

Forgiveness as Renunciation of Moral Protest

Derk Pereboom, Cornell University

in *Forgiveness*, Michael McKenna, Dana Kay Nelkin, and Brandon Warmke, eds., New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

Penultimate Draft

Introduction

On the standard view, when we forgive, we overcome or renounce future blaming responses to an agent in virtue of what the forgiver understands to be, and is in fact, an immoral action he has performed. Crucially, on the standard view the blaming response is understood as essentially involving a reactive attitude and its expression. In the central case in which the forgiver has been wronged by the party being forgiven, this reactive attitude is moral resentment, that is, anger with an agent due to a wrong he has done to oneself. When someone other than the forgiver has been wronged by the one being forgiven, the attitude is indignation, anger with an agent because of a wrong he has done to a third party. Such a position was developed by Joseph Butler (1749/1900), and in more recent times endorsed by P. F. Strawson (1962), Jeffrie Murphy (1982), and Jay Wallace (1994). Wallace (1994: 72), for example, claims that “in forgiving people we express our acknowledgment that they have done something that would warrant resentment and blame, but we renounce the responses that we thus acknowledge to be appropriate.”

The standard view has in recent times been subjected to challenge. Eve Garrard and David McNaughton (2003), Dana Nelkin (2008, 2011b: 44-50), and Brandon Warmke and Michael McKenna (2013) contend that in cases in which the forgiver is the wronged party, forgiveness need not involve a overcoming of resentment. In Nelkin's view, someone might not feel resentment in the first place and still forgive; one might, for instance, correctly perceive that one has been wronged, but not feel resentment, and then forgive the transgressor. The defender of the standard view may respond by arguing that in such cases, resentment was nonetheless appropriate, and believed to be so by the wronged party, while the forgiver renounces future resentment or its expression on her part. This route may well not be available to free will skeptics such as myself, who are concerned that resenting a wrongdoer is never appropriate due to resentment's presupposing that the wrongdoer basically deserves to be its target (Pereboom 2001, 2014), or due to resentment's commitment to a retributive desire (Honderich 1988, cf., Nussbaum 2016).¹ One possibility is that the renounced blaming responses need not be attitudes such as resentment and indignation, contested by free will skeptics (Pereboom 2014, 189-90), and I will now develop this claim. At the same time, even for the free will skeptic, if, despite her general rejection of its

¹ I've endorsed the cognitivist position on which having a reactive attitude such as resentment or indignation essentially involves as a component a belief that its target basically deserves to be blamed for an action (Pereboom 2001, 2014; cf. Wallace 1994; Nussbaum 2016). On this conception, it would be doxastically irrational for a free will skeptic to have such an attitude; she also believes that no agent ever basically deserves to be blamed, and thus she would have conflicting beliefs. Still, being angry and expressing anger may yet sometimes be practically rational.

appropriateness of resentment, she nonetheless resents, forgiveness on her part would still involve her renouncing it and its expressions.

Separating blameworthiness from the appropriateness of anger

Forgiveness requires that the wrongdoer was in fact morally responsible (in some sense) for his wrongdoing, thus blameworthy for his wrongdoing, and is believed to be blameworthy by the forgiver. This belief would have to be retained by the forgiver, on the pain of giving up a false belief. Hence it mustn't be the belief that the wrongdoer was blameworthy that the forgiver renounces. Rather, it must be attitudes and expressions of those attitudes that are justified in virtue of the wrongdoer's being blameworthy. Again, these attitudes are often specified to be reactive attitudes such as resentment and indignation. But perhaps this is a mistake. There may be cases of blameworthiness in which such attitudes are suboptimal, and even cases in which they are inappropriate. If so, supposing that wrongdoing in such cases can be forgiven, renouncing resentment and its expressions will not be required for forgiveness.

On one reading of P. F. Strawson's (1962) "Freedom and Resentment" blameworthiness is a response-dependent notion, according to which it's a particular emotional, attitudinal response that makes an action blameworthy; the blameworthy just is whatever occasions, or perhaps merits such a response. The response specified by Strawson in the case of a wrong done by another is one's moral resentment or indignation, both of which qualify as anger towards the other in virtue of his having done wrong.

David Shoemaker (2017) recently develops and defends such a Strawsonian account:

Fitting Response-Dependence about the Blameworthy: The blameworthy (in the realm of accountability) just is whatever merits anger (the angerworthy); that is, someone is blameworthy (and so accountable) for X if and only if, and in virtue of the fact that, she merits anger for X.

Shoemaker contends that what unifies all of the properties that make anger appropriate is just that they merit anger, and this is what makes the account truly a response-dependent one. He argues that this is analogous with response-dependence about the funny; what unifies all of the properties that make the amusement response appropriate is just that they merit this response. Most of his discussion defends his specific notion of response-dependence, and not the selected type of response: anger.

