

# The Endorsement View of Forgiveness

## Abstract

In this paper, I defend what I call the endorsement view of forgiveness. On this view, forgiveness is the victim's endorsement of her lack of negative offender-directed emotions (e.g. resentment) in light of the recognition of the right kind of reason to forgive. This view contrasts with the influential emotion account according to which forgiveness is the victim's moderation of her negative offender-directed emotions (e.g. resentment) for the right kind of reason to forgive. Thus, while the emotion view focuses on emotional change, my view focuses on practically efficacious evaluations of these emotions. Supporting my account, I argue that, of these two views, only the endorsement view can show why victims of an offense are usually able to know whether they are in the position to forgive, and why forgiving entails a commitment not to unforgive.

## 1. Introduction

Valentina and Martin met in Barcelona when they were both 18 years old. It was their senior year of high school. Martin lived in Barcelona as an exchange student. They had been going out for about 6 months when, one night, Valentina got quite drunk and asked Martin to escort her home. Having arrived at her place, Valentina just wanted to go to sleep; but Martin felt like he had the right to sex and started undressing Valentina. She resisted but he kept pursuing her until, finally, he raped her. A week later, Martin left Spain and went back to the United States. For Valentina, the next two years were a time of grave emotional turmoil. At times, she hated Martin for what he had done; other times, she hated and blamed herself; sometimes, she doubted that what had happened was, in fact, rape. "Your boyfriend cannot rape you and, in a way, I led him on." – she thought. For periods of time – the longest of these periods was two months – she felt fine. She didn't think about the assault much and simply went on with her life, but sooner or later her feelings of resentment always caught up with her. When two years after the assault permanent improvement seemed to be out of sight, she sought professional help. Her doctor prescribed medication that really seemed to help. She now felt less affected, less resentful and less shameful. To Valentina's surprise, another year later, Martin reached out to her. He issued the sincerest apology and asked her to forgive him for his offense. Moreover, in his hometown, Martin had founded an organization in support of victims of sexual assault. "Wow, I had no idea. He truly deserves to be forgiven." she then thought. Although she still finds herself being sporadically angry at Martin; and although she still sometimes feels shame and guilt, these emotions are now confined to *episodes*. They don't consume her. They don't take over her life. "You know", she recently told her best friend Anna, "sometimes I'm still so angry at Martin, it can be quite strong, and

most likely, these emotions will never completely subside. But that's okay, when I feel these things I can usually find ways to regulate these emotions down. I think of how much I love my current boyfriend; sometimes even taking a bath helps. Martin has made proper amends and I'm glad that he did. I think I really have forgiven him for what he did, and he deserves that too!"

This depiction of Valentina's path towards forgiveness presents us with a rough approximation to what real-life cases of forgiveness often look like. In fact, this description is an opinionated modification of Elva Thordis' case as described in *South of Forgiveness* (Elva & Tom, 2017). Initial reflection on Valentina's case points to various features of interest in the context of philosophical thought on forgiveness.

First, in Valentina's case, there is a myriad of processes underlying her recovery; e.g. the perception of Martin's change of heart, motivated reasoning, her natural resilience, forgetting, and medication. I assume that such complexities in a victim's journey towards forgiveness are the norm; they are not an exception. Philosophers, however, often assume that forgiving can only happen for a narrow set of specific reasons; most of the features responsible for Valentina's recovery, however, are not amongst those reasons. The first lesson is, thus, that we need to introduce some modifications to the theory that forgiving must happen for very specific reasons.

Second, recovering from a severe offense such as rape, or betrayal may rarely amount to *full* recovery. Residual feelings of anger, shame, and resentment may never fully go away. In theorizing about forgiveness, we should accommodate this feature; i.e. in forgiving we shouldn't be required to overcome all negative emotions. In the pertinent philosophical literature, it is often recognized that forgiveness does not have to overcome all negative emotions in full (e.g. Hughes 1993: 331; Griswold 2007, 41) but rarely is anything said as to *why* overcoming resentment and related emotions need only be partial. In this paper, I shall make an attempt to provide an answer to this question.

Third, as the above-example shows, forgiving is an involved process that often takes many years during which a victim, besides experiencing a range of emotional changes, engages in a lot of *reflection*. In a sense, this idea has been acknowledged in the philosophical literature on forgiveness. Pamela Hieronymi's landmark paper "Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness" argues that forgiving involves a "change in view" (Hieronymi, 2001, 530) on the victim's part whereby the victim comes to see her offender "in a different light". This idea has been re-affirmed many times over (e.g. Griswold

2007, 57; Lucy Allais 2008<sup>1</sup> and more recently by Milam (2018)<sup>2</sup>). Now, although it has been argued that forgiving involves reflecting on the offender's status, philosophers have failed to emphasize the vital importance reflection by the victim *on her own* emotional state has for forgiving. This paper will address this shortcoming too.

Adequately addressing these three points directs us towards a novel account of forgiveness. I will call this account the endorsement view of forgiveness. Here is my preferred formulation of it:

**Endorsement View.** Forgiveness is the victim's endorsement of her lack of negative offender-directed emotions (e.g. resentment) in light of the recognition of the right kind of reason to forgive.

