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THE LIMITS OF FORGIVENESS AND THE MERITS OF RESENTMENT

by

Desirée Gabrielle Ramacus-Bushnell

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Philosophy

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May 2017

To my favorite philosopher, Paul W. Hammond

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I've never fully understood the romanticization of philosophy as a solitary endeavor carried out in the sometimes-excruciating process of writing alone. Looking back, it was not the noble pursuit of ideas that hooked me in. It was, and still is, the people with whom I exchanged ideas. Although I wrote this mostly in the company of cats, I am deeply grateful for the people who made it possible.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thank you, Delores – you stuck with me through so much of graduate school. I miss you every day. Thank you, Seven, for being with me now and for keeping my lap warm as I write this.

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## Abstract

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The end of this dissertation is to demonstrate why, from a moral perspective, individual agents who have suffered from deep harm ought to be empowered to hold on to their resentment, and why they must not be encouraged, forced, or coerced into reconciliation with wrongdoers. This dissertation offers a moral defense of resentment. On the view that I defend, resentment has not only prudential value—this is already claimed elsewhere—but also, under certain conditions, resentment has a distinctive *moral* value. I argue that there are cases where resentment may be normatively required *even when* other “values” are within reach, such as forgiveness. This dissertation argues that morality sometimes requires that victims of wrongdoing be given the option to continue to resent wrongdoers, and that the grounds of this lies specifically in the agent’s duty to resent.

There are at least two major consequences of my view. First, my view both directly and indirectly challenges influential existing accounts of forgiveness in Anglo-American philosophy whose valuing of forgiveness in part turns on the *devaluing* of resentment. Thus, in Chapters 1 and 4, I answer deontological theories of forgiveness which suggest that there are always overriding moral reasons for agents to forgive. In Chapter 1, I answer virtue-based theories of forgiveness that emphasize the importance of an individual agent’s striving to forgive whenever it is possible to do so. And in Chapter 3, I answer consequentialist theories of forgiveness that claim that forgiveness produces superior individual and social outcomes. The second upshot of this project is that it

provides a starting point for defending resentment in social and political contexts, especially those dealing with issues of restorative justice.

## Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
1 Moral Non-Forgiveness: Building the Intuitive Case	1
Abstract	1
Forgiveness: A Typical Lay Account	1
When Should We forgive?	5
Strong Normative Views	6
Conditional Normative Views: Unilateral Conditional Views	9
Conditional Normative Views: Bilateral Conditional Views	11
Non-normative Views	14
Withholding Forgiveness: An Intuitive Case	16
The Sandy Case	17
Competing Intuitions: Forgiveness and Resentment	20
Conclusion	26
2 Forgiveness and Resentment Defined	27
Abstract	27
Forgiveness Defined	27
The Nature of Resentment	29
Resentment Defined	29
Resentment versus Anger	32
Resentment versus Envy	34
Resentment versus Revenge	35
Between Resentment and Forgiveness	36
3 The Merits of Resentment	40
Abstract	40
The Initial Bitter Taste of Resentment	41
Ancient Perspectives on Resentment's Merit	43
Modern Perspectives on Resentment's Merit	48
Contemporary Perspectives on Resentment's Merit	59
Conclusion	62
4 When Not to Forgive, or When to Resent	64
Abstract	64
Is Forgiveness Always Right or Desirable?	64
Fittingness Conditions for Resentment	66
A Failing Case of Fittingness	70
A Passing Case of Fittingness	76
A Duty to Resent	83
5 Resentment in Agent Centered Restorative Justice	87
Abstract	87
Resentment in Social and Political Contexts	87



Restorative Justice Defined	89
Reconsidering Restorative Justice	91
References	99

## **Chapter 1: Moral Non-Forgiveness: Building the Intuitive Case**

### **Abstract**

In this chapter, I identify three general views for the morality of forgiveness: strong normative accounts, conditional normative accounts, and non-normative accounts. I show that the strongest iteration of the normative account is radically counterintuitive.

Moreover, I show that conditionally normative accounts of forgiveness' merit, while initially more intuitive, cannot fully account for our competing intuitions in favor of non-forgiveness in certain cases of harms against individuals. I conclude the chapter by suggesting that existing accounts, regardless of whether they argue for "unilateral" or "bilateral" forgiveness, are limited. Correspondingly, a revised account is needed, and in particular, I will suggest that what is needed is a unilateral and specifically "agent-centered" position, which is moral *non*-forgiveness.

### **Forgiveness: A Typical Lay Account**

The typical lay Western view of forgiveness holds it to be the case that forgiveness is, all things being equal, good. The goodness and value of forgiveness is a defining and integral characteristic of Christian faith and perhaps for this reason alone, the goodness of forgiveness is deeply embedded in the narrative of Western culture. But there are also many secular contexts where forgiveness is believed to be intrinsically good. We can see examples of this in our everyday lives. One needs only to turn on the television to find a daytime talk-show host urging a guest to forgive an estranged aunt. Or, one can browse the psychology titles in a local bookstore and find instructional self-help manuals that promise the reader the capacity to forgive (and with it, the benefits of forgiveness) in "just ten steps!" In more serious everyday contexts, judges are often

influenced by evidence of contrition when determining the sentence for a crime. In short, we can see that there is a powerful collective belief in the goodness of forgiveness, especially in the Western world.

While this lay or “folk” psychological view of forgiveness might seem simplistic at first glance, it has sophisticated rationales. One such rationale is duty. That is to say, some believe that agents should forgive out of a sense of duty. Those who believe that forgiveness is a duty may also appeal to a certain interpretation of Christianity and argue that agents have a *prima facie* obligation to forgive wrongdoers. Others might not think there is a *prima facie* duty to forgive in all cases, but instead believe that “forgiveness” is more like a character trait—it is something that we should all at least try to strive toward. On this view, forgiveness is not possible in all circumstances thus, at best, agents can only *strive* to forgive in all cases. On this view, agents should strive to cultivate an overall virtue of “forgivingness” such that “forgiving” is the kind of action one ought to take to cultivate this virtue.

