Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a new dimension of moral responsibility theorising. Unlike freedom and determinism, a philosopher might reasonably fail to consider how her theory of responsibility bears on her theory of forgiveness (and vice versa). The responsibility and forgiveness literatures have only recently begun to influence one another in a significant way—a surprisingly late convergence given the influence on the responsibility literature of P.F. Strawson's "Freedom and Resentment" (1962) and the influence on the forgiveness literature of Jeffrie Murphy's "Forgiveness and Resentment" (1982), itself inspired by Strawson.

My aim in this chapter is to explore the connection between forgiveness and responsibility. One could describe the landscape of the forgiveness debate in any number of ways: by subject (e.g. victim-, self-, third party, and institutional forgiveness), by discipline (e.g., philosophy, theology, social psychology, and psychiatry), by comparison with cognate phenomena (e.g. excuse, justification, mercy, and letting go), by its manifestation (e.g. private or communicated), or in some other way.[1] My approach is to introduce a common model of forgiveness and some recent challenges to it, each of which highlights potential connections between forgiveness and responsibility.

This chapter has four parts. Section 1 presents some examples of forgiveness and draws attention both to their common features and to the diversity of our experiences of forgiving. Section 2 introduces the Standard View of forgiveness and explains its popularity and plausibility. According to this view forgiveness requires that the forgiver overcome her blame toward the offender in response to the offender's subsequent attitudes and actions. Section 3 considers objections to the Standard View and shows how they support a competing conception of forgiveness. Section 4 explores the implications of different conceptions of forgiveness, in particular how each view understands the limits of forgiveness.

Section 1: Examples

An adequate account of forgiveness will capture the phenomenon as we experience it. This should include not only paradigmatic cases, but also less familiar examples that are nonetheless recognisable as forgiveness. While disagreement about some cases is probably inevitable, we must accept that theorising about the nature and ethics of forgiveness—understanding what it is, what it does, and when to do it—requires working from examples. With that in mind, we can begin by considering three cases.

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[1] See Hughes and Warmke (2017) for one such introduction.

Joke. One night at a party, Jesse overhears an acquaintance, Roy, tell what sounds like a racist joke about latinos and is offended and angry with him. Roy notices Jesse's reaction to his joke and recognises that he's acted badly. He is ashamed and, later in the night, he finds Jesse and apologises to him for telling the hurtful joke. Jesse is relieved that Roy realised that the joke was inappropriate and happy that he cared enough to talk to him about it. He forgives him and, despite some awkwardness, they continue to get along well in the future.

Test. Andrea and Kelly are taking their graduate school entrance exams. During the test Andrea notices that Kelly is using her smart phone to cheat. Andrea is upset about this—the unfair advantage, the dishonesty, the implicit arrogance—especially when she learns that, as a result of their scores, Kelly will be preferred for admission to a prestigious graduate program to which both have applied. Andrea does not confront Kelly, but complains to mutual friends about the incident. When they tell Kelly and she reflects on her behaviour, Kelly, to her credit, realises its significance and tries to make things right as best she can. Andrea is still annoyed, but she acknowledges Kelly's remorse, and after a few weeks she decides to forgive. While they never talk about the test, both recognise that their conflict has been resolved.

Infidelity. David cheats on his partner, Donna. At first he thinks it's no big deal, but he begins to feel more and more ashamed of his behaviour and guilty about betraying her trust. David recognises what his remorse is telling him and he recommits himself, in his own mind, to being a faithful partner. Shortly thereafter he admits to Donna what he did, apologises to her, and assures her that it won't happen again, explaining how guilty and ashamed he feels and how much he values their relationship. Donna is understandably upset and, at first, does not know what to do. Eventually though she comes to believe that David is sincere in his remorse and apology, that he is trustworthy, and that they can still have a healthy and fulfilling relationship together. Donna overcomes her blame and tells David that she forgives him.

These cases illustrate the structure of our forgiveness practice. There are a number of similarities, but also important differences between them. Some factors seem essential to forgiving (e.g. a perceived offence), while others are common but unnecessary (e.g. an apology). Some features are absent from these cases: unrepentant wrongdoers, inappropriate forgiving, non-victim forgiveness—though they could be written in. Nonetheless, while different accounts inevitably disagree about which features are essential and which are not, few would reject these cases as examples of forgiveness.

In addition to capturing our diverse experiences of forgiving, a theory of forgiveness aims to give a coherent and psychologically plausible account that explains its role in our shared moral lives and is compatible with a plausible ethics of forgiving. Along with its intuitive fit, we assess the adequacy of any given theory according to these criteria.

Section 2: The Standard View

It is natural to think of forgiveness as a change of attitude. This thought is supported by paradigm cases of forgiving and by a simple but compelling line of reasoning. It is not enough simply to speak the words, "I forgive you." Such a statement—or an equivalent gesture, performance, or other behaviour—is consistent with an entirely unforgiving attitude. One might misunderstand one's own attitude toward the offender or say the words in order to manipulate others' perceptions. Even if such mistakes and subterfuge are rare, the reality of such scenarios suggests that forgiveness requires an internal change.