This view contrasts with the standard view of forgiveness which we can give the following formulation:

**Emotion View.** Forgiveness is the victim's moderation of her negative offender-directed emotions (e.g. resentment) for the right kind of reason to forgive.<sup>3</sup>

Before delving into the thick of things, explaining, and defending the endorsement view of forgiveness, let me use this introduction to adopt a more aerial perspective in motivating my project. Theories of forgiveness are sometimes categorized into theories of "forgiveness from the heart" and theories of "performative forgiveness" (e.g. Adams 1991, 294). According to the latter family of views (most recently defended by Warmke 2015), forgiveness is only peripherally related to overcoming negative emotions such as resentment. Rather, forgiveness is seen as a performance and is somewhat akin to debt forgiving (Warmke 2016b). The chasm between these views is gaping and addressing it would go beyond the scope of this paper. For this reason, I will simply screen off performative views of forgiveness for the duration of this paper and act as if forgiveness is something that comes from the heart; something that can be done *privately*. However, those who think that forgiveness can be achieved privately adopt one of two kinds of view. Some argue, on the one hand, that forgiveness consists in the (suitably specified) overcoming of one's negative emotions directed towards the

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<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Lucy Allais writes "the change in feeling my account invokes essentially involves a view of the perpetrator: the change *is* a change in view of the perpetrator, since it is a change in the way you affectively regard *her*, a changed affective view of her as a person" (Allais, 2008, 58).

<sup>2</sup> "Forgiveness are changes in how one views an offender" (Milam 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Versions of this have been defended by Garrard & McNaughton 2002; Hughes, 1993; Griswold, 2007; Richards, 1988; Holmgren, 1993; Hieronymi 2001.

wrongdoer. Philosophers such as Charles Griswold, Paul Hughes, and Pamela Hieronymi are among these philosophers. Alternatively, some philosophers argue that forgiving consists in forswearing certain action-related tendencies such as revenge or punishment. Bishop Butler is probably the most well-known defendant of this position. One way to look at my project is to bring these views together: Forgiving consists in a complex evaluative attitude one takes towards one's emotions; -- the attitude of *endorsement*. This attitude starts with a simple emotion evaluation which then grounds further efforts to either reign in or act in accordance with one's anger and resentment.

In the next section, I will explicate how my view and the emotion view relate forgiveness to resentment. In the course of this discussion, I will address the connection between forgiveness and reflection and we will see why forgiveness is compatible with a limited level of residual resentment. Next, in section three, I will detail the ways in which my view and the emotion view relate to the right reasons to forgive. In section four, I will demonstrate that the endorsement view can give a natural explanation for why forgiving entails a commitment not to go back on one's forgiveness. In section five, I will address the objection that my view unacceptably assimilates forgiveness and reconciliation.

## 2. Forgiveness and resentment

Forgiving, on what I've called the emotion view, is often *identified* with the moderation of one's resentment for the right reasons (e.g. Griswold 2007, 40; Murphy, 2003; Hieronymi, 2001, 545). This is a bold claim and sometimes it is stated more cautiously that forgiveness merely *crucially implicates* (Hughes & Warmke, 2017) such overcoming of resentment; but this is really an understatement. Authors such as Griswold and Murphy think that overcoming resentment is not just a necessary condition for forgiving. Rather it is what forgiveness is *about*. It is its aim.<sup>4</sup> The endorsement view takes issue with this assessment. Although, on this view, forgiving does require moderating resentment, this is a mere consequence of endorsement. Moderating resentment is not what forgiveness is about. Rather, forgiving is about taking an evaluative stance towards one's negative feelings (e.g. resentment) and acting on this evaluation. But let's first describe the emotion view in greater detail.

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<sup>4</sup> Griswold's takes the idea that forgiveness is "letting go of resentment (for the right reasons)" as its definition (Griswold 2007, 40). Similarly, Murphy adopts this idea as a definition of forgiveness (Murphy 2003, 16).

Let's start with the consensus. Forgiveness seeks to overcome a negative offender-directed emotion. Someone who simply registers that she's been wronged without being at all emotionally moved by it does not instantiate that which forgiveness seeks to overcome. Not every negative emotion, however, equals resentment, which is why more needs to be said in adequately specifying resentment. Unfortunately, this is already where consensus ends as various philosophers disagree on how to further specify the nature of resentment.

From here on, let me proceed as follows. First, I'll present some of the features (attitudes and dispositions) that resentment has been alleged to encompass. We'll see that, in the pertinent literature, it is often unclear whether overcoming resentment is intended to mean overcoming a particular feeling, or whether it means giving up these further attitudes and dispositions to act. I will then attempt to resolve some of this confusion arguing that the emotional component of resentment (i.e. anger), and these further attitudes and action dispositions should be kept distinct for an important reason: anger is not necessarily *relationship undermining*, but these further attitudes and disposition are. Next, I will introduce my own account of forgiveness – the endorsement view – according to which forgiving means taking an evaluative stance towards one's anger and, thus, acting to prevent its having relationship-undermining upshot. Forgiving, it will turn out, is not about eradicating a negative emotion. Rather, it is about evaluating and properly containing it. While this section is dedicated to the role resentment plays in theories of forgiveness, we'll talk more about the reasons underlying forgiveness in the next section.