Whichever way, according to these lay views, deliberately withholding forgiveness, at least when a wrongdoer has made an attempt at making amends, can amount to a moral failure, and in a few ways. First, an agent can simply fail to fulfill a *prima facie* duty to forgive. Second, an agent can fail to cultivate the virtue of being forgiving. Third, and corresponding to the second, the failure to forgive can be seen as its own distinctive kind of vice. For example, if a wrongdoer goes to great lengths to attempt to make amends for her wrong act, it might be judged petty, or mean-spirited to refuse to forgive the wrongdoer. Finally, refusing to forgive has sometimes been construed as a way of accepting one’s status as a “victim,” where such acceptance is construed as either

moral subterfuge or prudential harm. That is, accepting one's status as a "victim" is, it is said on many lay accounts, a means for those who have been wronged either to deny their own responsibility in a given situation or to justify an intentional unwillingness to move forward with one's pursuit of the good life.

The bare fact that forgiveness is taken to be inherently good (and, by implication, that non-forgiveness is taken to be undesirable or morally faulty) is neither particularly interesting nor controversial. What is interesting is the further fact that these lay views are at odds with other lay moral intuitions and beliefs. For example, Christian ethics recognizes the goodness inherent to forgiveness and accepts forgiveness as a virtue. This acceptance of forgiveness as a virtue often gets cashed out in the prescriptive requirement that Christians have a duty to forgive wrongdoers and thus, Christians should always strive toward forgiveness—even if such striving can never adequately be completed. However, this view not only assumes that it is correct always to pursue what is good, this view also does not provide agents with a way to choose between competing goods. For instance, "justice" might also be a virtue worth striving toward.

And yet, there are times when forgiveness may conflict with justice or any number of other virtues. For instance, forgiveness might conflict with justice when a crime victim is torn between pursuing retributive justice and forgiveness. In this case, the latter is in conflict with the former. Or, in another case, honesty can be taken as its own kind of virtue. A person can be implored to forgive but be torn between being truthful by admitting that she does not actually forgive and appearing to forgive because forgiveness is virtuous. Or, in another case still, someone might be torn between what Aristotle might call "proper pride" and forgiveness if someone is pressured to forgive before they are

ready to do so. In these cases, it is hard to say which virtue an agent *should* pursue and even harder to say which virtue is a more praiseworthy virtue.

Thus, the central question of this chapter: is an agent *always* morally required to forgive? Contrary to the widespread Western tendency to say “yes,” I argue here that agents are *not* always morally required to forgive. Moreover, the work done in this chapter is also in the service of a much larger ambition. Eventually, I will advance the view that resentment—not forgiveness—is not simply morally permissible; it can sometimes be morally required. There are some cases where agents not only *can* resent wrongdoers, but they *should* resent wrongdoers. Correspondingly I will argue that there are circumstances where one might be morally blameworthy for *failing* to resent a wrongdoer.

The path to this claim requires a bit of conceptual bushwhacking. Since I will eventually argue that there are cases where non-forgiveness is a requirement, I need to first show that there are cases where non-forgiveness is at least permissible. More exactly, I need to show that there is conceptual space for the weaker claim, namely, that non-forgiveness is morally permissible even if we think an agent’s overriding duty is to forgive. This is the central task of the present chapter. After that, I will need to make a case for the permissibility of resentment since resentment's permissibility is also a necessary condition for the possibility of its requirement. Once the conceptual space is created for both the permissibility of non-forgiveness and of resentment, I will then make the strong claim for the moral requirement of both non-forgiveness and resentment. The work of this argument will be divided across Chapters 2 through 4.

There are two ways I will show that withholding forgiveness is morally permissible. First, I will show that, pace the kind of Western mores I canvassed above, there is only limited support in the academic literature for the strong view that agents should always forgive wrongdoers. Second, I will present a counterexample to the claim that individuals ought to always forgive wrongdoers, which example challenges our basic intuitions about the goodness of forgiveness. This example will show that strong normative views are ultimately non-universalizable because they cannot fully account for cases where non-forgiveness is morally permissible.

To conclude the chapter, I argue that proponents of “unilateral” forgiveness do not adequately account for the ways in which “unilateral” forgiveness can actually *harm* the forgiver. On the other hand, I argue that proponents of “bilateral” or relationship-centered forgiveness are not the solution to this shortfall in existing unilateral accounts. For bilateral accounts are limited by their unanalyzed and thus undefended assumption of a relationship-centered view of the value of forgiveness, with the result that once again the forgiver is open to harm, though in this case this harm is a kind of privation. The needs of the forgiver, who was the victim of the original harm, are often supervened upon by the needs of the community or even the wrongdoer.

### **When should we forgive?**

Needless to say, forgiveness is a very broad concept but my concern here is quite narrow. Specifically, I am concerned with normative issues pertaining to forgiveness: the nature of its moral value and when (or if) we ought to forgive. Geoffrey Scarre identifies three perspectives to approach the moral value of forgiveness: duty, virtue, and utility (Scarre 2004, 37). I think this is a helpful characterization of views, but it has its

limitations since it does not adequately capture the subtle differences between possible conceptions of the normative requirements for forgiveness. For example, Margaret Holmgren offers a virtue-ethical approach to the value of forgiveness. However, her normative position has a deontic upshot: agents should *always* strive to cultivate forgiveness as an appropriate response to wrongdoing (Holmgren 2012, 66). To maintain *any* resentment is thus incompatible with her virtue-ethical approach. To be fair, Holmgren claims that the imperative to forgive is not in fact a deontological claim because “forgiveness,” as she describes it, is a general attitude rather than a discrete action. Nevertheless, her normative view is distinctly stronger than other virtue-ethical approaches (for example, see Griswold 2007).

Since there are limitations to sorting accounts according to the degree to which they conform to the three categories discussed above, I think it is more helpful to look directly at the normative conditions for forgiveness in each case. In this chapter, then, I will suspend metaphysical and conceptual questions about forgiveness and instead give an overview of forgiveness theories according to how each view would answer the following question: when should agents forgive offenders (if at all)?

### **Strong Normative Views**

The strongest normative view of when agents should pursue forgiveness can be found as a general platitude in the Western Christian cultural narrative as well as a distinct view within Christian ethics. While there may be other strong normative accounts of forgiveness’ merit, this discussion will focus specifically on Western views. In the Western canon, Bishop Butler offers one of the first modern philosophical accounts of the strong normative position in *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*. In Sermon

IX, Butler writes that we are morally required to forgive wrongdoers because a forgiving spirit is necessary, but “it cannot be imagined that we are required to love them with any peculiar kind of affection” (Butler 1958, 143). Thus, Butler seems to suggest that all agents are required to extend wrongdoers some basic level of universal goodwill but agents are not required to have any special obligations to wrongdoers above and beyond that. More contemporary Christian authors such as R. S. Downie claim that readiness to forgive is “always a virtue and unwillingness to forgive a vice” (Downie 1965, 133).

