Forgiveness and Consequences

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Recent philosophical accounts of forgiveness are steeped in deontological, anticonsequentialist views about morality. In this essay I discuss an act consequentialist approach to forgiveness with the aim of exhibiting its moral attractiveness. Act consequentialism holds that one morally ought always to do an act that would lead to an outcome no worse (impartially assessed) that the outcome of anything else one might instead have done; doing anything else is morally wrong. But a possibly more important divide is between those moral views that do, and those that do not, include at the level of fundamental principle a significant beneficence component. Along the way the merits of a thin or spare account of the nature of forgiveness are considered. These two aims—advancing a spare account of what forgiveness is and defending an act consequentialist position as to when one should and should not forgive—are independent of each other. The act consequentialist will hold that whatever forgiving turns out to be, one should forgive just in case doing so will bring about best consequences.

The spare account. Discussion of the conditions that must be satisfied for forgiveness to be justifiable cannot get off the ground until it is specified what forgiveness is. Here we find many competing specifications. To be useful, an account of forgiveness should have some resonance in ordinary usage, but usage varies, and it is doubtful that how competent speakers use the term will single out one account to the exclusion of all others. That there are different ideas in play comes out when people say such things as "In a sense he forgave his brother but at another level he did not really forgive him."

This essay works with a spare account of what forgiveness is but makes no grand claims to the effect that other accounts are illegitimate or rest on some mistake. On the spare account, forgiveness is the extinguishing of certain negative reactive attitudes in a person toward another, these attitudes being directed at what is perceived to be that individual's wrongdoing (or at least subpar behavior) that constitutes a wrong or offense either to the person harboring the attitudes or to others with whom that person specially identifies. The negative reactive attitudes that forgiveness eliminates include resentment, indignation, anger directed at a person, and blame insofar as blame involves dispositions to feel and not only to judge adversely. These attitudes all centrally involve dispositions to have the feelings associated with the particular attitude; they can also involve secondary dispositions to act in ways that express the negative feelings and to act in ways that harm the person who is their object. There is also an occurrent feeling dimension to forgiveness: If I now feel resentment or the like toward you, I have not fully forgiven you, whatever my dispositions in this regard might be. Also, I shall stipulate that if someone gives up the judgment that a person has done him wrong, but still sustains a resentment-like hostile feeling and attitude directed at what the person has done, having this emotional residue means that forgiveness has not occurred.

Some take it to be essential to forgiveness that in forgiving one retains with full force the negative moral judgments about the person's conduct that brought about in one the negative reactions one is overcoming. On the spare account, this need not be so. Forgiveness might typically be accompanied by a weakening of these negative judgments and something that feels very much like forgiveness can even be prompted by their disappearance. Whether the dilution of negative judgment is desirable or not, many will think, hinges on the degree to which one's adverse judgments were correct in the first instance. It is true that if one entirely gives up one's adverse judgment on someone's conduct that prompted negative reactive attitudes and still harbors residual negative feelings toward the person which one subsequently seeks to extinguish, what one is now seeking to eliminate is not any longer a negative reactive attitude, so it would be incorrect to call what one is now doing "forgiving." But this does not rule out forgiving a person for what one takes to be a wrong done to one but that is not really so. It is also possible that forgiveness of a person for some act or omission might give rise to heightened adverse judgment on the person's conduct or on the character of the person as seen in light of the episode.

Forgiving can be an action, something an individual does. On the spare account, forgiving can also can be something that happens, and can happen independently of the will or activity of the one who forgives, and even against the will of the forgiver. It can happen that you have forgiven someone for something you had not intended ever to forgive, even for something you regard as unforgivable and strenuously tried to keep resenting. Forgiving is a transition between a state of affairs in which one has ill will or other negative reactive attitudes directed toward an individual who has (as one believes) wronged one or harmed one or let one down in some way to a state of affairs in which these negative reactive attitudes are extinguished.

The spare account seems to be revisionary in this respect. A dictionary I consulted does not include any entry under "forgive" that allows forgiving to be passive (in a way that bypasses one's agency) rather than active. Still, it sounds idiomatic to say "I tried not to forgive Sam given his horrible behavior to me that night, but I could not sustain my ill will toward him; it is entirely dissipated; forgiveness has occurred despite my efforts to stay hostile." Forgiveness according to the spare account, the state in which the relevant hostile reactive attitudes have dissipated, can be reached in alternative ways, by acts of trying to forgive, but also by psychological processes not intended by the agent, or unintended byproducts of the forgiver's actions. In another range of cases, one might notice a psychological process going on in oneself that is gradually diminishing one's resentment toward some offender, and one might then do nothing to stop the process. There are various possibilities here. One might deliberately do nothing because one is glad that resentment is fading, or because one would prefer that resentment continue but one is not willing to accept the costs that would be incurred in sustaining it. Or one might not make up one's mind as to how one regards this fading of resentment, and just passively do nothing about it. Many insist that forgiving must issue from intentional action aimed at overcoming resentment, and deny that, for example, forgetting about an injury and an injurer amounts to forgiving. But the spare account partly agrees. Forgetting all about an injury is compatible with staying resentful, which involves a disposition to feel negative emotion toward the injurer when prompted. The disposition can remain even if no prompts ever trigger it.

If the spare account involve revision of our ordinary notion, the revision has a point. Acts of forgiving are always acts of trying to forgive, which might or might not succeed. If an attempt to forgive succeeds, what occurs is that the negative reactive attitudes directed at the target individual as characterized above disappear. One can say in performative mode, "I hereby forgive you," but whatever the performance, ill will may still remain in its aftermath. A wholehearted, sustained attempt at forgiveness may yet fail.