For Pamela Hieronymi (2001), resentment is a kind of protest, that “protests [the offender's] action as a present threat” (Hieronymi 2001, 546). Letting go of resentment is concomitantly characterized as overcoming such protest. Several authors (e.g. Nelkin, 2013; Warmke 2015, 6) have emphasized that these threat-related judgments are not constitutive of resentment. Rather, revising these judgments “typically results in the disappearance of resentment” (Warmke 2015, 6). At times, Hieronymi herself seems to favor this interpretation arguing that continued resentment after the threat has been eliminated would be irrational, not impossible.<sup>5</sup> Thus, we're still left somewhat in the dark as to what resentment consists in. Charles Griswold (2007) argues that resentment is a negative *moral*

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<sup>5</sup> Hieronymi writes: “Once the offender himself renounces the deed, it may no longer stand as a threat to either the public understanding of right and wrong, to his worth, 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. Continued resentment would now constitute mere vindictiveness, betraying a smallness of character or lack of self-esteem, rather than showing an admirable appreciation and defense of genuine goods” (Hieronymi, 2001, 548).

emotion. Giving up resentment, on this picture, entails giving up a host of negative moral emotions such as “moral anger, [...] scorn [and] contempt” (Griswold, 2007, 41). We are, however, left wondering what this moral character consists in. Murphy takes resentment to involve “vindictive passions — the passions of anger, resentment, and even hatred that are often occasioned when one has been deeply wronged by another. These are the passions that often prompt acts of vengeance or revenge, but one can have the passions without acting on them—just as one can feel sexual lust without acting on it” (2005, 16). I think Murphy’s view points in the right direction. First, resentment is a type of anger. Second, it does *prompt* certain behaviors that an agent can decide to act or not act on.

Let me elaborate on this picture of resentment. When analyzing resentment, it can help to view it as a way of blaming others. In the philosophical literature, we can find several accounts of blame, only some of which are relevant in the present context. First, we may be initially tempted to view blame simply as the judgment that what the offender did was wrong. In this sense, of course, forgiveness cannot overcome blame, on pains of keeping justification (i.e. judging that what was done was not wrong after all) and forgiveness distinct. The idea that forgiveness and justification are different is standard (e.g. Warmke, 2015; Murphy, 2005; Zaragoza, 2012; Allais, 2008; Roberts, 1995, 302) and also simply plausible. Justifying a putative offense implies that, really, there is nothing to forgive.

Now, there are two alternative notions of blame which are of closer interest to us. First, there is Tim Scanlon’s notion (Scanlon 2007, part 4) that ties blame to attitudes that bear on the relationship with the offender. On Scanlon’s view, taking someone to be blameworthy amounts to “a judgment that the action shows that person to hold attitudes that impair his or her relationship with others. To blame the person is to hold the attitude towards him or her that this impairment makes appropriate” (Scanlon, 2007, 131). On this account, blaming my friend who humiliated me in front of my colleagues means “revising my expectations and intentions” (Scanlon, 2007, 136) with regard to my friend. This revision might entail a decision not to confide in my friend anymore and not seek his company (Scanlon, 2007, 136). The actions and attitudes that blame is alleged to make appropriate are *relationship undermining*, and will, for the most part, consist in actions and attitudes that signify withdrawal (Wolf, 2011, 335). Blame, so construed, is not necessarily an emotional attitude. As Susan Wolf (2011, 334) points out, an editor could rightly be said to blame you for not turning in corrections in time by simply not offering you a contract on other projects. However, your editor’s behavior may simply express

her cold-hearted calculations. What matters is not the emotion, but the editor's adjustment of her relation to you.

On the other hand, there is what Susan Wolf calls "angry blame" (aka "Italian blame") (Wolf, 2011). Such blaming is emotional by nature and is importantly different from Scanlon's notion in that it is not essentially related to an impairment of relationships. Consider, to use one of Wolf's examples, your child storming out of the house screaming "I HATE YOU, I HATE YOU!". Such anger is often short-lived, and it doesn't need to express a problem in your relationship. It would be misguided to analyze such spouts of anger in terms of relationship impairments. There are several reasons supporting this idea. First, "there is something peculiar about the idea of assessing the quality of relationships in a way that is so moment-to-moment a way" (Wolf, 2011, 336). In a way, evaluating short-term expressions of anger in terms of quality of a relationship may simply be a category mistake. Second, such incidental anger can, at times, be indicative of a *good* relationship. Being angry at a person sometimes shows that this person *matters*. As far as relationships go, few things are worse than indifference. Although anger does not *need to* impair relationships, it certainly tends to have this effect. Angry blame certainly often bleeds into actions and attitudes of withdrawal that impair relationships. In Murphy's (2005, 16) words, anger "prompts" these feelings and attitudes. For this reason, it is hard, for instance, to think of *sustained* anger and resentment towards a person that keeps relationships intact.

The following picture emerges. Resentment is a complex phenomenon consisting in (a.) an angry emotion, and (b.) Scanlonian blame. Angry blame is inherently emotional; Scanlonian blame is not. However, only the latter, not the former, is inherently relationship undermining. Lastly, specific judgments about, say, the offender presenting some sort of threat (as Hieronymi argues) should be seen not as constituents of resentment, but, rather, as reasons to be resentful. Saying this much was necessary to introduce the first part of the endorsement view.

