais’s account does not depend on the Argument from Humility, contrary to what I am saying. There are passages where she addresses forgiveness directed to persons (2008, p. 63, and p. 66). For example, she says we can see Pearl Faku changing the way she feels about her offender as a person. “Although he has acted in a way that many would take to justify writing him off as a person, she is able to not write him off as a person; she is able to affectively see him as having a value that his actions indicate him not to have” (2008, p. 66; my emphasis). I am happy to accept this outcome, since it supports my view that respect for persons is central to understanding unconditional forgiveness. However, if this is how things stand, my objection now is that Allais is not sufficiently clear in distinguishing *character* (which is an object of appraisal respect) and *personhood* (which is an object of recognition respect).

¹⁸ In considering the example of Pearl Faku, I do not want to imply that your reason to forgive must come from the thought that, once forgiven, your offender will undergo a change of heart. That would make your reason consequentialist in form. At the same time, we can appreciate the role of hope from a non-consequentialist perspective. Hope in your offender’s capacity for moral change can itself be a form of recognition respect, insofar as the hope is grounded in your regard for your offender as a person. Understood in this way, I see no reason to conclude that hope is incompatible with genuine forgiveness. On this point I disagree with Griswold (2007, p. 121).

Objection 1. The transition from respect to forgiveness is illegitimate. At least one author has tried to build an account of forgiveness by turning to the concept of respect for persons. Margaret Holmgren argues, like I do, that our dignity as persons is not subject to evaluation: it is “not tied to our level of performance on some moral scale, nor does it fluctuate with the character of our choices and attitudes” (1993, p. 449). Yet some have criticized this view by saying that respect for the offender “is by no means incompatible with judging that she has done culpable wrong and holding this against her. On the contrary, it is only if we have this kind of respect for individuals as moral agents that we can judge them to be responsible for culpable wrongdoing in the first place” (Allais 2008, p. 45).

Reply. As I mentioned earlier, this objection would hold if respect for persons only served as a background assumption for negative reactive attitudes. Yet there is another role respect for persons can play in our lives, i.e., when it is made salient or foregrounded. In general, respect is made salient or foregrounded when we choose to focus on the capacities an offender has that give him dignity—capacities that mark him out as a member of the moral community, regardless of his track record up to this point. We foreground our recognition-respect for someone when we make a conscious effort to regard him as a free and reasonable being, capable of—if not always successful in—hearing our demands and respecting our dignity in turn. The reasons a victim may have to make her offender’s dignity salient may be precisely the ones Allais offers at the end of her paper: they may be reasons to view her offender separately from his actions, regarding him in ways untainted by his wrongdoing (2008, p. 67). I think Pearl Faku’s wish to hold her offender by the hand and “show him that there is a future” foregrounds recognition-respect in this way. She makes salient in her offender’s will a capacity that was always there, a capacity for moral change.

Objection 2. The offender’s capacity for moral change is irrelevant for forgiveness. As Eve Garrard and David McNaughton put it, why should the “mere potential for moral change in a wrongdoer provide us with a reason to treat him with the respect and good will appropriate to non-offenders—i.e. forgive him?” (2003, p. 53). When you focus on your offender’s wrongdoing, you needn’t deny his capacity for moral change; but what stands out is the fact that he has put this special capacity to ill use; and *that* thought is more likely to sustain, rather than dissolve, your resentment.

Reply. There are two responses I would like to give here. First, I agree that in some cases your offender’s moral potential may be irrelevant for your choice to forgive.¹⁹ You might cease to identify your offender with his offense by focusing on aspects of his character you find lovable or praiseworthy, or by reflecting on a shared personal history (a friendship, for example). If you can make these positive features

¹⁹ A clear case would be forgiving an offender who has died.

salient in your mind, you may come to see your current disappointment, anger, or resentment as no longer fitting, in contrast to the time when you had, as a victim, only seen your offender in his worst light. My account is open to these possibilities. However, my reason for emphasizing recognition respect is that it allows this shift to occur in cases where, despite your efforts of evaluation, you cannot find a praiseworthy or lovable feature of your offender's character. Such moments may be rare. But when they happen, foregrounding recognition respect for your offender—i.e., making his humanity salient—may be the only thing warranting your forgiveness.²⁰

Garrard & McNaughton seem to miss this by emphasizing the offender's misuse of his moral capacities. Focusing on the misuse would of course make negative attitudes appropriate; but then again, this would be reducing the identity of the wrongdoer to his actions. My point is simply that it is possible for a victim to disassociate this misuse from the capacities themselves, recognizing that her offender has an inherent dignity no matter what he has done.²¹ By foregrounding recognition respect, victims can make their offenders' moral capacities salient by disassociating them from their past misuse. Moreover, recognizing the value those capacities have may be enough for victims to change their affective stance. Viewing the offender under the aspect of his humanity, rather than his offense, may dissolve existing disappointment, anger, or resentment.²²

This brings me to an important point of clarification. I do not mean to say, as Holmgren does, that forgiveness is always mandatory for a victim, even in the absence of her offender's reparative activity. In her view, while a victim may need to go through some inner preparation before she is ready to forgive, the "morally appro-

²⁰ Garrard & McNaughton offer their own defense of unconditional forgiveness in terms of "compassionate solidarity" (2003; 2011). This arises when you can find common ground with your offender, either by recognizing that you would have acted the same way he did if you shared his personal history, or by seeing that his terrible actions reflect a "streak of evil" in your own heart. I worry, however, that compassionate solidarity only supports a *self-oriented* reason to forgive. On Garrard & McNaughton's account, you are more likely to forgive another when you realize that forgiveness is something you need as well. I believe my account is preferable because respect for your offender's personhood supports an *other-oriented* reason to forgive.