In contrast, one can utter "I hereby forgive you" as a performative that forswears debt, compensation, and perhaps apology that the forgiven person had owed to the forgiver. Directed duties owed to an injured person can, perhaps within some limits, be forgiven by the injured person or by someone authorized to act on her behalf. But to my ear this is all more accurately described as pardoning (but see Nelkin 2013 and the discussion of her view below). At least, it is not forgiving according to the spare account. This becomes immediately clear if the person makes the expanded statement, "I hereby waive my right to the $1000 compensation you owe me for wrongfully smashing my leg, but be it noted that I will continue to resent you for what you have done to me." There is no hint of inconsistency in the expanded statement.

Since forgiving involves the elimination of negative reactive attitudes, it can vary by degree. One can forgive someone a little, a lot, or entirely. These attitudes involve dispositions, which can be hard to detect, in oneself or in others. A disposition to experience resentment and the like can vary depending on (1) the strength of the stimulus that would be required to trigger occurrent resentment feeling and also on (2) the degree of vehemence of the resentment that a stimulus of a given strength would rekindle. For example, my mother was rightly resentful of mean-spirited comments I made to her during the years when we were prone to arguing about the War in Vietnam and other American social problems. Years later, we are getting along famously; we suppose all this past hostility is inert; at some point we think it safe to recall old times and revisit those conversations. But this turns out to be like pouring hot water on instant coffee; the brew of emotion returns. Surprising herself, my mother is now angry at me for what I did years ago. She had forgiven me—to a degree.

Forgiveness can involve dispositions to avoid behavior that might trigger rekindling of negative reactive attitude feelings. It might be correct to say I forgive someone even though under very intensive or extensive stimulation my negative feelings would arise in me again, provided I am also steadily disposed to avoid placing myself in situations in which these rekindlings of the negative would occur. Of course, this situation is only compatible with forgiveness at the margins.[1]

The act consequentialist stance toward forgiving. Since according to the act consequentialist, a candidate act of forgiving (really, attempted forgiving) can be either mandatory, if doing it would bring about the best reachable outcome impartially assessed, or forbidden, if it would not bring about the best reachable outcome, and since acts of forgiving can also be either apt or inapt, we have four possibilities—right and apt, right and inapt, wrong and apt, and wrong and inapt. In broad terms, forgiving is apt (or fitting) when it is appropriate in virtue of some relation between the person targeted for forgiveness and her enmity-arousing offense or in virtue of some other feature of this person—for example, that she has already suffered enough and declining to forgive would pile extra suffering on her. People disagree about what relations and features

render forgiveness apt; I help myself to one specification that I find plausible in the next sentences.[2] The problematic cases, which will provoke a raised-eyebrows response on the part of many deontologists and other nonconsequentialists, are the right and inapt and the wrong and apt forgivings. In the former, the act of forgiving is morally right, and required, even though the person to be forgiven is not distanced from his wrongful act by repentance, reparation, apology, and atonement. The person forgiven does not merit or deserve forgiveness, because he has not effectively repudiated his wrongful act. So forgiving in such circumstances would be inapt, and looks to be wrong.[3] The act consequentialist disagrees, hence her stance needs some explanation and justification.

The other suspicious category of forgivings consists of acts of forgiving deemed wrong by the act consequentialist standard even though forgiving in these cases would be apt—the person who might be forgiven has had a change of heart and has effectively repudiated his wrongdoing that is the target of the negative reactive attitudes that forgiving would seek to overcome. The person in this case merits or deserves to be forgiven, so here refraining from forgiving looks to be wrong. Or rather, since some deontological views will hold that acts of forgiving are always or usually morally optional not morally obligatory, the apparent difficulty for the act consequentialist is that she rigidly holds that forgivings that would fail to bring about the best reachable outcome are one and all morally impermissible, rather than sometimes either morally mandatory or at least morally permissible.

To make headway on this issue, the next few sections of this essay explore some examples of forgivings and refrainings from forgiving that involve mismatch. These turn out to be familiar occurrences that are acceptable or not depending on their consequences—or so it will be urged.

An important further point emerges from this discussion of mismatch cases. Not only act consequentialists will concur in the judgments that, by virtue of good consequences to be obtained, forgiving inaptly and refraining from apt forgiving can be and often are morally justified all things considered. Any morality, including a deontological morality that upholds constraints and options, can reach these verdicts, provided the morality contains a significant beneficence component—a general duty to improve the world by acting so as to bring about better not worse outcomes. Just to have a name, let us refer to this family of views as *deontology with beneficence.* Here as elsewhere it turns out that the boundary between act consequentialism and nonconsequentialist rivals may not be the most important moral boundary line from either a theoretical or a practical point of view.

A companion thought is that of crucial importance to the character of a morality is the degree of significance it attaches to the duty of beneficence so construed. Here as elsewhere in morality what matters is not so much that there is a distinction to be made but how strong the reasons are that shelter on one side or the other of the distinction.

Dangerous resentment. Persevering in resentment, indignation, or hatred of those who have (as one thinks) done one wrongful injury can readily motivate one to acts that aim to injure the wrongful injurers. Nothing guarantees that reasonable and appropriate degree of resentment rightly shaped to the specific injury that occasions it will motivate only morally appropriate acts of retaliation. To avoid acting wrongly in response to provocations and slights and wrongful injuries, sometimes the most effective technique, and occasionally the only technique that offers a reasonable prospect of

success, may be to bring about in oneself the extinguishing of the negative reactive attitudes directed toward the person in view of these wrongs to oneself. One should in other words forgive even the unrepentant wrongdoer, and one should perhaps forgive the unforgiveable (wrongs, if such there be, that are so horrendous that forgiveness of them would never be apt in any circumstances).