Call this the *Standard View* and its central claim—that forgiveness requires that the forgiver overcome her blame toward the offender in response to the offender's subsequent attitudes and actions—the *Change Condition*. This is the position developed by Butler (1749/1900), resurrected by Strawson (1962), refined by Murphy (1982), and defended in a variety of forms in much of the philosophical literature on forgiveness (Kolnai 1973, Hampton 1988, Calhoun 1992, Hieronymi 2001, Griswold 2007, Allais 2008, Garrard and McNaughton 2010, Pettigrove 2012).[2] The ongoing debate about the nature of forgiveness can reasonably be characterised as a series of refinements, revisions, and rejections of this view.

The Standard View is compelling, in part, because it describes a recognisable practice. It paints a familiar picture of what forgiveness is and how it works, the structure of which is distilled from examples like those presented above. But it is more than a familiar picture. The dominance of this position in the philosophical literature rests on the fact that the Change Condition hangs together with—supports and is supported by—other claims that tie forgiveness into our broader responsibility practice. Together, they provide a coherent, unified, and psychologically plausible picture of the phenomenon.

We can start by identifying the object of forgiveness. The forgiver forgives the offender for her offence—i.e. her blameworthy behaviour or the character it reveals. This is the only possible object. In order to forgive, the victim must view the offender's behaviour or character as blameworthy. Call this the *Blameworthiness Condition*. This condition is motivated by the absurdity of denying its component claims.

First, there must be something to forgive. The forgiver must view the relevant misconduct as an offence (Downie 1965, Kolnai 1973, Horsbrugh 1974, Murphy 1982, Hieronymi 2001, Bash

[2] Most scholars now agree that Butler's view does not require that the forgiver cease blaming entirely (Newberry 2001, Garcia 2011). However, he can reasonably be considered the source of this view, even if his intellectual descendants misunderstood his position.

2007, Zaibert 2009).[3] One cannot forgive another for unobjectionable behaviour; nor can one forgive behaviour viewed as harmful but permissible. Suppose that Andrea is applying to the same university as Brandon and that, as a result, he is less likely to be accepted. Brandon is unhappy that Andrea is hurting his chances of admission, but he also believes that her decision is reasonable and permissible. As such, forgiveness is not an option for Brandon. Andrea is not a proper candidate for forgiveness any more than a justified lawbreaker is a proper candidate for a pardon (rather than an acquittal). The forgiver must also continue to view the behaviour as an offence (Hieronymi 2001). If Andrea comes to believe that Kelly was permitted to use her phone during their test because she has a learning disability and requires extra help, then she cannot forgive her. Even if she ceases blaming her, what she does is justify her conduct, not forgive (Murphy 1988, 20).

Moreover, forgiveness depends on the perceptions and values of the would-be forgiver rather than the reality of the situation (Adams 1991). One cannot forgive a person one believes to be innocent, even if they are guilty (Novitz 1998); nor can one forgive an action one doesn't take to be wrong. For example, Valerie cannot forgive Donna for having premarital sex if she believes that doing so is entirely appropriate, but Donna can forgive herself if she believes that she ought to have abstained. To see why this is so, consider the alternative. If forgiveness required actual wrongdoing, then agents with false moral beliefs would be unable to forgive perceived transgressions—e.g. Jesse's grandmother could not have forgiven him for marrying someone from another religion. But such agents are doing something so nearly identical to what we call forgiveness that it seems implausible to exclude it from the category.

Now, this requirement can be understood in different ways, so that forgiveness is a wider or narrower phenomenon. As with blame, the object of forgiveness is usually taken to be wrongdoing, whether actions or omissions, but one can arguably also forgive others' wrongbeing —e.g. vices like inconsiderateness (Bell 2008, Pettigrove 2012). Others might defend an even wider category, arguing that one can forgive morally permissible but socially proscribed actions of various sorts—e.g. suberogatory actions (Driver 1992), violations of non-obligatory basic decency (Calhoun 2004), or morally permissible moral mistakes (Harman 2016). For example, Brandon may forgive Brenda for refusing to donate a kidney to him even if he believes she wasn't obligated to do it. Similarly, if telling offensive jokes is tasteless but permissible, Jesse might nonetheless forgive Roy for doing so. A still more inclusive conception might even allow for non-moral forgiveness as the complement to non-moral blame (Björnsson 2017, 143). If we can blame a reasoner for their sloppy inferences, perhaps we can also forgive such failures.

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[3] Espen Gamlund appears to deny this and argues that one can forgive both justified and excused conduct. However, even in his cases, one cannot forgive behaviour one believes to be justified, only behaviour for which one reasonably rejects a justification that is, in fact, adequate (2011, 112-115).