As Shoemaker points out, there is a response-independent account that also features anger, but as a response which is independent of the property in which blameworthiness consists, while anger is made appropriate in virtue of that property:

Response-Independence about the Blameworthy: The blameworthy consists in a property (or properties) of agents that makes anger at them appropriate, a property (or properties) whose value-making is ultimately independent of our angry responses. Anger at someone for X is appropriate if and only if, and in virtue of the fact that, she is antecedently blameworthy (and so accountable) for X. What makes her blameworthy is thus ultimately response-independent.

(Fischer and Ravizza 1998; Brink and Nelkin 2013)

In this view, blameworthiness is not essentially dependent on the response of anger. But anger is the property chosen to fix the reference of the term 'blameworthy.' The blameworthy consists in properties that in fact actually merit anger, even if blameworthiness doesn't just consist in whatever merits anger.

Here I raise two concerns about the choice of anger in each of these accounts (Pereboom 2019). First, there are cases of blameworthiness that are plausibly not cases of angerworthiness. Athena is a parent, and her kids misbehave in minor, common, predictable ways; they squabble, fail to clean their rooms, text their friends when they should be sleeping. Some parents respond with anger, but she doesn't, and instead responds from the sense of a duty to correct and educate, combined with care, but not with anger. The anger response is plausibly optional, and in many such cases seems in fact inappropriate. Basil is a teacher, and every class at least some students misbehave in minor ways; they come unprepared not having done the assigned reading, or talk about non-class-related matters in distracting ways, or surf the internet instead of participating and paying attention. Suppose they're blameworthy. Basil responds with protest but not with anger. The anger response again seems optional, and here very plausibly inappropriate. In each of these cases, the angry response stands to be counterproductive and to undermine his effectiveness and the respect students have for him. Evidence for the inappropriateness of anger in these kinds of cases is that parents and teachers who show anger in such cases are routinely criticized for being inappropriate.

One possible fix is to claim that the misbehavior in these cases is nevertheless *pro tanto* angerworthy, and that's enough to make it blameworthy. In reply, extending a point Victor Tadros (2016, 119) makes against Michael Moore's (1998) view about alleged *pro tanto* duties to criminalize, it's questionable that a response is *pro tanto* justified if the response is almost never appropriate, which in these cases the angry response would seem to be (Pereboom 2019).

The second concern is that anger has a strong tendency to distort judgments of blameworthiness, and that it's dubious that to be blameworthy is to be worthy of a reactive attitude that systematically distorts judgments of blameworthiness. Surveys conducted by Mark Alicke and his associates indicate that subjects who spontaneously evaluate agents' behavior unfavorably are apt to exaggerate their causal control and any evidence that might favor it while deemphasizing counterevidence (Alicke, Davis, and Pezzo 1994; Alicke 2000; Alicke, Rose, and Bloom 2012). Alicke calls this tendency *blame validation*. In the last several decades, impressive experimental evidence that blaming behavior is widely subject to problems of these kinds has been mounting (e.g., Nadelhoffer 2006).

There is reason to believe that it's the blame that accompanies anger that leads to these problems (Duggan, forthcoming). Psychological research indicates that anger, once activated, degrades subsequent reasoning processes in various ways (e.g., Lerner, et.al. 1998, Goldberg et.al. 1999, Litvak et.al. 2010). Anger increases tendencies to overlook mitigating details before attributing blame, to perceive ambiguous behavior as hostile, to rely on stereotypes, concerning, for example, ethnicity in assigning blame,

and to discount the role of uncontrollable factors when attributing causality and punitiveness in response to witnessing mistakes made by others. Anger makes us slower to associate positive traits than negative traits with an out-group. Julie Goldberg and her associates (1999) find in one of their studies that when the retributive desire to harm is not satisfied, anger "activate[s] an indiscriminate tendency to punish others in unrelated situations without regard for whether their actions were intentional."

Strawson (1962) draws our attention to the attitudes appropriate upon wrongdoing within interpersonal relationships of mutual regard, such as intimate relationships and friendships, which has had the effect of participants in the debate focusing on attitudes attendant upon serious wrongdoing in such relationships. Reactive attitudes, involving moral anger, as expressions of blame might be particularly salient in these contexts. But much wrongdoing takes place outside such relationships; in parental relationships, and in relationships between teachers and students, as in the examples of Athena and Basil. One might respond by arguing that these are not paradigm cases, since they are not relationships of mutual regard. But consider relationships between faculty members, or relationships between administrators and faculty. Non-major but significant wrongdoing in such relationships is frequent and to be expected. For example, university faculty are partial to their close colleagues and political allies when it comes to hiring and perks, and in many cases the resulting advocacy is wrong. Suppose Chloe is a university administrator and often faces these sorts of issues with faculty in her purview. Imagine she responds not with anger, but calmly with arguments that invoke the wider considerations. In such cases, angry responses typically reduce

one's effectiveness, and tend to cause false judgments which in turn motivate defective solutions.