Persevering in apt resentment can be dangerous in ways that need not involve the risk that one will jump over the moral fences and indulge in wrongful revenge and retaliation. That one harbors resentment might be unavoidably manifest to others with whom one is interacting, the resented person and others as well. The resented person might reasonably or unreasonably fear retaliation and the fear might impede trust and useful cooperation. Providing reassurance might be difficult or even impossible. "My continuing resentment of you will not, I assure you, provoke me to smash your face wrongfully" may not provide much helpful reassurance. Moreover, persevering in resentment can impede mutually beneficial cooperative relations in subtler ways. Interacting with someone who harbors resentment of one may provoke anxiety or mild dread, and so one avoids interactions. Much the same goes for others who might interact with the parties locked in resentment relations. In many situations, the best way forward for all affected parties is overcoming resentment. Of course, it would be nice if the resented person repented and apologized and made amends and reformed his character, but in the absence of this nice scenario, inapt forgiving may still be the best available way forward.

Dangerous vicarious resentment. Even if one is oneself saintly in being able to prevent oneself from acting wrongly from apt resentment feelings and masterful in being able to communicate the message that one has this saintly disposition to others, still, one's resentment may be infectious, and be toxic for social relations in indirect ways. I may not be disposed in the least to retaliate against Smith, my work colleague, for wrongfully breaking my legs, but my brother might do so, or his friend, or his children, or some of their associates and acquaintances. Again, there will be in such cases sometimes decisive moral reasons of good consequences in the offing to overcome one's apt resentment.

Resentment as an obstacle to harmony. In some cases merely becoming appropriately resentful at mistreatment and sustaining the resentment in the face of continued mistreatment may impede the unfolding of a process that promises good consequences. One should sometimes quash the resentment one feels, depending on the magnitudes of harms and benefits at stake in the short term and the long run.

Jean Hampton (1988, at 39,) has described a familiar example. The in-laws have come to town and are mistreating their son's wife. The wife is righteously angry, but the husband pleads with her not to spoil the holiday gathering and show forgiveness. This is a generic scene, and in many versions, a row now will pay off in future better relations or at least avoidance of further wrongful impositions. In some cases, showing forgiveness may do the trick of restoring family harmony, and need not even involve deception if one's in-laws are emotionally thick-headed. But in some such cases, we should accept that the credible appearance of forgiveness is the best way to restore desirable holiday harmony and cheer, and the only way to achieve the credible appearance of forgiveness is actually to forgive, so forgive one must, if one can.

Prudent self-healing. Consider Sally, who was brutally raped. Her resentment and anger and even hatred of her assailant are perfectly appropriate, we can readily imagine. Moreover, the utter indifference to her plight and contempt of her shown by her unrepentant assailant at trial is etched, she fears indelibly, in her mind, and torments her. Sally tries to "get over it" by contributing assiduously to rape awareness and rape prevention campaigns, all good causes. But none of this stops her brooding, which is making life miserable for her and impeding any effective progress toward gaining for herself a rich and fulfilling life. In this situation overcoming resentment and other negative reactive attitudes may be utterly beyond her capacity, and understandably so. But if she can undertake some psychic regimen that will expunge the negative reactive attitudes and emotions stemming from this traumatic wrongdoing she suffered, prudence and morality may well unite in heartily endorsing this inapt forgiving. She forgives for her own sake, and rightly so.

Good cause. Terrible things have happened to our country, we can imagine. Our country has divided into tribal and factional squabbles, which led to ethnic cleansing, civil war, seriously destructive attempts at genocides, and further atrocities. Guilty wrongdoing was not evenly spread across the population; some groups maliciously wronged others; some were for the most part innocent victims; some groups fought and killed only in proportionate ways for just causes. An uneasy peace has been restored. Renewed cooperation across the lines of bloody conflict is in sight. Apt and just resentment, indignation, and hatred cloud these prospects. A moral Realpolitik is in order. If those who suffered wrongs, or sufficient numbers of them, can manage a generalized inapt (or mostly inapt) forgiveness, civil peace and harmony may be restored, and if this forgiveness does not occur, the prospects for a tolerable outcome for all are greatly diminished. Here gritting one's teeth and making good-faith efforts to overcome all resentment against the wrongdoers may be the best way forward, and in fact morally mandatory. This is so even if we should be disposed to be tolerant and forgiving of people who cannot summon up this effort at heroic inapt forgiveness.[4]

Abused spouse. Jane has suffered grievous wrongs at the hands of her abusive husband. She has freed herself from the bad marriage and extricated her children and herself from further danger. Meanwhile her former husband has done a complete about face. He regularly attends Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, he does volunteer work counseling men struggling to stop abuse and women struggling to end abusive relationships. He is an exemplar of remorse and contrition and has thoroughly amended his ways. He does not seek to resume the relationship with his former wife; he recognizes encounters with him stir up bad memories and are painful. He seeks forgiveness and is an apt candidate for its receipt. All of this is consistent with Jane, while recognizing the changes in her husband, having good forward-looking reasons to sustain resentment and anger at him. She has some residual distrust of her ability to avoid sliding into some similar abusive situation in the future; retaining negative reactive attitudes armors herself against this possibility. Perhaps her case has gained media attention and any forgiving of her former spouse is bound to leak into news reports in away that may have the unintended effect, despite all she might try to do to forestall it, to weaken the gathering resolve of other women to end abusive relationships or block their blossoming.