The core of endorsement is an evaluation of the would-be forgiver's angry blame; i.e. a judgment that this emotion is (un)fitting in light of the relevant reasons to forgive.<sup>6</sup> An immediate objection arises. A person who is deeply angry but who cannot seem to get over it despite her better judgment

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<sup>6</sup> This notion can be contrasted with all things considered appropriateness. I might judge that my anger is fitting in light of the fact that you haven't apologized. Hence, anger would be a good fit for these reasons. Nevertheless, I might think that all things considered I shouldn't be angry; maybe because it makes me unhappy. Consult Howard (2018) for a more detailed introduction to fittingness.

simply thinks that she *ought* to forgive. She hasn't thereby forgiven. To see this more clearly, consider the following case:

**Humiliation.** My good friend humiliates me in front of my colleagues. After a long talk with my friend, he later comes to see how bad his action had been. He sees that he betrayed my trust and promises to never do such a thing again. My Christian upbringing has taught me that one should always forgive a repentant offender which is why I subsequently come to judge that I should forgive my friend for the offense. Unfortunately, seeing my colleagues at work serves as a constant reminder for my friend's betrayal. Rather than subside, my resentment towards him seems to get stronger by the day. Frequent resentful thoughts and angry feelings get a hold of me, which is why I withdraw from the friendship altogether.

Of course, I haven't forgiven my friend for his offense. Quite the opposite! For this reason, our characterization of endorsement will need to be much richer to be adequate. On top of coming to judge that anger is inappropriate, this judgment also needs to have practical upshot. Thus, a person who endorses not being angry manages to prevent the tendencies inherent in angry blame to prompt the relationship undermining dispositions and attitudes of Scanlonian blame. She manages to deal with her emotions and contain them, because she thinks she shouldn't have them. She prevents, so to speak, the bad downstream effects that her anger prompts. Consider a variation to **Humiliation** that illustrates what I have in mind:

**Shallow Anger.** My good friend humiliates me in front of my colleagues. After a long talk with my friend, he later comes to see how bad his action had been. He sees that he betrayed my trust and promises to never do such a thing again. In light of my friend's apology I deem my lingering resentment to be inappropriate, so I decide not to make this feeling my own and not let it affect my relationship. Fortunately, at this point, my resentment is confined to well-contained and short-lived episodes.

I think our considered judgment is that, in **Shallow Anger**, I have indeed forgiven my friend. Reflecting on both cases, **Humiliation** and **Shallow Anger**, we should note that our evaluative attitudes and our emotions often compete to control the relationship undermining features of Scanlonian blame. In **Humiliation**, my negative emotions towards my friend are too strong, and they wholly control how I think about and act towards my friend; my evaluation of the situation does little to change that. In **Shallow Anger**, on the other hand, my evaluative judgments take control of further

thoughts and attitudes about my friend. In these cases, when our emotions lose their grip on us, and thus fail to be corrosive, we have forgiven.

Forgiving, on this picture, works much like a dam that prevents water contained in a lake from flowing downstream. The water has a tendency to flow down into the valley and wreak havoc. However, being contained by the dam, the water can be prevented from having these effects. The dam's valves are regulated by a higher-level judgment (so to speak) that only allows water through occasionally, or when deemed appropriate.

Emotion theorists have, of course, recognized that a forgiver need merely *moderate* her resentment.<sup>7</sup> Let me stress, however, that it is somewhat unclear why proponents of the emotion-view are entitled to this conclusion. After all, there is something odd in making the overcoming of resentment forgiveness's *target* while, at the same time, allowing for some level of residual resentment. If forgiveness aims at overcoming resentment, why allow for forgiveness to be compatible with resentment? Why think that forgiveness is achieved before its aim is reached? This oddity has been noted by Griswold (2007, 43): "if resentment *is* moderated to the appropriate level, why aim to forswear it *altogether*? It would seem by definition that the appropriately pitched sentiment is warranted, such that abandoning it altogether – as achieved forgiveness would appear to require – is a vice not a virtue." Griswold's answer is that forgiveness does not end with resentment's moderation; it also implicates a *commitment* to continue its moderation (Griswold, 2007, 43). We'll talk about commitment more extensively in section four. My view is that a commitment of this sort cannot be bare; rather, it should be grounded in an evaluative attitude one takes towards one's resentment. In any case, on the endorsement view, it is quite clear why forgiving merely requires moderation of one's anger. After all, forgiving is not, at bottom, about moderation an emotion per se; rather it is about acting, feeling and thinking based on a judgment about this anger, thereby preventing its corrosive effects.

Let's summarize what has been said so far. Traditionally, forgiving has been associated with some appropriate way of letting go of resentment. However, traditional accounts leave the constituents of resentment somewhat vague, especially in determining the relationship between resentment as a feeling and resentment as a cognitive phenomenon. I've tried to shed some light on this slight disarray distinguishing between (a.) the right reasons to be resentful (e.g. threat-related judgments), (b.) the negative emotion of angry blame, and (c.) downstream effects of angry blame which I called

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<sup>7</sup> E.g. Hughes, 1993; Griswold, 2007, 41; Garrard & McNaughton, 2002.