These observations call for a general characterization of blameworthiness that does not highlight anger. Together with several others, I propose moral protest as the key notion. This, in turn, motivates an alternative conception of forgiveness, first proposed by Pamela Hieronymi (2001), according to which forgiving someone for doing wrong involves renunciation of the stance of moral protest against him for performing the action in question (Pereboom 2014, 189-90). In what follows, I develop and defend a version of this view.

Blame as Moral Protest

Pamela Hieronymi (2001), Matt Talbert (2012), Angela Smith (2013), and, in effect, Michael McKenna (2012), have proposed that blame should be understood as moral protest, and I follow their lead. Hieronymi (2001) connects moral protest and the reactive attitudes (as do the others just mentioned); for her moral protest is a reactive attitude such as resentment. I maintain that moral protest need not involve resentment or indignation. When Athena, Basil, and Chloe protest the behavior at issue, they are morally concerned, but not resentful or indignant. I think of moral protest as a disposition, in the central case, to engage in confrontational verbal protest against an agent for having performed an action that the protester perceives to be morally wrong. Moral protest may be accompanied by emotions such as concern, disappointment, or

sorrow; while it may be conjoined with a reactive attitude such as resentment or indignation, it need not be.

I've endorsed the following version of a moral protest view of blame (Pereboom 2017):

Moral Protest Account of Blame: For B to blame A is for B to issue a moral protest against A for immoral conduct that B attributes (however accurately) to A.

The immoral conduct will typically be an immoral action, but there are cases in which the action considered separately from the reasons for which it's performed is not wrong, but the reasons make the overall conduct wrong (e.g., Haji 1998, Hanser 2005). Sometimes blame is misplaced, since no wrongful actions have been performed, but the protest can still count as blame. This may happen when B believes A to have acted wrongly but the belief is false, perhaps due to misinformation or improper consideration of evidence. This can also happen when B does not believe that A acted wrongly but nonetheless represents A as having acted wrongly, as in cases of false accusation motivated by rivalry. It's often the case that blame functions, as in Hieronymi's proposal, as a moral protest against an agent for a past action that persists as a present threat, and I agree that this is one highly important objective for blame. But not all blame has this point, as when we blame the dead, or blame someone who is alive but lacks a persisting disposition to act badly -- someone, for instance, who has already undergone moral reform. In such cases protest can yet have the function of explicitly noting immoral behavior in order to encourage moral improvement on the part of an audience.

In the example of the already-reformed wrongdoer, blame might still function as a step in the process of reconciliation.

An objection to the protest account of blame is that while unexpressed blame is possible, the idea of unexpressed protest is not even coherent, and hence blame cannot be accounted for in terms of protest. The concern is that protest is essentially communicative, and unexpressed protest is not communicative. Eugene Chislenko (2019) has recently provided a response, citing the distinction Coleen Macnamara draws between the activity of communicating—of which mental states kept private are not instances—and the idea of a communicative entity (Macnamara 2015b: 217). An unsent e-mail, even though it does not actually perform the function of communicating, it has the function of evoking uptake of representational content in a recipient (Macnamara 2015a: 548). An unsent e-mail is thus communicative in nature; and similarly, unexpressed protest is communicative in nature. For a case in point, an unsent email might be an unexpressed message of protest. Chislenko says, “We can even say, as [Angela] Smith does of blame, that the email “expresses protest, and...seeks some kind of moral reply” (2013: 39), even when the email is unsent.” (Chislenko 2019). We can add that the email can express protest even if its author never intends to send it; and similarly, someone who privately blames may never intend to communicate it.

In accord with the protest account of blame, I propose the following amended version of Shoemaker’s response-dependent view about the blameworthy:

Fitting Response-Dependence about the Blameworthy: The blameworthy (in the realm of accountability) just is whatever merits moral protest (the

protestworthy); that is, someone is blameworthy (and so accountable) for X if and only if, and in virtue of the fact that, she merits moral protest for X.

This account has a response-independent correlate, which also invokes moral protestworthiness but claims that there are properties that make wrongdoing protestworthy that are independent of our protest responses, while appropriate moral protest can serve to fix properties which 'blameworthiness' picks out:

Fitting Protest-Response-Independence about the Blameworthy: The blameworthy (in the realm of accountability) consists in a property (or properties) of agents that makes morally protesting their wrongdoing appropriate, a property (or properties) whose value-making is ultimately independent of our responses of moral protest.