Girding one's loins for struggle. Although so far I have described forgiveness as overcoming of negative reactive attitudes prompted by wrongdoing done to oneself or

to those near and dear to one, with whom one is personally identified, there can be cases of forgiveness in which the persons forgiven have no personal connection at all to the person doing the forgiving. Perhaps the background for forgiveness has to include emotional identification with the victims of wrongdoing. One reads about the Nazi regime and feels indignant and angry on behalf of its victims. One hears stories about slavery and Jim Crow and feels angry at racist oppressors of African-Americans throughout U.S. history. One knows, some Nazis became profoundly remorseful, so have some racists. Some have become apt candidates for forgiveness. Of course it would be horribly presumptuous to imagine that I could by myself forgiving an oppressor remove any grounds for continued resentment and hostility his actual victims might have felt and might still feel. But I can still quash the angry resentment I myself feel toward these perpetrators of injustice. In some but not all cases I should do so. Anger at perpetrators might help fuel current struggles of injustice, and such anger directed at those apt for forgiveness might be part of the most effective feasible strategy for serving this moral purpose. In light of the consequences for possible victims of injustice, some apt forgiving is morally wrong just as some inapt blaming is morally right.

One might well wonder exactly what is supposed to be going on in some of these inapt blaming and forgiving episodes. Forgiveness theorists point out, perfectly correctly, that overcoming negative feelings toward the perpetrators of wrongs toward oneself and those near and dear to one can coexist without any inconsistency with holding adverse judgments about the person's conduct and about what the conduct reveals about his character. Forgiveness has to do with feelings not judgments. A related view is that forgiveness is the overcoming of negative feelings directed toward the person who wronged one but not necessarily of feelings toward the deed itself. Hate the sin but love the sinner, Saint Augustine admonishes us.

But loving the sinner, if that is indeed desirable, is compatible with continuing to resent the person for the wrong done to one, have ill will or anger or maybe directed irritation specifically with respect to the person qua doer of that deed. This resentment could persist even if overall one loves the person. Maybe all things considered we should love everyone if we can. Maybe not. That issue is different from the question, should we drop resentment for a particular wrong done to us, or let it slide, or allow it to be sustained, or actively nurture it.

On the spare account, the fact that in particular circumstances forgiving would be apt, and the fact that in other particular circumstances refraining from forgiving would be apt, at most indicates the presence of one type of reason for forgiving or refraining from forgiving. There are other reasons to consider. On a consequentialist view, these reasons, indeed all reasons for choice and action, ultimately boil down to forward-looking considerations; one should do what will bring about the best reachable future outcome, impartially assessed. There is nothing paradoxical or untoward about inapt forgiving or inapt refraining from forgiving.

Restoring relations. According to some views, forgiveness is essentially bound up with restoring relationships with those who have done one wrong (Hampton 1988). Forgiveness heals the rupture that wrongdoing brought about and enables something approximating a return to the status quo ante in the interactions between the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven. On views of this sort, it would be morally inappropriate for a woman abused by her romantic partner to forgive her abuser if he has

not reformed his character to the point that restoring relations with him will not continue the cycle of abuse (or, a possible if unlikely scenario, forgiving him will not in itself bring about a transformation that ends his abuse).

On the spare account being considered here, restoring relations is not necessarily an element in forgiveness, though such restoration might be a consideration favoring forgiveness or an end that forgiveness will expectably achieve in some situations. Forgiveness on the spare account is elimination of negative reactive emotions and attitudes toward the person who is forgiven, nothing more or less. Forgiveness so understood can coexist with retention of adverse judgments toward the wrongdoer regarding his conduct or the character his conduct has revealed. Forgiveness can coexist with a determined unwillingness to renew a special relationship with the person being forgiven, if one had a significant relationship with him prior to the wrongdoing and rupture, and indeed can coexist with determination to forego any interaction with that individual.

Restoring relations, though not necessarily an element in forgiveness, might on the spare view be its full justification. Restoring relations with those who have wronged one might expectably bring about good consequences, in a variety of ways, such that forgiving is permissible or even mandatory. One's associates are wrongly mistreating one in the nonprofit agency to which one is dedicated, but forgiving them might be a needed component of a strategy of carrying on one's work in the agency, which promises much good to distant needy strangers. If no alternative strategy that involves directing anger and indignation against the wrongdoing one suffers will do as much good overall, one ought to forgive and bear the wrongs patiently.

In all these cases the spare account of forgiveness yoked to an act consequentialist account of when forgiving is morally forbidden or required strikes me as eminently sensible. However, readers who disagree might still go part-way with this account. One might accept the spare account of forgiveness even if one holds utterly different views about the conditions under which forgiveness is permitted, forbidden, or required. More important, one might have nonconsequentialist convictions, involving allegiance to constraints and options, which dictate that one sometimes ought not to forgive, or is permitted not to forgive, even when doing so would be maximally beneficent, and dictate also that sometimes one ought to forgive, or is permitted to forgive, even when forgiving would be maximally beneficent.

With all that on board, one might still allow that sometimes, the consequences of not forgiving might be sufficiently bad that one ought all things considered to forgive even when the forgiving would be morally inapt in light of the disposition of the person who might be forgiven and sometimes, the consequences of forgiving would be sufficiently bad that one ought all things considered not to forgive even when forgiving would be perfectly morally apt in light of the dispositions of the person who might be forgiven. If the deontologist gives significant weight to bringing about morally good outcomes impartially assessed, the act consequentialist and she might be close comrades on many controversial practical issues, in the domain of forgiveness and in other moral domains.

Trying to forgive. Used to refer to an exercise of agency, *forgive* is a success verb. One has not forgiven unless one has succeeded in eliminating one's negative reactive attitudes directed toward the person one is trying to forgive. Trying to forgive is

then an action or a course of actions one might take, and is separate and independent of forgiving and can be assessed as apt or inapt and as morally permissible, impermissible, or mandatory in its own right. The concept of forgiving rules out the possibility of trying to forgive when one knows, or believes one knows, that there is nil chance of success, but one can try to forgive even when the chances of succeeding are small.