“Scanlonian blame”. Given these distinctions, I then proceeded to explain that forgiving means, at least in part, evaluating one’s anger and acting on this evaluation. Forgiving means appropriately dealing with one’s emotion, not, at bottom, overcoming it.

### 3. Forgiving for, or in light of, reasons

According to the emotion view, not every way to lose resentment is compatible with forgiveness. A victim who, for instance, simply forgets about the offense and who thereby loses her resentment has not forgiven (e.g. Milam 2018); something more is required. Much philosophical debate on forgiveness can be understood as an attempt to properly constrain this process by giving an account of the reasons for which one can and cannot forgive. Murphy lists five types of reasons to forgive: repentance or change of heart, the fact that the offender meant well, that she has suffered enough, has undergone humiliation, or simply for old times sake (Murphy, 2005, 24). Others have appealed to the offender’s “good intentions” (Murphy and Hampton 1988; Richards 1988), to the elimination of a threat posed by the offender (Hieronymi, 2001), to solidarity (Garrard and McNaughton, 2003, 2010), or the offender’s expression of remorse (Griswold, 2007) (for an excellent summary see Milam (2018)).

In this paper, I will not take sides on this issue<sup>8</sup>. Rather, I’m interested in the role these reasons are thought to play in forgiving. When explicit about the issue, philosophers assume that this role is *causal* in nature; i.e. the recognition of the right reason to forgive must cause the victim to lose her resentment. Hieronymi, for instance, explains that forgiveness is granted only if “an apology *brings about* a change in view or revision in judgement that allows one to forgo resentment” (my italics) (Hieronymi, 2001, 545). Hence, on her view, (the recognition of) certain reasons (e.g. an apology) must cause the agent to change her view, give up “moral protest” and, hence, overcome resentment. Similarly, Griswold affirms that forgiveness is “letting go of resentment *for* moral reasons” (Griswold, 2007, 40); and Murphy suggests that “[f]orgiveness is [...] forswearing resentment *on* moral grounds.[...]”

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<sup>8</sup> Forgiving must happen for specific reasons; reasons that are somehow connected to the wrongdoer and her offense. Thus, a person who decided to forgive “on the basis of a coinflip” seems to not fully grasp what forgiveness is about (Milam, 2018). Furthermore, certain considerations seem to imply that there really is nothing to forgive. If a victim were to lose her resentment because she thought that the alleged offender really couldn’t have known about the harmful consequences of her actions, thereby exculpating her, seems to imply that, on reflection, there is nothing to forgive. Besides such exculpation, philosophers (e.g. Warmke, 2015; Murphy, 2005; Zaragoza, 2012; Allais, 2008; Roberts, 1995, 302; Murphy, 2005, 13) generally recognize that condoning the act – “who am I to blame her?” –, or justifying the act – “what was done wasn’t that bad after all” – equally entail that there is nothing to forgive and are, thus, incompatible with forgiving.

A person who has forgiven has overcome those vindictive attitudes and has overcome them for a morally creditable motive—for example, being moved by repentance on the part of the person by whom one has been wronged” (Murphy, 2003, 13). All these proposals causally connect one’s forswearing resentment to the recognition of the right kind of reasons. Note that this is a very natural picture in the context of emotion accounts. After all, if forgiveness is understood as the overcoming of resentment, one would expect the right reasons to forgive to be those that causally bear on the achievement of this aim.

Now, the endorsement view has it that we should not so much focus on the overcoming of resentment, but, rather, on endorsing its overcoming. Concomitantly, we shouldn’t focus on the fact that one’s negative emotions are overcome for the right reasons, but, rather, that their absence is endorsed for the right reasons. To see the difference, consider a case in which you were wronged and thus harbor grave resentment towards your offender. Luckily your anger quickly subsides naturally until, two weeks later, all your negative emotions have faded entirely. Another week later, the offender shows up and issues a sincere and heartfelt apology. Surely, your negative emotions did not fade *for the right reasons*. When your resentment faded, you didn’t even know about the offender’s remorse. Endorsing your lack of resentment in light of the right reasons to forgive, however, is still a possibility. You can still evaluate your lack of anger to be a good fit in light of the offender’s apology. On the endorsement view, this is what matters for forgiveness which is why only the endorsement view allows for forgiveness at this point.

At the very beginning of this paper, I gave a rather in-detail description of a case in which Valentina, a victim of rape, overcomes her resentment towards Martin, her offender. These are the hard cases of forgiveness in which a victim overcomes her resentment after a long period of struggle and turmoil. It is striking that, in these cases, a victim’s loss of resentment is often the result of a multiplicity of factors such as the desire to feel better, medication, plain forgetting, condoning, exculpating, reappraisal, and, importantly, natural resilience.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Over the past 20 years, cognitive scientists have established that a significant proportion of the population exhibit a staggering degree of emotional resilience. These individuals experience quick emotional recovery after the loss of a loved one. To be precise, the leading researcher on this topic defines emotional resilience as follows: “[T]he ability of adults in otherwise normal circumstances who are exposed to an isolated and potentially highly disruptive event such as the death of a close relation or a violent or life-threatening situation to maintain relatively stable, healthy levels of psychological and physical functioning as well as the capacity for generative experiences and positive emotions” (Bonanno et al., 2005, 20-21).