Second, the forgiver must view the offender as having been morally responsible for the offence (Kolnai 1973, Murphy 1982, Calhoun 1992, Hieronymi 2001, Murphy 2003, Griswold 2007, Allais 2008, Warmke 2015 and 2016a).[4] One cannot forgive an offence that one believes resulted from non-culpable ignorance, inability, or lack of opportunity. For example, Valerie should visit her friends, but she is not a candidate for forgiveness if she didn't know they were in town, was too sick to travel, or couldn't afford the trip. And, as with offence, forgiveness requires perceived rather than actual responsibility. If Brandon and Brenda believe that Valerie chooses to go skiing each year rather than visit them, then they can forgive her despite the fact that she wasn't actually able to come. Their decision to forgive is based on a misunderstanding, but it's forgiveness nonetheless. Finally, as with wrongdoing, we sometimes realise that a purported instance of culpable wrongdoing was not actually the offender's fault. Such realisations usually prompt a change of attitude toward the offender—e.g. we stop blaming them—but relinquishing blame for this reason is to excuse, not forgive (Murphy 1988, 20).

There is nearly unanimous agreement that, in order to forgive, one must continue to view the offender as having been responsible for their offence. However, if responsibility skepticism is true and no one is responsible for any of their behaviour (Pereboom 2001, Rosen 2004, Levy 2011), then this condition would seem to make (non-deluded) forgiveness impossible. One can respond to this possibility in two ways. The first is to accept the conclusion as a radical implication of a radical theory. The second is to argue that forgiveness doesn't require the kind of responsibility that is threatened by the skeptical arguments (Pereboom 2001).

The Blameworthiness Condition is plausible, but not sufficient. According to the Standard View, forgiving is not just forming an attitude about the offence or offender; it is a change of attitude. Thus, an adequate account of forgiveness must identify what it is a change from. If forgiveness is a positive change of attitude, and we normally have positive attitudes toward others, then it must be preceded by a negative change of attitude about the same object, namely, the offence. The Standard View holds that the relevant negative attitude is blame and that the relevant change is overcoming blame. This is what we see when we reflect on our experiences and attempt to distill an account of forgiveness from real and imagined cases, like those discussed so far. In order to forgive, a victim must first have blamed the offender for her offence. Call this the *Blame Condition*.

It is not enough to view the offender as having culpably done wrong. One must hold the wrongdoing against the offender (Nelkin 2017). For example, suppose Brenda is a vegan and believes that it is blameworthy to eat eggs and dairy products, but that it is easy and nice to eat

[4] This condition is widely accepted in the empirical literature on forgiveness, too (Karremans et al 2003), though empirical studies often fail to operationalise the distinction successfully (Struthers et al 2008, Fehr et al 2010, Pronk et al 2010).

cheese while vacationing in Paris. If, during her trip, she indulges in custards, croissants, and cheese, never caring that she's acting contrary to her moral commitment, it seems impossible for her to forgive herself. Only if, back in London, she reflects on these luxurious days and regrets her decisions does it seem possible for her to forgive herself. The same can be said of Andrea's response to Kelly's cheating and Jesse's reaction to Roy's joke. The best explanation of our judgments in such cases is that blame—understood here as holding the offence against the offender—is a precondition on forgiving.

The Blame Condition also allows for different formulations. Different accounts have identified the necessary response to offence as resentment (Murphy 1982, Hieronymi 2001, Walker 2006, Griswold 2007), as any retributive attitude (Kolnai 1973), or as any negative reactive attitude or hard feeling generally (Richards 1988, Hampton 1988, Murphy 1998, Allais 2008, Pettigrove 2012, Bell 2013, Blustein 2014). However, while they require different initial responses, all seem to require blame of some sort. Moreover, in addition to disagreeing about the form blame must take—e.g. resentment or any hard feeling—proponents of the Standard View can also disagree about what blame is, such that forgiveness might be understood as overcoming a feeling (Murphy 1982), judging the situation differently (Hieronymi 2001), changing how one view's the offender (Hampton 1988, Allais 2008), or simply ceasing to hold the offence against the offender (Warmke 2011).

For example, a more restrictive view might hold that forgiveness is a personal practice, rather than one concerned with broader impersonal morality, and that one can only forgive actions that one takes personally. Thus, even if Brandon blames the politicians who propose to slash the foreign aid budget, he cannot forgive them unless he takes their indifference personally. However, a less restrictive view might deny this and suggest instead that it is no less plausible that one can forgive than that one can blame in such a case. However, while these disagreements about how precisely to formulate the Blame Condition suggest a wide range of conceptions, all seem to accept that in order to forgive one must hold the offence against the offender. Whether we think of this as blaming or as a particular kind of blaming is a matter of refining the view.

The Standard View, as I have described it, gives a compelling account of the nature and function of forgiveness—what it is and what it does. The picture of forgiveness as overcoming blame at apparent culpable wrongdoing is conceptually coherent, psychologically plausible, and true to our experience of what forgiving and being forgiven is like. It also explains common sense distinctions that we deploy in our moral dealings with one another. For example, it distinguishes cognate phenomena like excuse and justification that resemble forgiveness in their nature, function, or consequences by explaining that one can cease to blame an offender for different

reasons. One may judge an action not to be wrongful or an offence not to be culpable.[5] The consequences may be the same in each case (overcoming blame) and the different practices may have the same function (resolving moral conflicts), but they are nonetheless distinct.