But, to reiterate, there are “strong” normative accounts without this kind of deontic structure, including in the Christian view. Some authors claim that the Christian view of forgiveness does not amount to an unqualified obligation to forgive, but is instead supererogatory for *Christian* agents only. For instance, Paul Lauritzen (1987) claims that agents who are committed to Christian beliefs are morally required to forgive their wrongdoers in all cases whereas secular agents are not obligated to forgive in all cases. On this view, the normative rules for forgiveness are not universal; they are instead contingent upon an agent’s particular belief system. Some belief systems will produce binding moral obligations to forgive wrongdoers, while other belief systems do not. Thus Lauritzen’s view is another example of a view that is normatively strong but not quite deontological since its requirements cannot be made universal for all rational agents.

And there are yet more complicated cases in the Christian tradition. For instance, some Christian accounts of duty suggest that it is not entirely possible for humans to forgive. This is because the task of judgment and forgiveness is ultimately up to God alone so, in this way, forgiveness is out of the question for human agents. On this view, the victim cannot adequately judge her wrongdoer because humans are incapable of fully



evaluating the moral character another person (Adams, 1991). Nevertheless, we can place this view in the “strong normative” category because it requires agents to do whatever is humanly possible for them to do even if it cannot equate to forgiveness proper. Even though victims cannot be required to forgive in a robust sense of the term, victims are nevertheless required to overcome and forswear retributive emotions such as resentment (Adams, 1991). In this sense, agents are not strictly required to forgive since it is literally impossible for agents to do so, but agents are still required to forswear negative affect. It is worth mentioning here that this requirement to forswear retributive emotions is a requirement that many philosophers take to be a necessary but not wholly sufficient criterion for forgiveness, a point I will return to later.

There are also strong normative secular accounts of forgiveness. As already noted, the secular virtue-ethics position on forgiveness that Margaret Holmgren adopts is very strong, despite its explicit criticism of deontological accounts of forgiveness.<sup>1</sup> On her account, to reiterate, forgiveness is *always* the appropriate response for individuals to have toward wrongdoers. Agents *must* forgive “unilaterally,” meaning that the requirement of forgiveness is not contingent upon any response (such as contrition) from the wrongdoer (Holmgren 2014, 65). And, since Holmgren claims that forgiveness is always the appropriate response to wrongdoing, resentment is also always an inappropriate response (Holmgren 2014, 66). Therefore, for Holmgren, agents are required to forgive wrongdoers *and* to refrain from resentment regardless of the wrongdoer’s response (or lack thereof).

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<sup>1</sup> Holmgren does not actually specify which versions of duty-based accounts she objects to. She seems to object to the versions like the ones discussed here, although she may be referring to a Kantian account of forgiveness. For a discussion of Kantian forgiveness, see Scarre (2004) and Sussman (2005).

Trudy Govier (1999) acknowledges that it is very difficult to ignore a wrongdoer's response and forgive anyway. Despite this, Govier's view is more like Holmgren's in that she concludes that there are no cases where a given moral agent is absolutely unforgivable:

To regard people, even cruel torturers, as absolutely unforgivable is to mistakenly infer a permanent evil in their person from the atrociousness of their deeds. It is to omit considering the possibility of moral change in such persons, regarding them as deeply and permanently evil. To do so is to ignore their human capacity for moral choice and change, which is the very foundation of human worth and dignity (Govier 1999, 71).

To be sure, Govier's normative position is not entirely clear insofar as she does not require that an agent forgive per se. Moreover, she acknowledges that there may be cases where the harm done is of such a great nature an agent may feel as though she could not forgive. For this reason, Govier permits "conditional unforgiveness." Nevertheless, on her view, agents are forbidden from absolute unforgiveness. This means that, no matter the agent's capacity or desire to forgive, agents must always acknowledge that forgiveness is at least possible and that people are, on principle, not absolutely unforgivable. While forgiveness may not be explicitly required on this account, unconditional unforgiveness is forbidden.

### **Conditional Normative Views: Unilateral Conditional Views**

There are other views that acknowledge the moral value of forgiveness without making forgiveness obligatory. For example, Espen Gamlund (2010) takes a conditional view of forgiveness. Gamlund claims that forgiveness can be obligatory but only in certain cases. Unlike Holmgren's concept of unilateral forgiveness, Gamlund claims that an agent is required to forgive if and only if the wrongdoer adequately repents and apologizes to the victim. Since Gamlund's view requires something from the wrongdoer

in addition to the victim, his view supports a “bilateral” understanding of forgiveness. In other words, bilateral views of forgiveness require the participation of *both* the victim and the wrongdoer. Unilateral forgiveness only requires that *only* the victim undergo the process of forgiveness.

Moreover, since the correct moral response to wrongdoing is contingent upon a particular response from the wrongdoer, we can categorize Gamlund’s view as conditionally normative. Jeffrie Murphy (1998) also offers a conditional normative view that acknowledges that there may be cases where the strength of the normative requirement to forgive changes depending on certain circumstances: “[Forgiveness]—when directed (for example) toward a truly repentant wrongdoer—is permissible...But if forgiveness is a virtue, then it must be that sometimes it is not merely permissible that I forgive but I *ought* to forgive and can be properly criticized if I do not” (Murphy & Hampton 1998, 29). Murphy continues to claim that the presence of repentance on the part of the wrongdoer might, in some cases, render resentment inappropriate. Murphy claims that inappropriate resentment is irrational; it makes no sense to hold resentment toward someone who is repentant and holds no ill will toward ourselves. Jean Hampton discusses another criterion for cases where forgiveness may be obligatory. Hampton writes, “[the] injunction to forgive...makes sense if it is an injunction to drop bad forms of hatred and respond to real evidence of decency on the part of the wrongdoer” (Murphy & Hampton 1998, 154). Thus, on Hampton’s view, our overall assessment of a person’s character can inform the strength of the normative requirement to forgive. Perhaps Hampton has something in mind where the wrongdoer commits a wrong act that appears to be out of character. The act does not seem to be tied to any lasting state of ill-

intentions on the part of the wrongdoer. So, in those cases, there is a greater injunction to forgive.