Moreover, a wholehearted, sincere attempt to forgive may have significant good (or bad) consequences that differ from the consequences that would come about if the attempt were successful. Perhaps sometimes in the wake of civil war and grievous crimes directed at a certain ethnic group, making a sincere sustained attempt to forgive, if one is a wronged member of the criminally wronged ethnic group, would have good consequences in signaling a likely lessening of hostility and consequent prospects for renewed mutually profitable cooperation, whereas actually fully forgiving would inexorably suggest to former oppressors that they could probably get away with similar misdeeds in future without suffering retaliation.

It goes without saying that for an act consequentialist there is always in principle the option of pretending to forgive or pretending to try to forgive, as alternatives to making sincere efforts in this direction. Pretending to forgive might have good consequences, better than any alternatives, including successfully forgiving. Notice that pretending to forgive might have good consequences even if the person to whom the pretense is directed recognizes it for what is.

Other views. Recent philosophical discussions of forgiveness tend to weave together accounts of what forgiveness is and what determines whether forgiveness is morally acceptable. The accounts tend to be nonconsequentialist. There are many of them. The next sections of this essay survey some interesting views with a view to shedding some contrasting light both on the spare account and on the act consequentialist position on the acceptability of forgiving.

The views of Lucy Allais. As its title suggests, Lucy Allais's essay "Wiping the Slate Clean: The Heart of Forgiveness" (2008) works to make sense of the idea that a core element in forgiving is what is often referred to as wiping the slate clean or as ceasing to hold it against a person that she has culpably committed a wrong against the one who forgives. There are puzzles here, because if one retracts the judgment that the person one is forgiving has culpably committed a wrong against one, there is nothing to forgive, and if one retains that adverse judgment, wiping away the resentment that it justifies might seem unmotivated, irrational and even morally wrong. A further puzzle is that according to Allais forgiving can make sense even when the offender is not penitent, apologetic, or remorseful, nor in other ways repudiating and repenting the wrong done to the now forgiving victim.

Allais's solution is to distinguish sharply between adverse blaming judgments directed against the wrongful act done to the victim and retributive attitudes and feelings directed against the wrongdoer with respect to that wrongful act. In forgiving one retains the former but gives up the latter, and in particular a special type of directed attitude that she characterizes: Forgiving at its core according to Allais involves ceasing to regard the person as having bad character in the specific way her wrongdoing toward you seems to reveal. Forgiving involves wiping the slate clean: after forgiveness of one who has wronged you, so far as your estimation of the person is concerned, it is as though the wrong had never occurred, though your judgment of the offense and its quality remains

intact. The attitude that changes when you forgive someone "concerns the way you feel about the offender as a person as a result of the offense."

But shouldn't your estimate of the person's character be shaped by the ensemble of evidence you have regarding her, including the wrong she has done you? Even if not itself a judgment, a feeling or emotion can have cognitive appropriateness conditions. Allais responds by appealing to the epistemic slack that always accompanies estimations of character. The evidence may rule out some estimations but always permits a range. This feature of our feelings about other people's character permits one rationally to forgive, with forgiveness understood as wiping the slate clean, even if there is no evidence at all of remorse, repentance, reform, and reparation forthcoming from the one who has wronged one.[5] Of course, a change of heart on the part of the wrongdoer can facilitate forgiving, be reason to forgive.

Forgiving so understood might be a gift, not something the remorseful wrongdoer can claim from his victim (and those identifying with the victim) as an entitlement. It is compatible with Allais's account of the heart of forgiveness to maintain that forgiving is always optional never required.

Allais is seeking to interpret as coherent the position of some of women involved in Truth and Reconciliation proceedings in South Africa that were conducted in the wake of apartheid and criminal wrongs undertaken in its defense. The women on whom Allais's account focuses express a willingness to forgive those responsible even for heinous crimes provided only that those undertaking forgiveness know whom they are forgiving. (I suppose that on her view it can make sense, and might sometimes be justifiable, to forgive even unknown perpetrators of culpable wrongs done to one.)

An act consequentialist account of when forgiving is justified will agree with Allais that forgiving can be justified even when there is no evidence of change of heart on the part of the perpetrator and might indeed sometimes be specially admirable in such circumstances. But for the consequentialist the justification for forgiving undeserving perpetrators will always rest on careful weighing of the likely outcomes of forgiving compared to alternative courses of action. Also, for the consequentialist, forgiving strictly speaking is never optional for the potential forgiver (unless consequences are exactly balanced). It is either required or forbidden.

On some views, forgiving is never required, but rather either always optional or sometimes optional and sometimes forbidden. But consider an offense that happened in the past, and a victim who continues to harbor negative reactive attitudes toward the perpetrator. With a long enough passage of time, continuing in this stance appears objectionable. But why should time matter in this way? The act remains wrong and culpable, just as wrong and culpable one or ten or fifty years later as at the time it occurred. The act consequentialist has a suggestion. Anger and resentment directed at those who wronged you, proportionate to the magnitude of the offense and of the harm incurred, are often productive of good consequences, notably deterrence of similar wrongs, but nurturing these attitudes long after the offense is usually (though not always) counterproductive. Time makes a difference to the strength of the reasons for having reactive attitudes because time is a generally reliable indicator of the goodness or badness of having these attitudes. As the consequences become less good, at some point forgiveness becomes required, not optional. At what point? Again, the act consequentialist has a clear account of where to draw the line.