It also allows us to explain the role of forgiveness in our broader responsibility practice. Forgiveness is understood by reference to blame. Blame and forgiveness are conceived of as complementary practices, with forgiveness as a way of overcoming blame. It is part of the repertoire of practices—including blame, apology, and reconciliation—by which we work through the moral conflicts that inevitably arise between individuals. We can conceive of our responsibility practice in different ways, but a useful model is Michael McKenna's account of holding responsible as a conversation (2012, 89):

- Moral contribution: X commits an offence O against Y (e.g. Roy tells a racist joke that hurts and offends Jesse)
- Moral address: Y responds to X about O (e.g. Jesse blames Roy for telling the joke)
- Moral account: X gives an account of the offence (e.g. Roy apologises to Jesse)
- Moral response: Y responds to X's account (e.g. Jesse forgives Roy)

The practice may go smoothly or not. In a best case scenario, it proceeds as above. However, sometimes Jesse's blame may make Roy defensive or Jesse may reject Roy's apology as insincere. In such cases reconciliation may be partial or not occur at all. Whichever account of our responsibility practice we prefer, the conversation model shows how the Standard View understands the function of forgiveness as one element of a larger practice. On this view, a forgiver is engaging in one part of a practice of holding responsible that includes (or is partially constituted by) blame, apology, forgiveness, and other responses to the attitudes and actions of seemingly responsible agents.

Finally, the Standard View is consistent with a range of claims about the ethics of forgiveness. Typically, it does not settle moral claims in virtue of the nature or function of forgiveness. It leaves open whether and when forgiveness is good, right, or virtuous, whether the would-be forgiver's standing can render forgiveness inappropriate (Pettigrove 2009), and whether it is by its nature elective (Allais 2013, Milam 2018b). This wide compatibility—leaving the ethics of forgiveness to normative ethics—is another virtue of the Standard View.

Section 3: Revision and Rejection

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[5] The Standard View is also consistent with distinguishing forgiving from letting go, whereby one overcomes blame but for reasons that seem inconsistent with forgiving—e.g. in order to achieve cardiovascular benefits. Many philosophers recognise the distinction between forgiving and other ways of overcoming blame toward a culpable wrongdoer. See Milam (2018a) for an account that distinguishes the forgiving and letting go in terms of one's reasons for overcoming blame.

I wouldn't call this the Standard View if there weren't opponents. In this section, I introduce some objections and explain their motivation. These objections suggest that the Standard View is too exclusive and target either the Blame Condition or the Change Condition.

Section 3.1: Forgiveness without Blame

One might reject the Standard View as an overly narrow account of the nature of forgiveness. Contrary to the Blame Condition, one could argue that, while the forgiver must have a positive change of attitude, they need never blame in the first place, so the required change may be something other than overcoming blame. David might admit to Donna that he was unfaithful, apologise, and show genuine remorse. In response Donna might immediately forgive him without having ever blamed him.[6] The same is true if one can forgive preemptively. For example, suppose Susan has injured herself while skiing and that she and Brandon need help if she is going to get down the mountain. Brandon can still ski, but Susan doesn't want him to leave her alone. Nonetheless, she might say to him, "I forgive you if you decide to leave in order to find help." If we accept this as genuine forgiveness, Susan preemptively forgives Brandon and does so without ever blaming him (Cornell 2017). In both cases, the forgiver has a change of heart but does not cease to blame. Instead, David's apology and Susan's acceptance of Brandon's likely decision inhibit Donna and Susan's respective dispositions to blame.[7] The defender of the Standard View must either accept that Donna and Susan cannot forgive in this scenario or argue that, in those cases where they seem to forgive, they actually do blame in some sense.

Section 3.2: Forgiveness without Ceasing to Blame

Alternatively, one might contend that the Change Condition excludes recognisable cases of forgiveness. In particular, one might think that, if forgiveness is voluntary and elective, then one can forgive even if one hasn't yet overcome one's blame. Whether one rejects the Blame Condition or the Change Condition, these objections must be accompanied by an alternative account of what

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[6] Thanks to Karl Martin Adam for this suggestion.

[7] This argument applies equally well to affective, cognitive, and conative accounts of the nature of blame (Coates and Tognazzini 2012). Whether blame entails an emotional response, a change of judgment, or a change in how one behaves or is disposed to behave toward the offender, the claim is that one need not blame in order to forgive. If this objection is correct, Donna and Susan need not blame in any of these senses. However, if blame merely entails judging that the offender is 'to blame' for the offence—i.e. that they are blameworthy (Vargas 2013)—then blame *is* necessary for forgiveness because to cease to judge blameworthy would be to justify or excuse the offender (Hieronymi 2001, Murphy 2003). Forgiving cannot be a change in *this* attitude, i.e. the judgement of blameworthiness (at the time of action).

changes when we forgive. In this section, I consider four suggestions each of which views the connection between forgiveness and responsibility in a different way.