By contrast, utilitarian views, like Geoffrey Scarre's (2004) offer accounts that are conditioned not merely on acts or attitudes of the agents involved, but on the results of forgiveness. Agents should forgive wrongdoers if forgiveness is likely to produce more overall good than withholding it. Tara Smith also adopts a conditional normative view, and claims that forgiveness is under the jurisdiction of justice. Whether a person should forgive, on Smith's account, depends upon whether forgiveness has been earned. "This means," Smith writes, "that a person not only may forgive in appropriate circumstances. On some occasions, he should; it would be wrong not to" (Smith 1997, 39).

### **Conditional Normative Views: Bilateral Conditional Views**

Some conditional views on forgiveness incorporate the relationship between the two parties. "For us to forgive an enemy," Joseph Beatty (1970) writes, "he must, in some sense at least, be or have been a friend, even a potential friend" (Beatty 1970, 247). So, although Beatty does not explicitly state a normative view, he clearly implies one. Agent can be morally required to forgive wrongdoer only when forgiveness is in the service of some past or future relationship This highlights a major conceptual difference between unilateral forgiveness and bilateral forgiveness, namely, that "unilateral forgivers" (and those who advocate unilateral accounts) may be fundamentally mistaken about what forgiveness is or involves. For, "unilateral forgivers" do not require any kind of relationship to the wrongdoer to warrant forgiveness. Correspondingly, Beatty's

account implies a relatively small number of cases where agents might be required to forgive as compared to agents who would be required to forgive unilaterally.

However, Tara Smith argues that a relationship is created at the very moment a person harms another person (Smith 1997, 37). Thus, wrongdoing can create a relationship—however thin—between a victim and a wrongdoer and therefore fulfill any requirement that forgiveness be “bilateral”. This expands the possible number of cases where an agent might be required to forgive by expanding the conception of a “relationship” beyond who was once a friend or a potential-friend.

Charles Griswold (2007) adopts an Aristotelian virtue-ethical approach to forgiveness. “Forgiveness” in this context is an expression of a personal trait, which Griswold also calls ‘forgivingness.’ Thus, Griswold writes, “forgiveness is what forgivingness expresses” (Griswold 2007, 17). For Griswold, forgiveness is not a unilateral action, but “fundamentally an interpersonal process whose success requires action from both parties” (Griswold 2007, 212). Thus, for Griswold, there can only be a moral imperative to forgive if both people involved are committed to the process of forgiveness. Now enters the Aristotelean character of the virtue. Whether forgiveness is morally required depends partly on whether both parties share a similar conception of the good and whether both parties can exercise their practical reason and judgment to determine that forgiveness is the morally required course of action.

Since forgiveness is fundamentally bilateral on Griswold’s account, each party must satisfy conditions in order for forgiveness to be possible. Conditions for the wrongdoer include taking responsibility for the wrongdoing and expressing proper contrition (Griswold 2007, 49-51). Conditions for the victim include forswearing

revenge, moderating resentment, and letting go of resentment altogether among other things (Griswold 2007, 54). Moreover, given that Griswold identifies forgiveness as an Aristotelian virtue, there may be some instances where practical judgment would indicate that it is sometimes inappropriate to forgive. Sometimes, withholding forgiveness may be the better way to cultivate the virtue of forgivingness. Perhaps it is better to withhold forgiveness, for example, if a victim is asked to forgive too soon or if the offender did not take any of the appropriate steps toward forgiveness. For these reasons, Griswold's view, strictly speaking, represents a conditional normative view of forgiveness.

However, one should not conclude from this that bilateral-conditional approach like the one Griswold defends only fit virtue theoretic models. For example, Jean Harvey (1993) also outlines a few specific conditions that would result in a *prima facie* moral obligation to forgive, but, unlike Griswold, does not tie this duty to the willingness of both parties to engage in the forgiveness process. On Harvey's account, if the wrong is minor and the wrongdoer repudiates the act, tries to make amends, and tries to behave differently in the future, the *victim* would have an obligation to forgive a wrongdoer (Harvey 1993, 219). This is a straightforward set of criteria that would result in an obligation to forgive, so long as the wrong is minor.

There are other accounts that also use similarly straightforward criteria that result in a *prima facie* obligation to forgive. Espen Gamlund (2010) makes exceptions for agents who have suffered from grave harm. In cases such as child abuse, "the nature and gravity of the harm count as weighty reasons against forgiving. Exploiting defenseless children is something which renders resentment (or any other negative emotion or attitude) appropriate and justified despite attempts on the part of the wrongdoer to repent

and apologize” (Gamlund 2010, 665). On this view, there are some cases where forgiveness is obligatory and other cases where forgiveness is not obligatory and resentment is permissible. Judith Boss (1997) argues that, in cases of extreme harm such as with domestic abuse, forgiveness can *only* be supererogatory and can never be morally required of an agent (Boss 1997, 244).

### **Non-normative Views**

Finally, there are views that state that forgiveness is desirable because it is the prudential thing to do. I will not spend a great deal of time discussing prudential reasons to forgive since this chapter is mostly concerned with moral reasons to forgive. Briefly, then, and generally speaking, non-normative views concerning forgiveness’ merit emphasize the negative psychological effects of harboring resentment. On these accounts, agents should forgive in order to secure the psychological benefits forgiveness supplies to the agent, even though the agent may not be required to forgive on moral grounds. For example, Oliver Hallich (2013) notes that there is a considerable amount of empirical evidence that suggests that forgiveness brings a sense of psychological or emotional relief to both parties. Such views can vary in “strength.” Some suggest that it is unequivocally better for the agent’s well being to overcome negative retributive emotions (for example: Simon and Simon 2009) while others take a case-by-case approach (for example: McGary 1992). Hallich himself specifies that, while the psychological benefits count as a reason to forgive, this reason is prudential and not normative (Hallich 2013, 1009). In other words, psychological benefits provide *prima facie* reasons to forgive. These prudential reasons could be overridden by other competing prudential reasons or a moral

reason. In any event, the point is that in these cases agents forswear resentment on prudential grounds rather than on moral grounds.