²¹ See Govier (1999, p. 71) for a related claim.

²² One might worry that this re-introduces an evidentialist criterion to my model of forgiveness, since I have been speaking of how you can "attend to" or "apprehend" your offender's moral potential. Does this put us back to the Report Review? I do not think so. Remember, the Report View of forgiveness involves finding evidence of your offender's change of heart—in his acts of contrition or repentance, for example—whereas the features expressive of your offender's moral potential are not conditioned by his conduct. Attending to your offender's dignity is a matter of responding to him as a person, separately from his offense; and that does not involve adding or subtracting any beliefs you had about him. Thanks to David Wolfsdorf for pressing me to clarify this issue.

priate attitude to adopt toward any offender is one of unconditional genuine forgiveness” (2012, p. 99). While nobody should ever be pressured to forgive, Holmgren says frankly that forgiveness “is ultimately *not* something that is morally or epistemically variable or optional” (2012, p. 99). But why does a similar conclusion not follow from my account? If we are all due recognition respect—and if the offender retains his worth as a person in spite of the offense and regardless of whether he repents—why is it not mandatory to grant him the affective response he is due as a person, that is, to forgive him?²³

Unconditional forgiveness is not mandatory, on my account, because the only kind of respect you owe your offender is one compatible with an attitude of resentment. As we have seen, respect for your offender’s moral agency serves to warrant a whole range of negative reactive attitudes. My earlier point was that your warrant for resentment is never so strong as to make changing your affective stance compromising, and this clears conceptual room for unconditional forgiveness. To see where my account differs from Holmgren’s, we need to bring the reverse point in view: that your warrant for unconditional forgiveness is never so strong as to make changing your affective stance obligatory. Foregrounding your offender’s humanity opens up the possibility of a new emotional response, one I have suggested you can avow without incurring the charge of irrationality. But to my mind, the fact that you are not required to forgive your offender in the absence of his repentance explains why unconditional forgiveness is something you can elect—a gift you do not have to give, but that you are entitled to give nonetheless.²⁴

V.

Let us return to the challenge I posed at the outset of this paper. Can we present an account of forgiveness that is (1) articulate, (2) uncompromising, (3) agential, and (4) unilateral? One reason for preferring my account is that it meets all four conditions. To sum up: My account is articulate, because foregrounding your offender’s dignity is one reason you may have to overcome resentment—a possibility we miss if we think of respect for persons only as a background assumption for reactive attitudes. My account is uncompromising, because in changing your affective stance you do not have to revise your beliefs about your offender, his wrongdoing,

²³ I am grateful to an anonymous *APQ* reviewer for helping me formulate this question.

²⁴ Let me make two qualifications. First, I am only defending the elective character of unconditional forgiveness. While I do not see a simple formula for deciding when conditional forgiveness should be obligatory, I am not in support of the idea that forgiveness is always the victim’s prerogative, in all situations. Second, depending on how we lay down the criteria, I am open to characterizing unconditional forgiveness as a “supererogatory” choice, but this is a larger topic than I can go into at this time. For further discussion, see Gamlund (2010).

or your standing as a victim. My account is also agential, because it explains why forgiving your offender is something you must avow, as a commitment to see your offender separately from his wrongdoing. Finally, my account is unilateral, because it explains why the offender's reparative activity is not necessary for genuine forgiveness. Rethinking forgiveness under the Avowal View puts us in a position to see all of this.

Granted, the idea of unconditional forgiveness remains difficult to make sense of, and I have only begun to explore the issue here. I suppose we tend to view it as belonging more to the realm of the divine than the human because it seems to require a level of understanding only God could have. Perhaps the source of our skepticism is that nobody has epistemic authority to forgive without conditions. But if forgiveness is not a purely cognitive act by definition, then we needn't assess someone's capacity to forgive in terms of her capacity to know. If forgiveness is a matter of avowal—the choice to view your offender beyond his wrongdoing—then your claim to forgiveness does not necessarily depend on what your offender does. Someone who makes the decision to forgive is not violating epistemic humility. She is not claiming to know something beyond her intellectual reach. She is claiming to have made a decision. And for all we know, she may struggle with that decision still.

Maybe we also view unconditional forgiveness with suspicion because we only imagine it in contexts of atrocity. We think of examples of victims who lived through Apartheid, like Pearl Faku, whose forgiveness we find difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend. But not all examples are like this. Indeed, as Rousseau's example makes clear, unconditional forgiveness can occur on a mundane, everyday level. Rousseau sadly explains that when Grimm became a success in society he soon felt their relationship falling apart, but despite this Rousseau overcame feelings of hurt. "You're neglecting me, Grimm, but I forgive you. When the first intoxication of your brilliant success has worn off and you begin to feel its emptiness, I hope you will come back to me." Often the wrong we suffer does not come with irreparable damage and loss. We simply feel hurt; nothing more, and nothing less. Faced with such a situation, Rousseau's avowal may seem unremarkable, yet I believe it speaks to the nature of forgiveness in a rather direct way. It shows that forgiving someone needn't involve appraising his conduct or character, and so it needn't depend on his efforts to apologize or repent. That is why forgiveness only requires viewing others separately from their actions—and it is why, even after atrocity, forgiving persons is always possible.

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