What are these properties? I've argued (2014, 134-35; 2017) that there is a largely forward-looking conception of blameworthiness, which aims at goods such as moral formation of character, reconciliation in relationships, retention of integrity of a victim, and protection from harm. Blame as moral protest can be understood as having these forward-looking components, together with a minimal backward-looking element: that the agent knowingly acted wrongly is part of what makes the protest appropriate. In accord with a broad consensus, it's the agent's responsiveness to reasons that's engaged in central cases of blaming, since blaming confronts its target with moral reasons. Thus these properties would include: the agent's knowingly having acted wrongly, her being reasons-responsive, and her being disposed to moral protest's realizing the forward-looking aims.

Following Shoemaker, in these formulations I've retained the idea that the notion to be characterized is blameworthiness in the realm of accountability. If accountability requires the appropriateness of resentment and indignation, I would then want to reject accountability, and advocate for answerability instead (as I do in Pereboom 2014, 131-38). But does blameworthiness in the realm of accountability essentially involve confrontation by such reactive attitudes? Shoemaker thinks so, but here is a lean characterization of accountability he himself provides:

To be accountable for something is to be liable to being appropriately *held* to account for it, which is to be eligible for a range of fitting responsibility responses with a built-in confrontational element. (2015, 87)

However, like anger, moral protest is essentially confrontational. But I'm fine with my proposal not counting as a view about accountability; this is likely a verbal issue.

Forgiveness as renunciation of moral protest

If in many cases of personal wrongdoing, moral anger is not optimal or even appropriate, forgiveness should not generally be taken to be renunciation of moral anger and its expressions. In specific cases in which it is appropriate, forgiveness may involve its renunciation. But in cases of wrongdoing in which the angry response is not optimal and one does not in fact respond with anger but rather with concern, one's forgiveness cannot plausibly consist in the renunciation of moral anger and its expressions. This leaves it open that forgiveness involve the renunciation of whatever negative attitudes and their expressions are appropriate, where such attitudes differ

across cases. This I accept, but let's explore the possibility that forgiveness nevertheless has a simple unified essence. Hieronymi suggests that forgiveness essentially involves the renunciation of moral protest. While she thinks of protest as involving resentment, at least in central cases, his connection can be denied, which I do. Even if resentment generally involves protest (cf. Hampton 1988),² it's possible for moral protest not to involve any sort of moral anger, or even a belief in its appropriateness.

Imagine a friend has wronged you in some way a number of times by acting inconsiderately, and you find yourself resolved to end your relationship with him. You engage in a moral conversation with him, protesting against him for the wrong he has done and for the threat that his disposition to act in this way poses. In response, he is contrite, assumes a firm disapproving stance toward that disposition, and commits himself to full elimination. You might now withdraw your protest and agree to continue the relationship on a better footing. In Hieronymi's conception, forgiveness is such a withdrawal of a protest to a threat upon acknowledgment of the offender's change of heart:

If I ask for forgiveness, I am not asking you to understand why I did the deed, from my point of view. (I may no longer fully understand that myself. In any case, if I am properly repentant I surely don't recommend that point of view.) To ask you to understand things from my point of view is to hope for an excuse, not to

² Jean Hampton writes: "[r]esentment is a kind of anger which protests the demeaning treatment to one who could and should have known better, and this protest is frequently linked to verbal rebuke, reprimand or complaint direct at the insulter" (Murphy and Hampton, 1988: 55)

ask for forgiveness. Nor, when I ask for forgiveness, am I asking for your pity or compassion in response to the pain of my remorse. Nor am I asking you simply to acknowledge the fact of my repentance and reform. I am instead asking you to believe me when I say that I no longer see what I did to you as acceptable, to recognize and so ratify my change of heart. (Hieronymi 2001: 554).

Even if forgiveness sometimes involves the renunciation of resentment, and sometimes the renunciation of a different emotional attitude, I contend that in every case it involves renunciation of morally protesting against the wrongdoer for having committed the specific wrong at issue. This renunciation involves one's acquiring a belief that such protest on one's own part is no longer appropriate, and a commitment to acting on this belief. This renunciation is compatible with the forgiver never having actually protested the wrong, since in renouncing moral protest one renounces potential and not only actual protest.

Here is a case of Per-Erik Milam's (2020) that serves to illustrate this proposal: *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 recognizes 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, apologizes 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.