Howard McGary (1992) offers another argument in support for the view that there are prudential reasons to forgive. These reasons for forgiving can be “self-pertaining” where self-pertaining reasons are reasons that show concern toward the self without being selfish. On McGary’s view, individual agents may opt to forgive wrongdoers because the psychological toll resentment takes on an agent’s life is too great. Thus, for McGary, it is not so much that there are psychological benefits that accompany forgiveness but rather forgiveness can bring about a lack of pain. An agent may thus choose to forgive in order to “to move on with her life” and that reason alone supplies a sufficient reason to forgive.

Before close, there is this final crucial observation: resentment (and related species of reactive attitudes) plays a role in an agent’s motivating reasons to forgive in prudential accounts of forgiveness. Even non-consequentialist or virtue-ethical views such as Griswold’s acknowledge that an agent may choose to relinquish resentment for psychological reasons, although such reasons do not make this choice obligatory. Although there are a few exceptions to this view, there is widespread agreement in the current literature on forgiveness that resentment is a “toxic” sentiment whose negative effects impact both the wronged party and the wrongdoer, and correspondingly, supplies moral and/or prudential reasons to *not* resent, and thus (typically) *to* forgive.<sup>2</sup> Hence, the view of resentment as a harmful sentiment often supplies the reasons for why resentment is unmerited.

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<sup>2</sup> In some accounts, such as in McGary (1992), “not resenting” conceptually entails forgiving although most other accounts of forgiveness outline more robust conditions for forgiveness than simply “not resenting” or “ceasing to resent.” Again, I take it that non-forgiveness and resentment are two separate stances an agent can adopt toward either a wrong act or a wrongdoer.



### **Withholding Forgiveness: An Intuitive Case**

As we can see from a survey of the literature on the topic, there are several conflicting answers to the question of when an agent ought to forgive. Moreover, these answers have deeper layers of conflict depending on whether each endorses a “bilateral,” relationship-centered view of forgiveness, or a “unilateral,” agent-centered view of forgiveness. In this section, I will present a case that reveals our basic moral intuitions about when (and if) agents ought to forgive.

Both scholars and “lay” people have some basic intuitions about unforgivable acts. Some think that, some actions (and hence, some actors) may be unforgivable even when certain conditions are met (such as contrition). For example, Trudy Govier (1999) acknowledges the possibility of unforgivable acts but claims that deeming certain actors “unforgivable” is to ignore their human worth and dignity—particularly if a wrongdoer goes to great lengths to demonstrate remorse or contrition. All acts are, at least in principle forgivable on this view, even if forgiveness is only achieved unilaterally.

However, this argument against unilateral accounts faces its own distinctive objection, namely, that it turns victims into wrongdoers by asserting that victims are dehumanizing wrongdoers if they choose to indefinitely withhold forgiveness. Moreover, as I will show, this objection points to a deeper complaint. Normatively strong unilateral views of forgiveness struggle to make good on their promise of being an authentically “agent-centered.” For there are cases where it is, all things being equal, best for the agent—that is, the victim—to withhold forgiveness. Normatively strong bilateral accounts are different in this regard since they generally attempt to (re)establish moral

equality between both the victim and the offender. And yet, I will also argue, bilateral views also risk exacerbating a victim's suffering because they discount the victim's needs and capacity to forgive. Bilateral views end up elevating the needs of the wrongdoer over the needs of the victim. Thus, the efficacy of bilateral forgiveness is contingent upon the willingness of the wrongdoer to participate in the forgiveness process. On most of these accounts, if a wrongdoer is willing to participate in the process of forgiveness, but the victim is not, then these accounts hold the victim morally culpable for withholding forgiveness. In short, I will argue that exiting unilateral and bilateral views both face *prima facie* objections of unfair treatment of victims. To do this, I will first build an intuitive account that shows the permissibility of non-forgiveness. I will follow that with an account of the merits of resentment in Chapter 3 and the conditions for when agents have a moral obligation to resent in Chapter 4. The implication is that a more authentically agent-centered approach to withholding forgiveness is needed.

So, consider now the following case discussed by Jeanne Shaffer, a clinical psychologist in *Forgiving and Not Forgiving*.

### **The Sandy Case**

Throughout Sandy's childhood, Sandy suffered from extreme abuse by her older brother on a recurring basis. Her brother had violently abused her sexually by penetrating her anally with a screwdriver and abused her physically by deliberately setting her on fire. Adding to Sandy's suffering, her parents refused to openly acknowledge her brother's routine abuse. Instead, they insisted that she submit to his behavior because her brother's actions were done "out of love" and it was his way of "trying to be friends." As a child, Sandy was physically trapped by the fact that she was forced to live with her violent

brother. She was also psychologically trapped by her parents cajoling her to accept her brother's acts of abuse as acts of love. For many years, Sandy continued to abide by her parent's wishes that she accept her brother's behavior.

Eventually, when she turned 35, she decided that she no longer wanted to speak to her brother. In response to her decision, her parents became angry with her, accused her of destroying the family, and began to pressure her to forgive and forget what happened. In an attempt to resolve the dispute with her parents, Sandy sent her brother a letter stating that she will start speaking to him if he acknowledges what he had done to her. He replied to her letter by saying that what happened between the two of them was normal sibling behavior and he was willing to let bygones be bygones if she would just let the situation go. Sandy never spoke to her brother after he sent her his reply.

Although Sandy's refusal to speak to or forgive her brother continued to cause rifts within the family, she believed her decision to withhold forgiveness to be morally just and she stood by her decision on those grounds. In her words, her brother "never changed, never grew, and just found new ways to feel entitled...it would be wrong not to hold him responsible for being an undeveloped person now; I would be colluding in creating a false reality, which was what allowed me to be violated in the first place."

Sandy's story captures an intuition we have about *non-forgiveness*, which intuition flatly contradicts those competing "lay" intuitions we canvassed about the universal value of forgiveness or any related categorical duty to forgive. And most of us who find some version of the "lay" view of forgiveness appealing would *also* be reticent to blame Sandy for her refusal to forgive her brother. For most us, we accept that there are cases, like Sandy's, where the wrong an agent suffers makes forgiveness seem

inappropriate or even impossible. Few of us think it obviously wrong if a woman resents her rapist. We do not *expect* a parent to forgive the murderer of their child. We do not *demand* that a widow forgive a drunk driver for killing his spouse.