First, one could accept that blame is a precondition on forgiving, but deny that the forgiver must overcome blame. This might seem to like a minor refinement of the Standard View and in some versions of this view it is (Newberry 2001). It does not depart much from the spirit of the view to require that one significantly, but not entirely, overcome one's blame and the two views do seem to shade into one another. Nonetheless, some versions of this position differ significantly from the Standard View. For example, Ernesto Garcia interprets Butler as arguing that to forgive is, fundamentally, to resent to the appropriate degree given the fact that the offender remains a moral agent who deserves the same basic regard and goodwill as any other human being (2011, 9).[8] On this view, one forgives by coming to view the offender as morally redeemable despite their offence. One must cease to blame only insofar as blaming is incompatible with recognising the offender's capacity to reform. This is a much thinner and more inclusive notion of forgiveness that the Standard View. It also allows us to make sense of forgiveness as, by its nature, a virtuous mean between excess and deficiency in a way that proponents of the Standard View have struggled to make plausible.[9] Alternatively, one might argue that forgiving requires only that one cease to endorse one's blaming emotions (Schönherr 2018).

Second, one could reject the Change Condition based on how one understands the nature of blameworthiness. It's often thought that an offender remains blameworthy forever, even if blaming them ceases to be justified. But if one can cease to be blameworthy for a past culpable wrongdoing (Khoury and Matheson forthcoming), then we can understand forgiveness as ceasing to view an offender as *presently* blameworthy, even if one continues to view them as *having been* blameworthy *at the time* of the offence, as seems necessary. For example, one could argue that: in order for an offender to be blameworthy for their action, it must be the result of a bad (or substandard) quality of will; a repentant offender does not have a bad quality of will; therefore, the offender is *no longer* blameworthy, though it may still be true that she *was* blameworthy.[10] We often conceive of forgiving as separating the offender from their offence (Murphy 1988, Hieronymi 2001, Allais 2008). According to this view, separating the two supports ceasing to view the offender as blameworthy, rather than merely ceasing to blame.

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[8] Jean Hampton's discussion of moral hatred and biblical forgiveness gives a similar view (1988, 37).

[9] See, among others, Richards (1988), McGary (1989), and Griswold (2007).

[10] Technically, on this view, the change required for forgiveness is a change in one's perception of the offender's present blameworthiness. However, insofar as blaming requires judging blameworthy, one must, as a matter of fact, also cease to blame. Thus, this view can capture the intuition that the forgiver must overcome their blame, but also allow that this is not the relevant change.

Third, one could argue that it is sufficient for forgiveness that the victim changes her mind about personally punishing the offender for their offence, even if she still blames them for it. On this view, in order to forgive the victim must come to believe that the world would be a worse place if she tried to do something offset the offence (e.g. take retribution) and, on these grounds, must deliberately refuse to do so (Zaibert 2009, 387). The change required for forgiveness, then, is a change in belief and the decision to act (or refrain) on the basis of that belief.[11]

Finally, one could argue that it is sufficient for forgiving that one choose to release an offender from the obligation generated by their offence, whether one continues blaming them or not (Nelkin 2013). On this view, blameworthy behaviour generates an obligation that the offender has to the victim and to forgive is to release the offender from this obligation. For example, one may be obliged to repent, show remorse, or make amends in some way. Forgiveness also changes the normative significance of the offence from one which warrants various negative responses to a state where at least some of these responses are no longer justified (Warmke 2016a). Among other things, this view captures examples of forgiveness that resemble debt-forgiveness or waiving a promise and that do not involve overcoming blame (Twambley 1976, Adams 1991, Nelkin 2013, Warmke 2016b, Cornell 2017, Bennett 2018) and it extends both to easy forgiveness of minor offences (Adams 1991) as well as to the immediate or unconditional forgiveness of horrific wrongs often reported in the media (Walters 2006, Berman 2015).[12]

This last option may be the most promising and radical departure from the Standard View.[13] Call it the *Norm Changing View*. It aims to explain the role and importance of forgiveness in our shared moral lives (Warmke 2016a, 687-688). However, in order to constitute a legitimate alternative to the Standard View, more must be said about what exactly changes when one forgives. In the remainder of this section, I consider some possible explanations.

Altering the norms between victim and offender is not itself sufficient for forgiveness. After all, these norms can be altered by the offender or by relevant changes in the world. For example, if

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[11] For responses to this view, see Warmke (2011) and Russell (2016).

[12] It is unclear whether, on this view, forgiveness requires that offender actually be blameworthy or whether it is enough that the forgiver perceive her as being so. Perceived wrongdoing is sufficient on the Standard View, but if forgiving releases the offender from an acquired obligation, that would seem to imply that she is actually guilty of culpable wrongdoing.

[13] A particularly radical version of this view might argue that forgiveness is neither a change of attitude nor even a response to the offender or their offence, but rather a persisting attitude expressed in the requisite speech act or other performance. On this view, being wronged and forgiving function like being promised and waiving that promise. One can only wave a promise if one has been promised something, but it can be waived at will and for any reason (or no reason). Thus, for example, one might have a persisting desire not to be owed anything beyond what is owed to everyone and, for this reason, immediately and unconditionally waive all promises and forgive all wrongs as soon as one acquires the power to do so—or, if possible, do so preemptively.