One might ask what Donna's forgiveness consists in. In my view, it's Donna's believing that moral protest on her part against David for what he is done is no longer appropriate, and being committed to acting on this belief. We can imagine that Donna has never actually protested the action. Nevertheless, she can still renounce future moral protest against David for his infidelity. If Donna does say at some future time, "You are such a jerk for being unfaithful; I can't believe that you did this!" it seems clear that she hasn't forgiven him.

In the case of Basil, the teacher, suppose one day, Emma, a student for whom he has high hopes, for the first time in the course is not paying attention to class proceedings and is surfing the internet instead. Protest is appropriate even if anger is not, and forgiveness, as the renunciation of further moral protest, may be granted upon contrition and apology. Basil may say to Emma: "Your surfing the internet is distracting to other students, and it would be best for you to pay attention instead" without being angry but with moral concern for her and from a sense of duty for seeing to her education and moral formation. Suppose Emma expresses contrition and apologizes, and her subsequent behavior in the class indicates, to Basil, change of heart. If at that point he nevertheless calls her aside to say: "You were wrong to surf the internet that day; it distracts other students, and you should have been paying attention," it would be clear that he hadn't yet responded to her contrition with forgiveness. Suppose instead

that in response to Emma's contrition Basil renounces appropriateness of this sort of protest on his part. This would be a case of forgiveness with renunciation of moral protest but without renunciation of resentment. On the other hand, if resentment were appropriate – suppose that free will skepticism is false and resentment was appropriate upon discovery of unfaithfulness in an intimate relationship – forgiveness upon contrition and apology would involve renunciation of further moral protest, even if it would also involve renunciation of resentment. Thus, I propose, renunciation of moral protest can qualify as the essence of forgiveness.

Forgiveness might involve an occurrent belief that morally protesting wrongdoer's having performed an action is no longer appropriate, together with an overt verbal communication to the wrongdoer that she has been forgiven. But in some cases the belief that protest was appropriate may be merely dispositional and not occurrent, and the indication to the wrongdoer that she has been forgiven might be understated — evident, for example, only in subtle changes in the forgiver's behavior and expression. What is ruled out upon having forgiven is overt verbal moral protest against the agent for having performed the act in question, and also a continuing dispositional but uncommunicated stance of moral protest. Some overt specifications of wrongdoing don't count as protest. In cataloguing instances in which a forgiver has been wronged in the past, she might cite a wrongdoing she has forgiven in a way that doesn't count as morally protest against the wrongdoer. But she might cite the wrongdoing in such a way as to indicate that she hasn't forgiven, and this would be the case if how she

expresses it is indicative of a stance of protest against the wrongdoer for having acted as he did.

Renunciation of moral protest must be for the right reason

Moral protest might come to be regarded as inappropriate for various reasons. One is that the putative wrongdoer has a valid excuse. One might initially think that it is legitimate to protest against the fellow subway passenger for stepping on your foot, but then come to realize that this was neither intentional nor negligent, but that he inadvertently stepped on your foot due to being pushed by another passenger. Here one renounces moral protest, but this is not a case of forgiveness. More generally, renouncing protest due to recognition of an excuse is not forgiveness (cf. Nelkin 2013).

Suppose a senior colleague is a conversation dominator; in an average one-on-one conversation, through the mastery of various techniques, such as not breathing between changes of topic, your colleague manages 90% air time. You've protested against him for this behavior in the past, but to no avail, and you've come to believe the condition is unalterable, except perhaps by neural intervention, which you believe is on balance morally inadvisable in this case. You then come to renounce the appropriateness of moral protest, but specifically because you have come to believe the condition is conventionally unalterable. This is again not a case of forgiveness, even though it involves the renunciation of moral protest. Renunciation of protest due to

regarding behavior as incorrigible does not count as forgiveness. Milam (2019) would classify this as a case of *letting go*, not of forgiveness, and I agree.

Imagine that a friend has certain habits that result in behavior that is morally wrong but only in a minor way; being somewhat too angry at bad drivers, being mildly noncharitable toward rival philosophers, or insufficiently restraining irritability when tired. One might renounce moral protest in such cases because the moral offenses are too minor, and even if there's a chance of the protest being effective, you think it's not worth the disruption of one's relationships to achieve the result. Here again one renounces moral protest, but without forgiveness. This is plausibly also a case of letting go.