Allais agrees in broad terms that forgiving involves overcoming resentment but insists that a core element in forgiving is giving up the specific attitude of (affectively) seeing the offender as lesser, as having bad character in the specific way the wrongdoing appears to reveal. But it seems there can be cases of wrongdoing in which there is no epistemic slack regarding assessment of the character of the wrongdoer of the sort Allais takes to be necessary for forgiving, yet forgiving is justified. One can forgive Hitler without ceasing to see him (affectively) as incorrigibly having bad character as revealed in his wrongdoing. Whether one should forgive in such a case depends on what forgiving will bring about. But this sort of judgment about this type of case presupposes that what Allais proposes as the heart of forgiveness is not best regarded as that, and not necessary to forgiveness more usefully construed. To my mind the lesson we should draw is that Allais is right to interpret forgiveness as centrally involving overcoming resentment and allied negative reactive attitudes directed toward a wrongdoer for his wrongdoing but her further interpretation of the metaphor of wiping the slate clean in terms of more precisely specifying the type of feeling involved is more problematic.

Also, it is far from clear that wiping the slate clean as Allais characterizes it should occur, and hence doubtful this can be the core of forgiveness. How persons behaved toward you should play a role in determining what behavior you expect from them in the future, and in your regard for their characters. As a wrongdoer it is understandable I would want the slate wiped clean in the Allais sense, but what is written by my conduct stays written. I am the person who committed that particular wrong to those particular people. Allais seeks to register this, by distinguishing the forgiver's cognitive judgment of the person qua perpetrator of that particular wrong and the forgiver's feeling toward the person's character regarding that wrong. But should the feeling float free of the judgment?[6] If I tried to murder Tom with an ax, unless Tom is utterly (and correctly) convinced this was an aberration that will not recur, or will not be followed by related outbursts, he should be on guard in my presence, and adjust his emotional stance as well as his beliefs about the kind of person I am, given what I did. Such a shift in Tom's emotional stance toward me is fully compatible with forgiving me if forgiving is understood as overcoming of resentment and related hostile attitudes.

Eve Garrard and David McNaughton on unconditoward tional forgiveness. Whereas the act consequentialist account says that there can be situations in which it would bring about the best impartially assessed reachable outcome, and hence is morally required, to forgive, even if there are no particular features of the person being forgiven that provide reasons for doing so, Eve Garrard and David McNaughton go further. They maintain that forgiveness is always and everywhere morally admirable and morally permissible, even if never mandatory, no matter whether or not the person being forgiven is repentant, contrite, remorseful, has made genuine apology, has made compensation or restitution, or anything along this line. They defend unconditional forgiveness.

On their view, forgiving an offender involves giving up hostile feelings toward the person, being open to restoring one's prior relationship (if there was one) with the offender when that is possible and desirable, and waiving one's complaint against the wrongdoer that one has been wronged. They defend the view that there are no conditions the offender must meet, to be eligible for such forgiveness, in part by noting that forgiving someone is compatible with continuing to find the person blameworthy, insisting on compensation or restitution, endorsing or seeking the person's punishment,

not condoning the person's wrongful action, cutting off one's relationship with the individual, and being mindful of the wrong in one's future dealings with that person. If we take an overly broad view of what forgiveness is, the ide that unconditional forgives is always permissible and even admirable would be harder to defend and perhaps indefensible.

Why always forgive? There is always a sufficient justification for forgiveness as they characterize it, they maintain. This is human solidarity based on common species membership. Our species is prone to bad acts, and being human also, the thought "there but for the grace of God go I" or a secular equivalent is always appropriate. Even if you would not have done the wrongful deed had you been in the shoes of the person who wronged you, you might have been or become this sort of person, had circumstances been different. Luck beyond one's power to control always at some level explains why the person wronged you and not the reverse (or the doing by you of something equally bad and wrong). One might take this claim about luck to rule out as inadmissible the thought that anyone is ever truly morally blameworthy or culpable for doing bad deeds or omitting to do good ones. The familiar claim here is that one can be morally responsible, hence morally blameworthy or praiseworthy for one's acts depending on their quality, for what lies within one's power to control, and on the moral luck thesis, nothing we do lies within our power to control. Garrard and McNaughton take the different line that moral blameworthiness attaches to people who wrong others but if one is wronged, forgiveness is never inappropriate, always permissible and admirable.

The act consequentialist has a simple riposte. Let us assume for the sake of the argument that sheer luck beyond one's power to control always explains why you are the wronged person contemplating forgiveness rather than in the position of the person who culpably did wrong and might be forgiven. But forgiving is an act with consequences, which might be good, bad or ugly. Agreeing that the person's unrepentant or even heinous character with respect to the wrong done is never a bar to the acceptability of forgiving someone, the act consequentialist denies that forgiveness is admirable or even permissible when the consequences of forgiving are sufficiently bad. In that stance the act consequentialist travels in the company of a broad array of nonconsequentialist doctrines that include a significant beneficence component in the set of principles that together are deemed to determine what should be done. The consequences of forgiving a wrongdoer might be excessively bad, so forgiveness in that circumstance is wrong. The act consequentialist pushes this line further: If better consequences would be brought about by refraining from forgiving rather than forgiving, one morally ought not to forgive. There but for the grace of God go I, and if I went there, I too should not be forgiven, if holding a grudge against me would improve the world by impartial moral assessment.

Jeffrie Murphy on forgiveness. Jeffrie Murphy succinctly defines forgiveness as "forswearing resentment on moral grounds (1988, at 24; see also his 2003). These must involve perception of separation between the wrongdoer and the wrongdoing. If "the wrongdoer is intimately identified with his wrongdoing," forgiveness will involve condoning or acquiescing in wrongdoing, and so be incompatible with "self-respect, respect for others as moral agents, and respect for the rules of morality." According to Murphy the required separation need not involve a change of heart on the part of the wrongdoer; sometimes the thought that the wrongdoer had good motives, or has had good

relations with the victim in the past, or even that the wrongdoer has suffered enough. On this view forgiving must be intentional, so losing one's resentment by forgetting the injury or distracting oneself will not count as forgiveness, and overcoming resentment to bring about good consequences is not acting with the right sort of reason and so is not (true) forgiving. On Murphy's view, overcoming resentment, to quality as forgiving, need not be apt or appropriate in the narrow sense identified earlier in this essay.