Dylan crashes his father's car, but suffers serious injury such that he is no longer a responsible agent, then he will not have obligations from which his father can release him. It seems, then, that the change of norms must be brought about by a change in the forgiver.

However, it is not enough to *intend* to release the offender from their obligation because one might still fail to carry through or abandon the intention. One option is that the forgiver's *decision* to forgive makes the difference (Zaibert 2009, 387). However, this would seem to be in tension with two desirable features of the Norm Changing View, namely, its ability to explain the change of status between forgiver and offender and the similarity between interpersonal forgiveness and exercises of official authority like debt-forgiveness or pardon. Altering the norms between forgiver and offender requires communication of the relevant decision, so a personal decision to forgive is not sufficient. A person is not free to leave prison as soon as the governor decides to pardon them, nor is a person released from their obligation to pay back a loan as soon as the creditor decides to forgive it. Communication of the decision is sometimes required to alter permissions and requirements.[14] This suggests, then, that communicating the decision, rather than the decision itself, is what alters the relevant norms, whether via a speech act ("I forgive you") or some equivalent gesture or behaviour. There is disagreement about the nature of the communicative dimension of forgiveness. It has been characterised variously as a behabitive (Haber 1991), a commissive (Pettigrove 2012), and a declarative (Warmke 2016a).[15] This is the change relevant to forgiveness.

However, even communication might be insufficient if forgiveness also requires *uptake* by the offender in order to alter norms. It is not clear that a forgiver releases an offender from his obligation if the offender fails to recognise or accept this decision. In this way, forgiveness may operate like consent or refusal. Donna fails to refuse her stylist's offer to shampoo her hair if the stylist interprets Donna's "That's okay" as "Okay, go ahead" rather than "Thank you, but no." Similarly, Dylan fails to consent to a medical procedure if he is not recognised as consenting because he fails to meet the legal requirements for doing so.[16] The same may be true of forgiving if, for example, an offender fails to recognise or refuses to accept forgiveness.

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[14] Warmke recognises the importance of communication, but does not argue that communication is necessary for forgiveness (2016a, 699).

[15] These accounts of the nature of communicative forgiveness are themselves neutral between the Standard View and Norm Changing View. One could argue that forgiving requires a speech act, but that the speech act must communicate that one no longer blames the person (Pettigrove 2012).

[16] This is different from consenting but being refused, as when a person consents to give blood, but is refused because they weigh too little. Brunning and Milam defend an uptake condition (2018, 155-157).

The alternatives to the Standard View canvassed in this section, especially the Norm Changing View, offer a significantly different conception of the nature, function, and ethics of forgiveness. They dispute the preconditions for forgiveness (e.g. whether blame is necessary), what must remain fixed when one forgives (e.g. whether one must continue to view the person as responsible), and what must change when one forgives (e.g. overcoming blame, forswearing punishment, altering norms between victim and offender). At the same time, these views attempt to capture the same experiences of forgiving and the same distinctions between forgiveness and cognate phenomena.[17] For example, forgiving is different from excusing or justifying, in part, because the former requires a decision, while the latter do not. The fact that an offender was excused or justified alters what the victim can permissibly say or do to the offender, but the victim does not *possess* this power to alter.

The challengers to the Standard View also give a different account of the function of forgiveness. It is still understood as a way to resolve moral conflicts, but its primary significance is as a way of influencing norms of permission and obligation rather than as a step in our practice of holding responsible. For proponents of the Norm Changing View, wrongdoing and forgiveness function like promising and waiving promises— forgiveness dispels obligations just as promises create them. However, for proponents of the Standard View, forgiveness complements blame. One implication of this is that the plausibility of the Standard View of forgiveness is tied to the plausibility of its complementary account of blame. Meanwhile, the plausibility of the Norm Changing View is tied to the plausibility of a normative ethics that recognises forgiving as a normative power.

This difference in function has implications for the ethics of forgiveness on these views. The Standard View leaves the permissibility and impermissibility of forgiving to normative ethics, which is itself independent of the nature and function of forgiveness. Whether and when forgiveness is permissible or impermissible will depend on one's account of moral permissibility—e.g. one may hold that forgiving is permissible if and only if doing so will produce the greatest happiness. However, the Norm Changing View takes a theory of forgiveness to be part of a normative ethical theory. If forgiving makes demanding restitution impermissible, then any normative theory that denies this must be mistaken. This view has significant implications. For example, if forgiveness functions like other normative powers, then one may be unable to reverse the normative changes one makes by forgiving. The ethics of forgiveness will also depend, for each of these views, on the degree to which it takes forgiving to be voluntary. We have only partial control over our beliefs, attitudes, and actions, so any view that requires a change of attitude—whether abjuring punishment, overcoming blame, or accepting an offender's remorse—must allow that forgiving often proceeds indirectly and that some are, at times, unable to forgive. By contrast, views according to which forgiving is a decision that one can make independently of one's beliefs and attitudes may suggest

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[17] Warmke claims only to be concerned with paradigmatic forgiveness (2016a, 691 and 698), but he presumably wants his complete view to be true of the broader practice.

that forgiving is often under our direct control. Given the widespread acceptance of some version of the ought-implies-can principle, how voluntary one takes forgiveness to be will influence one's account of whether and when one ought or ought not to forgive.