We might object that these questions are missing a more important point: whatever there is to say about forgiveness as a requirement to (re)establish a moral relationship, forgiveness is fundamentally a way of showing “self-respect” (Holmgren 2012, 59). So, refusing to forgive is a way of *not* respecting oneself. This kind of claim may be easy to justify in the abstract, but it does not hold up to scrutiny when applied to a case like Sandy’s. It simply does not seem to be the case that Sandy is, in any way, disrespecting herself by withholding forgiveness. In fact, Sandy’s stance of non-forgiveness is fundamentally self-preserving and self-respecting. To Sandy, her refusal to forgive represents a moral demand to not be violated or abused. Although forgiveness is conceptually distinct from “condoning” or “pardoning,” nevertheless, from Sandy’s point of view, forgiving her brother for his actions would be tantamount to some kind of permission for his behavior.

Sandy does not view her brother’s actions as permissible and she aims to hold her brother responsible for his actions. Her refusal to forgive reflected a general moral view that she ought not have been treated the way she was treated. Moreover, Sandy also seems to have a prudential reason for withholding forgiveness. Refusing to forgive her brother also helped Sandy “preserve the truth” of her experience so that she could protect herself from further harm. If the only reason to forgive in a case like this is on moral grounds—that is, on a supervening duty to forgive—that obligation to forgive her brother overrides whatever obligations she has to herself (assuming that forgiveness is *not* the

only way to show self-respect). However, Sandy has a clearly articulated moral reason for non-forgiveness: she feels that withholding forgiveness is a way to hold her brother morally accountable for his wrongdoings, even when all third parties in her life accepted his behavior. Sandy's case shows us that, despite the common praise of forgiveness, and despite the plausibility we might find in views that make forgiveness a virtue or duty, we can also now see some strong competing intuitions that there are, at least some cases, where there are good moral and prudential reasons to withhold forgiveness.

### **Competing Intuitions: Forgiveness and Resentment**

Do our competing intuitions in favor of forgiveness and against forgiveness amount to a "stalemate" between a moral duty to forgive and the moral reasons we sometimes accept for a victim's refusing to do so? In cases like Sandy's, there is good reason to accept that a refusal to forgive on moral grounds overrides a duty to forgive. As Judith Boss writes, "[t]o suggest that victims have a duty to forgive their abusers implies that victims owe abusers something. To claim that a duty or debt to someone can stem from our own prior degradation or deprivation is like saying we are indebted to someone who robbed us and then, feeling remorse, decides to return the stolen goods" (Boss 1997, 243). Boss suggests that the requirement to forgive in this context is almost nonsensical because it is impossible to separate a duty to forgive from the circumstance of wrongdoing.

Some authors, such as Govier, go so far as to suggest that agents who unconditionally withhold forgiveness, in effect, disrespect the human worth and dignity of the wrongdoer. However, this is also an unreasonable interpretation of what it means to establish moral equality between two persons. Forbidding agents from unconditionally

withholding forgiveness is, in essence, a way of turning a victim into a wrongdoer if an agent decides to indefinitely refuse to forgive a wrongdoer. Therefore, forbidding victims from withholding forgiveness seems to also disrespect the victim's dignity.

In this particular case, the view that Sandy is wrong to withhold forgiveness from her brother is virtually indistinguishable from the moral stance adopted by her parents. Sandy's parents willfully did nothing to intervene in the situation on her behalf, yet they were among the first to urge Sandy to forgive her brother, for his sake and for the sake of the family. The idea that Sandy's refusal to forgive her could "dehumanize" him is strange, particularly in light of the fact that, by writing him a letter, she fully acknowledged that he might have been capable of change or contrition. Sandy decided to adopt a stance of unconditional non-forgiveness only when her brother showed no contrition or acknowledgement of his wrongdoing.

Sandy's attitude toward her own refusal to forgive suggests that she had what philosophers like Charles Griswold call "warranted resentment." For Griswold, cases where an agent has warranted resentment are cases where an agent's resentment or non-forgiveness is permissible. Cases where resentment is "warranted" are cases where resentment has 1) moral content that is universalizable and 2) the agent has a specific relationship to that moral demand.

In other words, the wrong act that prompted an agent's resentment is not only an act that should not be done from an objective moral perspective, but the agent's resentment *also* contains the demand that the wrong act should not have been done *to the agent* from the agent's perspective (Griswold 2007, 45). "Resentment," Griswold writes, "embodies the demand that the wrong-doer show the proper respect, and be accountable

for not having done so. Implicitly then, it not only expresses the view that the wrong-doer is an accountable being, but even shows a certain respect toward the wrong-doer” (Griswold 2007, 46).

What “warranted resentment” ultimately amounts to, then, is a set of permissibility conditions for when it is acceptable to withhold forgiveness: is the wrong act in question the kind of act that, generally speaking, should not be done? Is the agent’s resentment reflective of this general moral stance? If the answer is “yes” to these questions, then, on this view, it seems that resentment can be a means to demand that a wrong-doer show proper respect to the agent. However, resentment is not the only route to these goals since Griswold writes that forgiveness can also accomplish these goals and more: “[forgiveness] expresses that respect, and recognition of accountability, by way of a remarkable transformation on the part of inured and injurer alike” (Griswold 2007, 46).

Be that as it may, the concept of “warranted resentment” raises a natural question that will help illuminate our competing intuitions about forgiveness and non-forgiveness. If it is the case that resentment can sometimes be warranted, how can the intuitive view discussed at the outset of this chapter that forgiveness is *always* good be true? If forgiveness is a duty or normatively required in all cases, we *must* always attempt to forgive. Yet, for the reasons discussed above, Sandy is perfectly justified in refusing to forgive her brother and her non-forgiveness is (at the very least) morally permissible. As one can see, cases like Sandy’s easily expose the limits of duty-based or strong normative accounts of forgiveness.

One of the reasons our intuitions against this view are so strong in Sandy’s case is because her refusal to forgive has moral content of its own. It is not that Sandy is a bitter,

vengeful person. Rather, she feels that forgiving her brother would violate her duty to herself. If there is any legitimacy to Sandy's reasoning, it shows that the strongest iterations of normative views of forgiveness are mistaken. Duties to forgive can be overridden when the refusal to forgive is itself a moral act. But what of conditional accounts of forgiveness? Might it still not be true that forgiveness is something we should strive or aim at, all things being equal?