A problem with Murphy's view is that since overcoming or just losing resentment as such is always compatible with continuing to judge that the one being forgiven has committed an unexcused wrong against one and is culpable for doing so, it does not seem that forgiving ever need involve condoning the conduct being forgiven. Also, overcoming resentment for the reason that in the circumstances doing so is singled out as morally right by act consequentialist standards will be incompatible with maintaining proper respect for oneself, other people, and the rules of morality only if act consequentialism is an unsound moral doctrine.

Dana Nelkin's debt release account. As already noted, the social phenomena that get classified under the heading of "forgiveness" are heterogeneous. Different accounts of forgiveness are oriented toward different bits of the phenomena. For example, contrast the spare account and the debt release model of forgiveness (Nelkin 2013; see also Warmke 2016 and Twambley 1976). On the spare account, forgiveness is like love, in that neither is directly under the control of the will.

In contrast, on a debt release model, forgiveness is not essentially a matter of feeling a certain way or being disposed to feel a certain way. Nelkin summarizes the debt release idea in these words: "In forgiving, one ceases to hold the offense against the offender, and this in turn means releasing them from a special kind of personal obligation incurred as the result of committing the wrong against one"—such as obligations to apologize, to make reparations, to atone, to pay compensation for wrongful damage inflicted. Forgiving so construed is quite similar to a promisee releasing a promisor form the obligation to do what has been promised. In forgiving, as in releasing someone from a promise, one is exercising a moral power that persons have. Like promising, forgiving (in this sense) is what used to be called a performative verb, as is signaled by the fact that one can sensibly say "I hereby forgive" just as one can say "I hereby release you from your promise to me," and when one sincerely utters these words in the presence of the right background circumstances, one thereby brings it about that the obligations owed by the person addressed to the speaker are dissolved.

Regarding forgiveness and resentment, Nelson identifies three components, or perhaps subtypes, of this negative reactive attitude: protest against a wrong done to one,[7] feelings of ill will, and the desire to be in a position of power over the offender. She suggests that on the debt release model, overcoming resentment on any of these construals is neither necessary nor sufficient for forgiveness, but there is a close association between forgiving and overcoming resentment: in standard circumstances the former will often bring about, or accompany, the latter. She also suggests that in forgiving one might relinquish the right to resent. This does not rule out sustaining boiling resentment after (debt release) forgiving, but the resenting forgiver will be internally conflicted.

One who elaborates the spare account and one who elaborates the debt release account are explicating two different concepts. At the beginning of this paper I suggested

that "pardoning" would be a preferable word to use in connection with the debt release concept, but of course the word "forgiving" is used for both. Is there more than verbal disagreement between one who advocates the spare account (or other accounts that identify the core of forgiving with overcoming of resentment) and one who advocates the debt release account (or others that make something other than overcoming of resentment central to forgiving?

There might be empirical disagreement here—one might claim the standard or ordinary meaning of forgiving is debt release (or relinquishing resentment, or something else entirely)—or background normative disagreement—one might claim the morally significant element in the social practice of forgiving is debt release (or some alternative). The latter might remind one of *persuasive definition* as introduced by Charles Stevenson (1937). Persuasive definition surely sometimes is not disreputable. One might be pursuing a sound moral agenda and find that appropriating a term used in various ways in common speech and insisting it has one correct, or truly correct use, which one then stipulates, might be useful for advancing the desirable agenda. And if one rightly has certain moral commitments, some concepts and some conceptions of concepts may be useful, and others not, for elaborating and deploying the moral commitments.

However, in the case at hand, it does not seem that the act consequentialist has a stake in favoring the spare account over the debt release model. The act consequentialist could ride along with a wide variety of proposals about what is the core idea or ideas in forgiving. Whatever the answer, the act consequentialist will have a particular line on the further issue, what makes it the case that forgiving (or trying to bring it about that forgiveness occurs) is mandatory, permissible, or required in given circumstances.

Why then favor the spare account of forgiving? I simply believe that in ordinary life, our practices involving forgiving (and apologizing) are mainly centered on feeling and emotion. If I have done something wrong to someone, and her response is to the effect that "I release you from the obligations to me that your wrongful conduct to me brought into being, but I still harbor angry resentment directed at you, and expect to sustain that hostile feeling toward you, and probably to nurture it," I do not consider myself forgiven. The simple idea to which I am appealing here is that forgiveness involves a change of heart on the part of the one who is forgiving.

Assessing forgiveness norms from the standpoint of multilevel scalar act consequentialism. All the accounts under review regard forgiving as presupposing the background thought that the person being forgiven is blameworthy for having committed a moral wrong against the victim who is doing the forgiving. The target of forgiveness has violated an obligation owed to the one who forgives. Can the act consequentialist accept this agreed background? The answer is Yes, but this complicates her response to the deontological norms woven into accounts of forgiveness.

The act consequentialist holds that we always have just one fundamental obligation, to act for the best. This obligation is not directed, owed to particular persons with whom one is interacting. However, since humans tend to be variously not well informed, not good at integrating such information as they have into decisions about what to do, and anyway not motivated to do what is impartially for the best, we need what R. Hare once called levels of moral thinking.[8] We need simple rules and norms for practical guidance, these ideally being such as to lead us toward choices of action that are on the whole closer to the choices than act consequentialism would dictate for the circumstances

we face than the choices that we would reach if we tried to follow the act consequentialist principle in each separate decision.[9] On a multilevel view, practices and norms that establish rights and duties as ordinarily understood can be good rough guides that point us toward doing what is right and also shift expectations and so change what it is right to do in particular circumstances. Can be: act consequentialist assessment might approve or disapprove of existing established practices and norms to varying degrees. On this approach, the reason-giving normativity of norms such as tell the truth and keep your promises is derivative and instrumental to achieving the best reachable outcomes. But this sort of normativity attaches to some not all practices and norms and variably to them.