I have presented these alternatives as challenges to the Standard View, but, before moving on, we should consider whether the Norm Changing View might supplement rather than supplant the Standard View. On the one hand, the Standard View offers necessary conditions on forgiveness, while its opponents reject these conditions and argue that other changes are sufficient. And at least some versions of the Norm Changing View reject the conception of forgiveness as an emotional change (Warmke 2016a and 2016b, Bennett 2018). On the other hand, however, an account very like the Standard View, but which holds that its conditions are jointly sufficient but not necessary for forgiveness, may be more plausible insofar as it can be broadened to capture a wider variety of forgiveness practices.

Section 3.3: Pluralism

Instead of rejecting the Standard View in favour of an alternative account, or vice versa, it might seem reasonable to advocate pluralism about forgiveness—i.e. to claim that there are multiple legitimate conceptions of forgiveness, including (perhaps) the Standard View and one (or more) of its challengers. However, justified pluralism requires more than a few irreconcilable theories. For it to be plausible (at least) the following conditions must be met: 1) each conception of the phenomenon is inadequate or incomplete on its own; 2) the competing conceptions are not parts of a single adequate account; and 3) the pluralist account is more plausible than the best monist account according to at least one of the criteria by which accounts are assessed. For example, a pluralist account of forgiveness would be plausible if, 1) theory X captured one class of examples and theory Y captured another class (e.g. private and communicated forgiveness), 2) the two theories are inconsistent (e.g. one restricts forgiveness to victims, while the other does not), and 3) neither of the theories is able to account for the plausibility of the other (e.g. if preemptive forgiveness cannot be understood merely as granting permission).

While many philosophers accept that we deploy multiple seemingly irreconcilable conceptions of forgiveness (Hampton 1988, Adams 1991, Calhoun 1992, Garcia 2011, Nelkin 2011, Pettigrove 2012), Christopher Bennett (2003) is among the few who have developed an explicitly pluralist account. Instead, forgiveness theorists tend to reject one or more of the above conditions for pluralism. For example, in order to explain how forgiveness is elective, Cheshire Calhoun distinguishes aspirational from minimal forgiveness, but argues that the latter is actually a form of excuse (1992, 81). Miranda Fricker (forthcoming), also in an attempt to resolve the tension between elective and non-elective forgiveness, identifies two seemingly inconsistent

conceptions but argues that one is, in fact, a derivative form of the other. Ernesto Garcia (2011) identifies two interpretations of Butler's account of forgiveness, but argues that one is not only a better exegesis but also a more plausible account of the phenomenon.

Indeed, the most commonly drawn distinction between 'kinds' of forgiveness—i.e. between internal (or private) and external (or communicated) forgiveness—is rarely presented as a genuinely pluralist theory. Rather they are taken to be different practices, the latter of which may (but need not) accompany the former (Zaibert 2009). An exception may be Marilyn McCord Adams' account, according to which external ('performative') and internal ('from the heart') forgiveness can occur independently of one another (1991, 294). The other distinction that might motivate pluralism—and has motivated reconciling monisms like Calhoun's and Fricker's—is that between elective and non-elective forgiveness. For example, suppose that Kelly was seriously injured as a result of Steve's recklessness and that he has avoided her since the accident. In response, Kelly might forgive Steve despite his unwillingness to take responsibility and apologise because she suspects that it is his shame and defensiveness that is keeping him from repenting and atoning; at the same time, she may be unwilling or unable to forgive without an apology. On Bennett's (2003) pluralist view, Kelly offers personal forgiveness, which is elective, but not redemptive forgiveness, which is owed or not depending on the offender's response to the victim's blame.

Section 4: Implications

Different accounts of forgiveness emphasise different features or versions of the practice. In this section, I highlight some of the implications of the Standard View and the Norm Changing View. In doing so, I focus on how they bear on salient experiences of forgiveness, key debates about forgiveness, and potential limits of forgiveness.

Difficulty. Sometimes forgiving is difficult. Steve may want to forgive Dylan for betraying him, but be unable to do so. He may struggle with the decision itself, wondering if Dylan really deserves his forgiveness; or he may have decided to forgive but struggle to actually follow through. Both scenarios seem true to life.

The Standard View recognises both dimensions of difficulty as obstacles to forgiveness. However, if forgiveness does not require an emotional change, then the struggle to follow through is not part of forgiving. This particular difficulty may be real and significant, but it is not an obstacle to forgiving. One accomplishes forgiveness by making or communicating one's decision and this does not require overcoming blame—though it may be difficult to communicate one's decision if one has not overcome one's blame. Which view one thinks best captures the difficulty of forgiving will depend on a number of factors, only some of which I

have taken up in this chapter. These include whether one sees forgiveness in terms of its normative significance or in terms of its role in our responsibility practice, and whether one conceives of forgiveness as entirely voluntary or as partially involuntary.