It is admittedly harder to show where these accounts go astray. After all, cultivating a virtue of forgivingness, for instance, does not entail that one must *always* forgive. A true virtue account of forgiveness (and even some strong normative views like Gamlund's) admit that there may be some cases, perhaps like Sandy's, where (again, all things being equal), it would be better to withhold forgiveness. As we have seen, Griswold—the most prominent advocate of the virtue view—points out that there are at least two loosely connected moral reasons to withhold forgiveness and resent one's wrongdoer.

First, on his view, resentment can be a way of holding the wrongdoer accountable for his misdeeds in cases where the other party renders it impossible to reconcile. Contrary to Govier's claim, properly warranted resentment can even be a way of showing respect toward a wrongdoer's person precisely because it assumes that the wrongdoer is in some way capable of meaningful change (Griswold 2007, 46). However, Griswold implies that even if we can have reasons to resent, resentment is not an *ideal* response. This is because forgiveness can serve the same function of holding wrongdoers accountable and expressing respect while *also* bringing about positive transformation on both sides.



In other words, even if withholding forgiveness has its benefits (consider Sandy's reasons for withholding forgiveness), Griswold claims that aiming at forgiveness (regardless of whether the wronged "successfully" forgives at the end of the day) can do a *better* job of holding wrongdoers accountable and expressing respect than resentment, *and* forgiveness accomplishes the additional "good" of bringing about some kind of transformation in the relationship between the two parties that resentment cannot produce. On Griswold's account, mutual transformation is possible due to the "bilateral dimension" of forgiveness that depends on mutual sympathy and understanding of the other in addition to a shared sense of humanity.

Nevertheless, this view is mistaken in at least one crucial respect, namely, that forgiveness is qualitatively always better than non-forgiveness. We do have intuitions against the "virtuous forgiver," but they are subtler. Non-forgiveness may still be permissible *even if* (a) forgiveness is conditional on wrongdoer contrition (broadly construed) and (b) the wrongdoer meets those conditions. So, for example, I will show that even if Sandy's brother had been willing to acknowledge his wrongs *and* had expressed respect for her person, still it would be permissible for Sandy to withhold forgiveness.

To show this, let us suppose that Sandy's brother *does* repent for his actions. Let us further grant that his repentance fulfills the subsidiary goals of attempting to forgive, namely that of "holding responsible" and "expressing respect." And, for the sake of argument, let us grant that Griswold is right both about the conditions of such transformation and that this end provides a moral reason to aim at forgiveness. Still, I argue that an agent is entitled to withhold forgiveness even in these cases. This is because

calling for forgiveness—even for the “virtuous forgiver”—is a kind of category mistake. One of the possible goals of forgiveness, at least as far as Beatty and Griswold are concerned, is the restoration of relationships; not just individual agents.

So, Holmgren is correct to focus our concern on individual agents in the context of wrongdoing but her account goes astray by pinning this focus on forgiveness. This is because forgiveness ultimately describes a “bilateral” relationship—“unilateral” forgiveness is a modification of the original concept. In any case, what is morally and prudentially good for the relationship between Sandy and her brother is a completely separate question from what is prudentially good for Sandy and whether or not Sandy is morally correct in withholding forgiveness. The fact that some normative evaluations of Sandy’s decision to withhold forgiveness could change on the condition of her brother’s contrition is evidence of the fact that Sally’s interests and her brother’s interests are often conflated with one another.

If our concern in matters of wrongdoing is with what is good for the agent, then agents need to be permitted to withhold forgiveness. Duties to forgive that override an agent’s obligation to the self are ultimately relationship-centered. That is to say, they have their justification in restoring moral order to fractured relationships (or, fulfilling some kind of theological obligation as in the case of Christian accounts of forgiveness). This means that both strong and weak versions of the normative views on forgiveness seek to restore the relationship between the wronged and the wrongdoer *even if* that “restoration” is at the emotional or psychological expense of the individual agent.

Sandy’s case shows just how misguided this can be because it is precisely in her brother’s interest (and even in her family’s interest) that she forgive even though it

directly conflicts with her own interests. Sandy's relationship with her brother is characterized by her continual degradation at his hands and her family's implicit condoning of his behavior. Asking Sandy to forgive is effectively asking her to continue to place her needs and desires beneath that of her brother's which was the condition for the possibility of her abuse in the first place. To say that Sandy violates a moral imperative to forgive by withholding forgiveness is essentially saying that, in being a victim of wrongdoing, Sandy herself is a wrong-doer and she ought to be blamed for failing to attempt to forgive her brother. This kind of reasoning should be rejected.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, my central aim was to show that non-forgiveness is morally permissible. While there are views in the current literature that suggest that non-forgiveness is morally permissible given certain conditions (such as lack of contrition from the wrongdoer), I have shown through the discussion of Sandy's case that these conditions are ultimately unfair to the agent because it makes our moral assessment of the agent's character and actions completely contingent on the will of a wrongdoer. Blaming agents for withholding forgiveness on moral grounds not only undermines an agent's self-respect, but it also suggests that victims of severe wrongdoings are themselves morally incorrect for being victims.

After a brief discussion about the nature of resentment itself in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 will focus on the merits of resentment. This will include addressing questions about whether the active resentment of a wrongdoer can be permissible and the circumstances under which resentment has merit.

## Chapter 2: Forgiveness and Resentment Defined

### Abstract

In this chapter, I will offer working definitions of forgiveness and resentment. This project is fundamentally concerned with the question of merited resentment and the limitations of forgiveness. That said, it is beyond the scope of my discussion to offer robust accounts of either forgiveness or resentment. Correspondingly, the aim of this chapter is not to defend a particular conception of either of these. Rather, the aim is only to clarify the terms of my own discussion.