Now consider the proposal that one ought to forgive only wrongdoers who repent, make reparations, apologize, and atone (or alternatively that only forgiving when these conditions hold is true forgiveness and one ought to strive only for true forgiveness). Taken as a candidate fundamental level norm, this proposal must conflict with act consequentialism, which adherents of the doctrine affirm as the sole fundamental moral principle, not one among several. But at a derivative or secondary level, the act consequentialist could sign onto this norm in the same way that she presumably signs on to ordinary norms such as tell the truth and keep your promises.

The arguments advanced in this essay are to the effect that signing on to this and other conceptions of forgiveness advanced by philosophers would be misguided. This means that whereas in many circumstances I will do best by act consequentialist lights to forego deliberating from scratch about what would best bring about good consequences on the whole when I am considering telling a lie, and instead just follow the rule against lying, it is not the case that when I am considering forgiving, I am unlikely to do better according to the standard of bringing about best consequences if I just follow some one of the various proposed norms to the effect that one should forgive if and only if the person to be forgiven truly deserves it. Instead I should consider broadly the moral value of the outcomes that will ensue depending on whether I forgive or not (try or not) and choose what will bring about the best outcome. All the forgiveness accounts canvassed here, and others as well, point to what are in many circumstances relevant considerations bearing on decisions to forgive, but each one demands narrowing the relevant range or reasons, and thereby goes wrong.

The disagreements between the act consequentialist and the advocate of one or another directive conception of forgiving that specifies when one ought to forgive will be in a way direct and obvious and in another way indirect and subtle. The consequentialist will deny that it is in itself wrong, even just pro tanto in itself wrong, to forgive the undeserving or decline to forgive the deserving. But it will always be an empirical question, and often not a clear or easily answerable one, whether at the level of secondary, derivative norms, the act consequentialist should embrace a norm for its instrumental value, in light of the consequences of internalizing it and following it in ordinary circumstances. Act consequentialist dismissal of some candidate idea about the morally appropriate conditions for forgiving should standardly be tentative and provisional, not dogmatic.

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[1] . If I am bursting with latent negative reactive attitudes toward Sally, but by dint of enormous effort of will and constant surveillance avoid the huge variety of minor stimuli that would trigger feeling responses stemming from these attitudes, we would not say I have really forgiven Sally.

[2] . Insight on what are plausible appropriateness conditions for forgiving can be gleaned by considering what are deemed to be the conditions for true or genuine apology. On apology, see Bovens 2008.

[3] Some nonconsequentialist accounts of forgiveness and of the conditions for justified forgiveness make room for inapt forgiving. See, for example, Garrard and McNaughton (2003). In contrast, Griswold argues that there are necessary and sufficient conditions for the propriety of forgiveness, and "When satisfied, these conditions qualify the offender for forgiveness and entitle the victim to forgive" (2007, at 47). According to Griswold, forgiveness at its best is afforded only when the offender's attitudes change, thus satisfying the conditions. In the terminology used in this essay, forgiving is then apt.

[4] . But of course there will be a secondary act consequentialist calculation as well; perhaps some inapt blamings of those who are excusably dragging their feet at the forgiveness effort are also called for in view of the bad consequences of refraining from inapt blaming.

[5] . It should be noted that Allais is making a point about the concept of forgiveness. She does not intend to be taking a stand as to the conditions that render forgiveness morally permissible, prohibited, or mandatory all things considered. These further questions are normative issues not to be settled by conceptual fiat. She wants to make the significant point that those victims who would forgive heinous criminal wrongdoers in the absence of any evidence of change of heart on the part of the perpetrator are not necessarily either confused about what they are doing in forgiving or morally wrong to engage in such inapt forgiving.

[6] . Allais flags and sets to the side the question of what is involved in restoring trust on the part of the forgiver, who might have dealings with the wrongdoer being forgiven in the future. She allows that forgiving someone in her sense might be compatible with not regarding the person as trustworthy in future dealings with him. What makes trust reasonable is a further issue not settled, she holds, by her proposed conception of forgiveness. And to reiterate, her account by design does not address the question, when forgiveness is justifiable all things considered.

[7] . For an account that takes resentment to be "protest against a past action that persists as a present threat," see Hieronymi (2001). Overcoming resentment on this view is only appropriate when the threat is removed. The threat is posed by the wrongdoer and maybe others continuing to leave standing the statement implicit in the act against the victim that what was done to this victim was acceptable. –But it seems one could relinquish all resentment (hostile feeling) against a wrongdoer who is unrepentant, even in the face of support for the wrongdoer's stance by others, while affirming one's judgment that what was done was wrong and unacceptable. In this way resenting and protesting against wrong can come apart, and on forward-looking views of the justification of forgiveness, should sometimes come apart.

[8] Hare (1981); also Railton (1984).

[9] . A scalar act consequentialism regards as morally important not so much whether what one does is right or wrong, but rather the amount of shortfall between the best outcome one might have brought about and the actual outcome of what one chose (here we are assuming that choice of one or another action brings about a particular outcome for certain). Acts are more or less wrong, depending on the amount of shortfall. On this

view, it is not troublesome if following a norm such as "Don't cheat!" often leads one to do wrong acts provided their shortfall is not too great and trying to guide choice directly by calculating overall consequences would do worse. But as an act consequentialism one's commitment to any secondary norm will be hedged; one should be alert to large shortfall. See Railton 1984 and also the canonical statement of utilitarianism at the beginning of chapter 2 of Mill (1979; originally published 1861).