Reversal. Sometimes a person forgives, but changes their mind and withdraws their forgiveness. Brandon might forgive Valerie for lying to him because she apologises and appears remorseful. However, if he learns that her apology was insincere and her remorse feigned, he might withdraw his forgiveness and continue blaming her. Again, such scenarios seem true to life.[18]

The Standard View takes such phenomena at face value as can some other views (Zaibert 2009). Other accounts have a harder time capturing this possibility. If forgiving alters what it is permissible to demand of or do to the offender (Nelkin 2013, Warmke 2016a and 2016b), then withdrawing forgiveness would seem to be either impossible or else to require that the norm change is also reversed. However, one might think that the significance of a norm change comes from its irreversibility. Forgiving, like waiving a promise, may be significant because one cannot reclaim the normative power once it has been used.

Mistakes. Sometimes a person is mistaken about whether they have forgiven. Donna may think she has forgiven David for betraying her trust, but slowly come to realise that she hasn't. This realisation may stem from the recognition that she still ruminates on David's misbehaviour or from others pointing out that she still seems detached and suspicious of him—i.e. she blames him.

The Standard View gives a straightforward account of such mistakes. Whether one has actually stopped blaming the offender is not always or entirely transparent to the would-be forgiver, so one might be mistaken about whether one has forgiven. Moreover, given the valorisation of forgiveness in many societies, we might often be motivated to believe we have forgiven when we actually haven't. The Norm Changing View also has room for mistaken forgiveness, but the phenomenon it describes is different. If forgiveness is a decision or communicative act, then mistakes like Donna's are less common and may be impossible. However, one can be mistaken about whether one has forgiven insofar as one can be mistaken about the fact of the wrongdoing and, thus, about whether one has actually altered the relevant norms. For example, Andrea might forgive Brandon for allowing an anti-semitic public figure to speak on their campus, only to realise that Brandon wasn't the one who made the decision. Thus, while she intended to release him from the obligation created by his offence, she didn't have the power to do so because he hadn't committed the offence, and she is thus mistaken about having forgiven.

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[18] There is also a further question about withdrawing forgiveness. Geoffrey Scarre (2016) allows that forgiveness can be withdrawn in cases like Brandon's, but denies that one withdraws forgiveness just because one's hard feelings return. Forgiveness can only be withdrawn in response to recognising that one forgave on the basis of bad information.

Non-Victim Forgiveness. Our everyday understanding of forgiveness seems to allow that individuals other than the victim can forgive. We speak of individuals forgiving themselves, third parties forgiving those who have harmed their friends, and groups seeking and offering forgiveness. These are familiar phenomena and are recognised as cases of forgiveness.[19]

A theory must either account for these practices as forgiveness or explain why they are not. The Standard View takes the first approach. Anyone can, in principle, overcome their blame and do so for the right kinds of reasons. If Steve can forgive Valerie for lying to him, why can't Valerie forgive herself, or Brandon, as Steve's friend, forgive her for the same reasons? However, if forgiving changes the normative situation between victim and offender, and only a victim can do this, then non-victim forgiveness is impossible. While Valerie and Brandon might do something that looks like forgiveness, only Steve can make the relevant change. Thus, whether one finds one or the other position more plausible will depend whether they can provide satisfying answers to various questions. For example, if non-victim forgiveness is impossible, then what exactly are agents like Valerie and Brandon doing when they try to forgive? And what exactly do we object to when we view self- and third-party forgiveness as inappropriate or wrongful?

Section 5: Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to provide an introduction to the philosophical debate about the nature, function, and ethics of forgiveness. In particular, I have tried to place that debate in the context of a broader discussion of the nature of moral responsibility and to highlight the connections between these two contexts. I began by presenting the Standard View of Forgiveness, according to which to forgive is to overcome one's blame toward a culpable wrongdoer. I then introduced a number of objections to this view, each of which disputed the nature of the change required for forgiveness. I focused, in particular, on the Norm Changing View, according to which forgiving changes what is permissible and impermissible for the victim and offender to do and to forgive is to bring about that change. I closed by considering the implications of these two views for how we answer some open questions about forgiveness.

Inevitably, I have been forced to neglect a number of important topics and questions, including the following: elective vs. non-elective forgiveness (Allais 2013, Milam 2018b), standing to forgive (Pettigrove 2009 and 2012), reasons to forgive (Milam 2018a, Schönherr 2018), divine forgiveness (Warmke 2018a and 2018b), the history of forgiveness (Konstan 2010), and how forgiveness works in non-ideal circumstances (Walker 2006, MacLachlan 2009, Brunning and

[19] On self-forgiveness, see Holmgren (1998), Dillon (2001), and Milam (2017). On third party forgiveness, see Pettigrove (2012), Walker (2013), and MacLachlan (2017). On political forgiveness, see Amstutz (2004) and MacLachlan (2012).

Milam 2018). However, I hope that the way in which I have introduced the debate will give readers some insight into how to investigate and answer these questions.

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