If philosophers are right in their assessment of adequate reasons to forgive, most of these features underlying Valentina's recovery preclude forgiveness. Taking pills, forgetting, engaging in motivated reasoning, and good old natural resilience are all inappropriate reasons to forgive. Note that this observation is largely theory-independent as virtually *all* theories of forgiveness exclude forgiving for said reason. If forgiveness requires overcoming resentment for a narrow set specific reasons, then many contender cases of forgiveness turn out to be something else on reflection. At least that's a worry.

Occasionally, philosophers have simply embraced this conclusion. Milam (2018), for instance, believes that in forgiving a victim must overcome her resentment based on a perceived change of heart; and since, in many cases, victims overcome their resentment for quite different reasons his position "implies that we forgive less often than we might have thought and that we often let go instead. We forgive only when we change our attitude towards an offender for the right kind of reasons and we will often lack such reasons" (Milam 2018, 8).

Confining forgiveness to a few select cases is a mistake, as it would exclude *paradigm* cases, such as the one set out at the very beginning of this paper. But these are precisely the cases that make us care about forgiveness as an important moral phenomenon.

One strategy to remedy this problem may simply be to argue that a perception of the offender's change of heart simply needs to *contribute* to the victim's overcoming her resentment. It need not be the sole reason. I think this strategy is flawed. First, it is not clear to me whether this solution is as effective as it is intended to be. Surely, not all contributions are equally important, and we should at the very least require that the victim's recognition of the right reason is an important contributor. But there is a much more severe problem in the vicinity. Even if the right reason plays its suitable causal role in a victim's recovery process, victims such as Valentina are not usually in the position to *know* whether this particular consideration was causally efficacious. Since, on the emotion view, forgiveness depends on the causal efficacy of the right considerations, not knowing which considerations were efficacious likewise entails not knowing whether one has forgiven a victim for her offense. Let me elaborate on this point further.

Knowing whether a particular consideration was causally efficacious involves (at least in standard cases<sup>10</sup>) knowing whether one would have felt worse absent the consideration. However, such counterfactuals are chronically hard to assess. Furthermore, 40 years of research in cognitive science have established that people are, quite generally, incredibly unreliable in assessing the mental causes of their mental states.<sup>11</sup> The classic paper that stoked an industry of psychological research on this matter is Nisbett and Wilson (1977) who found that subjects will often misidentify even proximal causes of their mental states. Such misidentification goes two ways. On the one hand, subjects will think that certain reasons were efficacious that really weren't (e.g. the influence of loud noise had on one's rating of a movie); on the other hand, subjects think that certain reasons weren't efficacious that really were (e.g. the influence of a product's shelf position for product quality ratings). In more recent studies, researchers have found that subjects will misidentify reasons for why they judged a face to be (un)attractive (Johansson, 2005); and why they decide to tidy up in the house (Carruthers, 2011, 342).

Many findings in cognitive science are subject to revision, but I shall assume that they are roughly correct. In any case, we should further acknowledge the severity of this problem in paradigm cases of forgiveness. While studies show that subjects are unreliable in identifying even immediate causes of their mental states in closely circumscribed contexts, Valentina's recovery process takes several years during which she undergoes a whole range of hard-to-identify psychological processes. It is plainly unrealistic to suppose that she'd be in a position to know which of these had a robust causal effect on her emotional life.

I take it that this problem demands a solution. Although not strictly speaking incoherent, it is highly implausible to maintain that people aren't usually in a position to know whether they can forgive. There are two ways out of this problem. First, we could broaden the range of admissible reasons to forgive. But this idea is a non-starter. After all, forgetting, condoning, exculpating and cognate phenomena are simply different from forgiving. Second, we could loosen the alleged connection between the right reasons and one's overcoming of resentment. This is exactly what the endorsement view suggests. Forgiving, on the endorsement view, means evaluating one's lack of resentment *in light of* the right reasons. On this view, we get the best of both worlds. The process by which resentment

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<sup>10</sup> Non-standard cases might involve causal preemption and over-determination.

<sup>11</sup> Goldman (2006, 233) nicely sums up the consensus asserting that "[n]o careful privileged-access theorist should claim that people have introspective access to the causes of their behavior, in fact, it seems adequate to call it philosophical orthodoxy."

is allowed to subside is entirely unconstrained, yet we still can make sense of the idea that forgiveness may only be done for certain reasons. Reconsider Valentina's case and imagine that eight years after the offense, she does not feel resentful towards Martin anymore. She may not know what made her feel this way. Maybe it was Martin's apology, maybe it was resilience or the doctor's pills. However, she may still judge that her present emotional state is a good fit given that Martin showed adequate signs of repentance. So it can still be true (and she can know that it is true) that she has forgiven him.