Central cases of forgiveness involve the renunciation of moral protest in response to contrition on the part of the wrongdoer, or as Milam (2019) puts it, in response to perceived change of heart on the part of the wrongdoer. Perhaps the wronged party *should*, at least *pro tanto*, forgive upon recognition of contrition, since not forgiving in such circumstances fails to respond to sufficient reason to forgive. Contrition can be manifested through apology, but sometimes through other verbal and behavioral expressions. Milam argues that other sorts of reasons to cease to engage in blaming are not reasons to forgive. We might renounce moral protest because the offender had good intentions (Murphy and Hampton 1988), or because the threat incipient in the offence has been neutralized (Hieronymi 2001), or out of solidarity (Garrard and McNaughton 2003, 2010), but these are not cases of forgiveness. Are there any cases of forgiveness that aren't responses to contrition, change of heart? Nelkin (in

correspondence) suggests that we sometimes forgive a wrongdoer just because we believe he has suffered enough, even if he hasn't undergone change of heart. But perhaps this is also a case of letting go and not of forgiveness.

One might suggest instead that forgiveness is essentially relationship-focused; perhaps what it is to forgive is to cease to regard the wrong done as a reason to weaken or dissolve a relationship. This feature can be seen as retracting blame in the sense Scanlon characterizes it (Scanlon 2009: 128). My forgiving someone who has wronged me would involve my initially having judged that what he did showed something about his attitude toward me that impairs his relationship with me, but in response to his repentance, my no longer taking this relationship to be modified in a way that this judgment of impaired relations justifies as appropriate. The judgment of impaired relations is withdrawn because I take him to have given up the attitude toward me that impairs our relationship. A concern for Scanlon's view, pressed by Susan Wolf (2011), is that relationships are often resilient to and not impaired by blameworthiness of a minor sort. Routine and expected wrongdoing, such as a spouse's snappy irritability when tired, or a child's not cleaning his room, may not be relationship-impairing (Pereboom 2017). Such wrongdoing might still be forgiven — by renunciation of protest against the wrongdoer, and so forgiveness is not essentially relationship-restoring.

Forgiveness, the Standard View, and Norm Changing

Problems noted for the standard view, notably that forgiveness does not require renunciation of actual resentment or other initially appropriate negative reactive

attitudes, has motivated development of an alternative conception by philosophers such as Brandon Warmke and Dana Nelkin: the norm-changing view. In Nelkin's conception, it is sufficient for forgiving that one choose to release an offender from certain obligations generated by their offence, whether or not one continues resenting or blaming them (Nelkin 2013). On her view, blameworthy action generates an obligation on the part of the wrongdoer to apologize or make amends, and for the wronged party to forgive the wrongdoer is to release him from this obligation. Warmke (2016) argues that forgiveness 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. In his view, in forgiving a victim releases the wrongdoer from certain personal obligations to do these things, and the victim can release the wrongdoer only from those obligations over which the victim has normative authority. The victim may tell the wrongdoer that he does not need keep apologizing and that no further restitution or penance are expected. In Warmke's view, in forgiving, the victim releases the wrongdoer from certain obligations, but also gives up certain rights to blame, and thus norms for both wrongdoer and wrongdoer are changed. On such a conception, forgiveness resembles norm-changing actions such debt-forgiveness or waiving a promise (Twambley 1976, Nelkin 2013, Warmke 2016).

Warmke further maintains that, generally speaking, paradigmatic cases of forgiveness involve both psychological changes and a certain kind of communicative, norm-changing act that is motivated and rationalized by those psychological changes. I endorse Warmke's general conception. I want to emphasize that altering the norms

between victim and offender is not itself sufficient for forgiveness. In my view, the change of norms that partially constitutes forgiveness would have to be brought about by a change of attitude in the forgiver, and this change of attitude is the core element of forgiveness. This core element always involves a renunciation of moral protest, and it will sometimes involve the renunciation of anger. That this is the core element of forgiveness can be seen by examining central cases of forgiveness. In the case of serious interpersonal wrongdoing, as in the *Infidelity* example, forgiveness is a response to a wrongdoer's change of heart expressed in apology and offering to make amends. Imagine that in this case the amends consist in David's making a sincere commitment to spending less time away from Donna and engaging in activities that stand to renew the relationship. But then it's implausible that Donna's forgiveness would consist in the Donna releasing David from the obligation to apologize and to make these amends. David has already apologized, and in the normative case, the apology is ongoing in the sense that it's not retracted. One might imagine Donna asking for the apology to be made again; that might be consistent with her forgiveness if what she wants is for the apology not to be retracted. The amends are an ongoing project, and releasing David from the obligation to make these amends is not a requirement of forgiveness in this case. True, asking him to make yet further amends might well be at odds with forgiveness. But we can now see that the core element of her forgiveness is her renunciation of protest, and perhaps anger. Donna's protest: "You are such a jerk for being unfaithful; I can't believe that you did this!" would clearly indicate that she hasn't forgiven.

Warmke contends that the overcoming of resentment can't have the norm-changing function that he specifies:

How could giving up my resentment towards someone else have an effect not only on how I am morally permitted to treat that someone, but also on how that person is morally obliged to treat me? I see no way of linking my overcoming of resentment to the inappropriateness of, say, asking for apologies or engaging in other forms of overt blame. Nor can I see how my overcoming resentment would release you from certain personal obligations to, say, apologize to me or offer me restitution.

He is right that my mere *overcoming* of resentment can't affect how I am obligated to treat the wrongdoer. But my *renunciation* of resentment, since it involves a moral commitment I make, can have this function, and similarly renunciation of moral protest. But, as Warmke plausibly contends, releasing the wrongdoer from obligations such as further amends cannot be private; it must be communicated to the wrongdoer. So as Milam (2020) points out, 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.

Richard Swinburne's conception satisfies this constraint; he argues that "forgiving is a performative act—achieved perhaps by saying solemnly "I forgive you," or perhaps by saying "That's all right," or maybe by just a smile' (Swinburne 1989, 85). In Warmke view, forgiving is a declarative act, but he emphasizes that it must feature an appropriate rational and motivational mesh between the act and mental states. The forgiver must, for instance, intend to forgive by means of the words he uses. Here the

importance of the forgiver's the mental state of renunciation of a stance such as resentment or protest can be highlighted. Suppose I'm self-deceived in my belief that I no longer resent you for maligning me, and that my attempt to renounce the stance of moral protest is a failure. Then I am mistaken when I say, "I forgive you;" I say the words, but I don't forgive. Some norms may have changed by my having said what I did, but forgiveness hasn't occurred. A pronouncement of forgiveness thus has content that can be falsified by the nature of one's attitudinal stance.

Donna's forgiving David features the belief that he was blameworthy for his wrongdoing, and on a moral protest view of blameworthiness this entails that his action was protestworthy. Donna has renounced moral protest on her own part against David for his infidelity, but this is consistent with others appropriately not renouncing their moral protest against David for this wrongdoing, in particular if he has not manifested his contrition to them. Imagine David has been unfaithful with someone in the purview of his professional responsibility. In forgiving, Donna does not renounce moral protest on the part of relevant figures in his profession; Warmke (2016) makes this point. Donna might see continued moral protest on the part of those figures as appropriate, but in view of the apologies and amends David has made to her, renounce moral protest on her own part.

Summary

My proposal for an account of forgiveness, like Warmke's (2016), combines elements of both the standard and the norm-changing views. Forgiveness need not be

preceded by actual resentment, or indeed any actual angry emotion. Rather, the forgiver, by virtue of regarding the wrongdoer as blameworthy for a past wrongdoing, regards moral protest against him for this specific wrongdoing as having been appropriate. In forgiving, she renounces such moral protest on her own part going forward, both the psychological stance and its expressions. This renunciation is constitutively norm-changing, first of all because since it involves moral protest on her part changing from being appropriate to being inappropriate. Other alterations in norms may accompany this change: earlier the wronged party legitimately demanded apology and amends, while when she forgives the request for new apologies and additional amends become inappropriate.³

References

- Alicke, M. D. (2000). "Culpable Control and the Psychology of Blame, *Psychology Bulletin* 126, 556-74.
- Alicke, Mark. D., T. L. Davis, and M. V. Pezzo. (1994). "A Posteriori Adjustment of A Priori Decision Criteria," *Social Cognition* 8, 286-305.
- Alicke, Mark., D. Rose, and D. Bloom, 2012. "Causation, Norm Violation and Culpable Control," *Journal of Philosophy* 106, 587-612.
- Brink, David and Dana Nelkin. 2013. "Fairness and the Architecture of Responsibility," *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility*, v. 1., David Shoemaker ed., 31-54.

³ Thanks to Brandon Warmke, Dana Nelkin, and Michael McKenna for valuable comments and discussion.

- Butler, Joseph. 1900. *The Works of Bishop Butler*. London: Macmillan.
- Chislenko, Eugene. 2019. "Blame and Protest," *The Journal of Ethics*,
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10892-019-09288-0>
- Duggan, Austin. forthcoming. "A Genealogy of Retributive Intuitions."
- Feinberg, Joel. 1970. *Doing and Deserving*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Fischer, John M., and Mark Ravizza. 1998. *Responsibility and Control*. Cambridge:
 Cambridge University Press.
- Garrard, Eve and David McNaughton. 2003. "In Defence of Unconditional Forgiveness."
Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 100, 39-60.
- Goldberg, Julie, Lerner, J., Tetlock, P. 1999. "Rage and Reason: The Psychology of the
 Intuitive Prosecutor," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 29, 781-795.
- Haji, Ishtiyaque. 1998. *Moral Accountability*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hanser, Matthew. (2005). "Permissibility and Practical Inference," *Ethics* 115, 443-70.
- Hieronymi, Pamela. 2001. "Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness," *Philosophy
 and Phenomenological Research* 62, 529-54.
- Honderich, Ted. 1988. *A Theory of Determinism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lerner, Jennifer S., Julie H. Goldberg, and Philip E. Tetlock. 1998. "Sober Second
 Thought: The Effects of Accountability, Anger, and Authoritarianism on
 Attributions of Responsibility." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 24 (6),
 563-74.
- Litvak, Paul M., Jennifer S. Lerner, Larissa Z. Tiedens, and Katherine Shonk. 2010. "Fuel in
 the Fire: How Anger Impacts Judgment and Decision-Making." In *International*