#### 4. Forgiveness and commitment

There is an increasing consensus that true forgiveness requires that resentment, once gone, stay gone. Forgivers must commit to its continued absence (e.g. Griswold, 2007, 42; Garrard and McNaughton, 2010, 90; Warmke, 2016; Scarre, 2016). Griswold emphasizes this in a poignant passage:

Forgiveness requires that resentment for the relevant injury be appropriately moderated *and* that the agent make a further commitment to work toward a frame of mind in which even that resentment is let go. Forswearing the emotion is indeed the ultimate goal. (Griswold's italics)

The impetus to tying forgiveness to some form of commitment is plainly right, I think. There are several ways to account for it. As I understand it, performative accounts of forgiveness – accounts explicating forgiveness in terms of overt speech acts – are appealing, at least in part, because of the ease with which they accommodate these facts about commitment (e.g. Warmke, 2016). That said, at the beginning I've indicated that I wouldn't engage with this part of the literature, and I shall keep it this way. Warmke, however, also points out that there is “no way of linking my overcoming of resentment to the inappropriateness of, say, asking for apologies or engaging in other forms overt blame” (Warmke, 2016, 692). Griswold's strategy to simply *add* such a commitment criterion to his particular brand of the emotion view feels *ad hoc*. Thus, it feels more like an expression of (partial) defeat rather than a true solution.

Let me be a bit more explicit about why I think simply adding commitment as a requirement to the theory is a subpar solution. First, and most obviously, it fails to explain how moderation and commitment hang together and it detracts from the idea that forgiveness is a somewhat unified phenomenon. It does nothing, to use Warmke's expression, to *link* the two. Second, commitments to maintain certain attitudes are regularly grounded in more basic attitudinal facts. We wouldn't, for instance, think of the commitment to another person in the context of romantic love as bare. Instead,

a commitment to another person seems to be grounded in and explained by our love for this person. Similarly, we would expect that the commitment not to go back to a resentful state of mind should be grounded in some kind of evaluative outlook. Third, and most importantly, simply adding commitment as criterion fails to account for the limits of such commitment. Let me explain.

In a recent article, Geoffrey Scarre (2015) has described in detail the extent to which going back on forgiveness is (im)permissible. His verdict is clear: In paradigm cases, one cannot go back on forgiveness. Imagine the case in which “James loaned money to Mike, who also misused his loan but afterwards was sincerely sorry, apologizes and asks James to forgive him. [...] Suppose now that James grants Mike the forgiveness he requests. Could James later change his mind and go back on that forgiveness?” (Scarre, 2015, 932) Scarre answers this question with a resounding (and plausible) no. “Not taking back one’s forgiveness is a necessary condition for forgiving” (Scarre, 2015, 933f).

In a thoughtful discussion, Scarre then details the limits to the impermissibility of unforgiving. Sometimes going back on forgiveness is okay. There are two types of cases, only one of which will be of interest to us. Sometimes we take back forgiveness because we realize that the offender’s apology was insincere (Scarre, 2015, 931). The fact that forgiveness can be withdrawn in these cases is unsurprising, because, after all, forgiveness depends on the recognition of the right kinds of reasons. Insincere apologies are not among those reasons. However, secondly, and more interestingly, sometimes it is permissible to withdraw forgiveness although the offender has sincerely apologized. Consider Scarre’s central example:

**Second Thoughts.** Miles, a tolerant and easy-going person, frequently finds himself the butt of Jules’ somewhat warped sense of humor. When Miles is about to drive to the airport to catch a plane to take him to an important meeting, Jules mischievously removes a vital part from Miles’s car, causing him to miss his flight. When a laughing Jules later presents the missing part to Miles, Miles is very angry. But Jules replies that he is sorry for what he did – he did not realize the meeting mattered so much to Miles and, besides, it was just a bit of fun, not an act of malice. ‘Surely you can take a joke,’ he says to Miles; and Miles is persuaded that he both can and should. He therefore forgives Jules, adding that he hopes that he will desist from playing similar tricks in future. Later, in a cool hour, Miles reflects again on Jules’ joke and his response to it. He now considers that he has let Jules off too lightly. Jules’ ‘bit of fun’ was actually a mean and unfriendly trick and one that, despite his protestations, smacked of malice. Even if Jules was sorry for his act, his sorrow, Miles considers, could be no deeper than his own estimate of his ‘offence’ as a possibly ill-judged joke. [...] [H]e may nevertheless no longer forgive Jules. He withdraws his forgiveness because he judges that his earlier graciousness to Jules was ill-deserved. Unless Jules, too, reconsiders his ‘joke’ and comes to Miles with a more adequate apology and

acknowledgement of his fault, then Miles may continue to judge him unworthy of forgiveness.

Forgiveness can be taken back when it was granted (privately or openly) before the victim “has fully thought the situation through” and it “can be cancelled or withdrawn where the offended party considers that it has been given by mistake” (Scarre, 2015, 940). But why may we cancel forgiveness in these cases? Scarre doesn’t offer a compelling explanation. At times, he intimates, much like Griswold, that we should simply add relevant facts about commitment to our theory of forgiveness. “[F]orgiveness involves a replacement of moral indignation by good will and a firm commitment to move on from an offence and to put the past behind” (Scarre, 2015, 933). More substantively, he points out that forgiving involves “ceas[ing] to dwell on” certain memories (Scarre, 2015, 935), and that “to forgive is to transcend the past and move out of its shadow, determining to make a fresh start” (Scarre, 2015, 935). Scarre, however, does not provide an analysis of *transcendence*. Furthermore, it seems to me that speak of transcending the past doesn’t capture what we’re after, because it does not respect the main upshot of Scarre’s discussion: At times, going back on forgiveness is okay. Transcendence, however, is final if anything is.