- Handbook of Anger*, edited by Michael Potegal, Gerhard Stemmler, and Charles Spielberger, 287–310. New York: Springer.
- Macnamara, Coleen. 2015a. "Reactive attitudes as communicative entities," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 90, 546–569.
- Macnamara, Coleen. 2015b. "Blame, communication, and morally responsible agency," in *The nature of moral responsibility: New essays*, ed. Randolph Clarke, Michael McKenna, and Angela M. Smith, 211–235. New York: Oxford University Press.
- McKenna, Michael. 2012. *Conversation and Responsibility*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Milam, Per-Erik. 2019. "Reasons to Forgive." *Analysis* 79.2, 242-251.
- Milam, Per-Erik. 2020. "Forgiveness." in *The Oxford Handbook of Moral Responsibility*. Dana K. Nelkin and Derk Pereboom, eds., Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Moore, Michael. 1998. *Placing Blame*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Murphy, Jeffrie. 1982. "Forgiveness and Resentment," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 7.1, 503-516.
- Murphy, Jeffrie. 1998. "Jean Hampton on Immorality, Self-Hatred, and Self-Forgiveness." *Philosophical Studies* 89.2, 215-236.
- Twambley, P. 1976. "Forgiveness." *Analysis* 36.2, 84-90.
- Nadelhoffer, Thomas. 2006. "Bad Acts, Blameworthy Agents, and Intentional Action," *Philosophical Explorations* 9, 203-20.
- Nelkin, Dana. 2008 "Responsibility and Rational Abilities: Defending an Asymmetrical View," in *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 89, 497-515.

- Nelkin, Dana. 2011. *Making Sense of Freedom and Responsibility*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nelkin, Dana K. 2013. "Freedom and Forgiveness," in *Free Will and Moral Responsibility*. Eds. Ishtiyaque Haji and Justin Caouette. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press.
- Nussbaum, Martha. 2016. *Anger and Forgiveness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pereboom, Derk. 2001. *Living Without Free Will*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pereboom, Derk. 2014. *Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pereboom, Derk. 2017. "Responsibility, Regret, and Protest," *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility*, v. 4., D. Shoemaker ed., 121-140.
- Pereboom, Derk. 2019. "Free Will Skepticism and Prevention of Crime," in *Free Will Skepticism in Law and Society*, Gregg Caruso, Elizabeth Shaw, and Derk Pereboom, eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shoemaker, D. 2015. *Responsibility from the Margins*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shoemaker, D. 2017. "Response-Dependent Responsibility," *The Philosophical Review* 126, 481-527.
- Smith, Angela. 2013. "Moral Blame and Moral Protest," *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, N. Tognazzini & J. Coates, eds., Oxford University Press, 27-48.
- Strawson, Peter. F. 1962. "Freedom and Resentment," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48, 187-211.
- Swinburne, Richard. 1989. *Responsibility and Atonement*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- Tadros, Victor. 2016. *Wrongs and Crimes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Talbert, Matthew. 2012. "Moral Competence, Moral Blame, and Protest," *Journal of Ethics* 16, 89-101.
- Wallace, R. Jay. 1994. *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Warmke, Brandon. 2016. "The Normative Significance of Forgiveness." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 94.4, 687-703.
- Warmke, Brandon and Michael McKenna. 2013. "Moral Responsibility, Forgiveness, and Conversation" in *Free Will and Moral Responsibility*. Eds. Ishtiyaque Haji and Justin Caouette. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 189-212.
- Watson, Gary. 2014. "Peter Strawson on Responsibility and Sociality," *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility*, v. 2., D. Shoemaker ed., 15-32.
- Wolf, Susan. 2011. "Blame, Italian Style." In *Reasons and recognition: Essays on the philosophy of T. M. Scanlon*, ed. R. Jay Wallace, Rahul Kumar, and Samuel Freeman, 332–347. New York: Oxford University Press.