The endorsement view can help understand why forgiveness entails commitment and why, in cases such as **Second Thoughts**, one may go back on it. A person who forgives, judges that not feeling anger and resentment is a good fit, which is why she will contain her resentment so as to not undermine her relationship with the offender. Thus, her evaluation that anger is out of place directly grounds a commitment not to let her anger resurface. Deeming a particular emotion to be inappropriate while making no efforts to contain it seems plainly irrational. Moreover, the endorsement view shows why we may, at times, go back on forgiveness. In **Second Thoughts**, Miles goes back on his forgiveness because he thinks it was inappropriately given; forgiving wasn’t a good fit after all. Unforgiving is permissible when we make the relevant evaluative adjustments; this seems unsurprising if forgiving *consists* in such evaluative judgments. Thus, the relevant facts about commitment are nicely explained by the endorsement view: Forgiving entails commitment because it consists in an evaluative stance. This commitment, however, is limited insofar as it depends on the relevant evaluations being upheld.

## 5. Forgiveness and reconciliation

Forgiving, I have argued throughout this paper, consists in taking a stance towards one's emotions. This stance I have called *endorsement*. In section two, we distinguished two types of blaming attitudes, angry blame and Scanlonian blame, and we said that only the latter has relationship-undermining properties and that the former undermines relationships only if allowed to bleed into Scanlonian blame. Endorsing not being angry, in our sense, was then said to consist in a negative evaluation of one's anger and in one's successful effort not to let angry blame undermine one's relationship with the offender. A natural objection to this view is that this position illegitimately blurs the distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation. Reconciliation means something like "restoring the relationship to where it was before the offense", or maybe "undo the effects of the offense". Thus, since the endorsement view is, at its heart, about preventing anger from having relationship-undermining effects, it does seem that forgiveness must, where possible<sup>12</sup>, lead to reconciliation. Unfortunately, the worries goes, forgiveness does not automatically achieve reconciliation as Griswold (2007, 111) tells us:

[T]here is no reason to think that forgiveness *must* lead to "affirmative reconciliation" as one might call it. Such an outcome might be neither warranted nor desirable. For example, one could forgive one's partner for infidelity but no longer wish to remain together as a couple; forgiveness does not necessarily restore the love that was destroyed by infidelity, even if it does restore a certain level of mutual respect, and dissipate resentment and guilt.  
(Griswold's italics)

I think we should simply dig our heels in and insist that forgiveness must often lead to reconciliation. Suppose, for instance, that my friend humiliates me in front of my colleagues, but later comes to see that what he did was wrong. He apologizes, and I forgive him. Suppose all this happens within the span of a week. Suppose, however, that at the end of this week I tell my friend that I forgive him and thereby regain respect for him but that, unfortunately, the friendship has been irrevocably damaged and must therefore end.

Whatever has happened between me and my friend, it isn't forgiveness. Quite the opposite, by ending the friendship for good, it seems that I treat his offense as *unforgivable*. In these cases, it seems, forgiveness must lead to reconciliation. In other cases, however, it doesn't, but this has nothing to do with deep facts about forgiveness. Reconsider the case presented at the very beginning of this paper. Valentina embarks on a long journey to overcome her resentment against Martin who had raped her.

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<sup>12</sup> In some cases (e.g. forgiving the dead) reconciliation is strictly impossible. In such cases, forgiving does not need to amount to reconciliation of course.

At the time of the incident, Valentina and Martin had been a couple. Now, years later, Valentina has a new life. Of course, in forgiving she doesn't need to dial back the clock, leave her current boyfriend, move back to Barcelona, and go back to her old life. Forgiveness does not require reestablishing a previous relationship at all costs. Similar considerations hold for the humiliation case. Suppose you humiliate me in front my colleagues. In response to your offense, I distance myself from you and find new friends. When I finally come to forgive you, I don't have to leave my new-found circle of friends to reestablish my bonds with you. Our lives have changed, and our friendship has permanently ended.

## Conclusion

Let me end this paper on a more exploratory note. To the extent that emotions are said to be reasonable, they may seem to reflect who we are and what we care about. My being furious at the thief who stole my bike says something about how much I loved my bike and about how I see myself as bike-person. This is what Peter Goldie means when he says that emotions “are embedded in and interweaving with the rest of the person’s emotional life and other aspects of his mood and character” (Goldie, 2000, 16). In this sense, in responding to the right reasons, emotions may reflect who we are; and to the extent that our emotions are transparent to us, they tell us about who we are.

All this assumes, of course, that our emotional lives are mostly transparent to us. In some cases, such as the bike case, this is a reasonable assumption. I'm angry at the bike thief because I am and think of myself as a bike person. However, many of our most intimate emotions such as love, disdain, and resentment are less occurrent, are less direct responses to proximal causes, and are, thus, much less transparent. In these cases, the reasons why we feel emotions, and the reasons why we appraise these emotions may be very different.

The present paper is driven by the conviction that people don't generally know why their resentment towards an offender has faded but that these people can still forgive by appraising their emotions and acting on such appraisal. This process I have called *endorsement*. Future research will have to show whether discussions of reasons for love or hate should take a similar shape; i.e. whether reasons for love or hate should similarly be cast as reasons to endorse these feelings.

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