### Forgiveness Defined

What is forgiveness? And what is resentment? These are natural questions to ask, given the ambitions of my project. However, I am ultimately not interested in defending a particular conception of forgiveness and resentment, and thus I will be happy to trade on going views of these topics. My argument assumes a definition of forgiveness that is relatively common among contemporary Anglo-American philosophers who write on forgiveness. Specifically, I assume that forgiveness either consists in or requires overcoming resentment or some similar negative reactive attitude. It would be too much to accomplish in this project to demonstrate the compatibility of my view with all other views of forgiveness and resentment. What I am responding to, then, is a *general* trend in Anglo-American philosophical literature on forgiveness and resentment—not every conceivable view of forgiveness and resentment.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There are, of course, other views represented in this area of the literature that go against the general trend of requiring that agents overcome resentment. For instance, Owen Ware (2014) claims that forgiving involves ceasing to identify the offender with the wrongdoing is the necessary condition of forgiveness (as opposed to relinquishing negative affect).

The definition of forgiveness as the “forswearing of resentment” is often attributed to Bishop Butler, who wrote that resentment “destroys our natural benevolence toward [others], it is excessive, and becomes malice or revenge. The command to prevent its having this effect, i.e., to forgive injuries, is the same as to love our enemies; because that love is always supposed, unless destroyed by resentment” (Butler 1958, 141). Charles Griswold offers a more contemporary interpretation of Butler. He writes that forgiveness is possible when there is a commitment to the “continued abatement” of resentment (Griswold 2007, 43). For Griswold, resentment need not be completely forsworn right off the bat, even though the ultimate goal is to completely let go of resentment. Alternatively, Margret Holmgren describes the process of forgiveness as a “change of heart in which an initial attitude of resentment is overcome and replaced with a positive attitude toward the offender” (Holmgren 2012, 32). Jeffrie Murphy elaborates on this claim by stating that, for forgiveness to occur, resentment must be given up on moral grounds (Murphy 1990, 24). Thus, for Murphy, merely “overcoming” resentment will not suffice for forgiveness. Instead, overcoming resentment must occur for certain kinds of reasons in order for it to have a relationship to forgiveness.

These are just a few of the extant definitions of forgiveness. But they suffice for pointing out some of the key features that most accounts of forgiveness have in common. Although there are subtle differences between the various definitions discussed in the literature, they nevertheless share some family resemblance to one another. In each case, the “victim” decides to acknowledge yet move past a wrong act committed by the other party. To forgive, the wronged party must do something to decrease or otherwise moderate resentment or other hostile reactive attitudes or emotions.

This may seem too general a definition. But, again, my aim is not to defend a particular view of forgiveness. Instead, my aim is to defend a view about the *merit* of resentment, which should stand independent of any particular account of forgiveness. For this reason, my account will only indirectly challenge particular accounts of forgiveness (granted, it will challenge some views necessarily, given that some accounts of forgiveness assert or imply an unconditional *demerit* of resentment).

### **The Nature of Resentment**

The end goal of this project is to defend the prudential and moral value of resentment. For this reason, I remain neutral about any particular details concerning the metaphysics and phenomenology of resentment. In other words, my discussion in this chapter is not an attempt to defend any particular descriptive account of resentment or settle any disputes about its nature. Whether resentment can best be described as a cognitive judgment, a reactive attitude, an emotional state, or some mixture thereof is superfluous to my ultimate goal in this project. My complete account of resentment's value only requires a rough and ready notion of the concept, which this section will provide. If there appears to be any allegiance to any one account of resentment, it is only reflective of tendencies in the literature discussed herein. What little I have to say about the nature of resentment itself will fall out naturally from the critical analysis in later chapters.

A final clarification: my discussion in this project is narrow in scope insofar as it is restricted to resentment as a reactive attitude, that is, as an emotion felt in response to an injury. Although individuals are capable of holding on to a specific feeling of resentment for a prolonged period of time, my discussion here excludes resentment as a

general disposition or character trait. Furthermore, as a reactive attitude or emotion, resentment is often confused with other emotions, reactive attitudes, or mental states (such as regret). For this reason, I will begin with a general account of resentment and then follow that account by discussing the difference between resentment and anger, revenge, or envy.

### **Resentment Defined**

Perhaps the most well-known historical account of resentment is from Joseph Butler's *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*. In these sermons, Butler distinguishes between two species of resentment: "hasty and sudden" anger and "settled and deliberate" anger. "The former is called anger, and often *passion*: which, though a general word, is frequently appropriated and confined to the particular feeling, sudden anger, as distinct from deliberate resentment, malice and revenge" (Butler 1958, 123). Though Butler recognizes resentment as a type of anger, for simplicity's sake, I will simply refer to the "hasty and sudden" species of anger simply as "anger" and "settled and deliberate" anger as "resentment." Butler goes on to say that the passionate feeling of anger is purely instinctual (Butler 1958, 124). Resentment is distinguished by the fact that it cannot occur without the occurrence of a wrong act or injustice (Butler 1958, 125).

Butler describes resentment as a "weapon, put into our hands by nature, against injury, injustice, and cruelty" (Butler 1958, 127). The inclusion of cruelty suggests that resentment is not just a response to feeling slighted in some way, but it is a response to a *moral* injury. This is, in part, how resentment can be distinguished from other emotions like anger or envy. Anger or envy can be experienced as responses to non-morally "laden" events such as getting a flat tire, being passed over for a raise, or coveting a

neighbor's new vehicle. Finally, Butler thinks resentment manifests as a "settled" emotion. Unlike anger, it does not grip its subject suddenly. It often slowly manifests over time.

The distinction between resentment as a "settled" emotion and anger as "sudden" one corresponds to the common contemporary distinction between resentment as "cool" and anger as "hot". Aaron Ben-Ze'ev agrees that resentment is a "long term" emotion (Ben-Ze'ev 2001, 153). Resentment is not accompanied by an "urge to attack." In this way, we could say that resentment is a cold emotion. Ben-Ze'ev likens resentment to an emotional protest against something perceived as morally unjust. Resentment is not an unqualified negative reaction to any given state of affairs. The proper "object" or target of resentment is typically injustice of some kind.

From this, it is clear that resentment has a unique evaluative component. Alice McLachlan describes resentment as a response to a moral infraction; it is an emotional way to assign blame for a particular action. D'Arms and Jacobson write that resentment is a kind of "cognitive sharpening" of anger (D'Arms and Jacobson, 2000). This means that resentment is an "affective-laden" mental state that involves a particular belief or thought. In the case of resentment, the belief or thought could be the judgment that one has been wronged in some way. This judgment is the evaluative component of the affective state. As Rawls explains in *A Theory of Justice*, "guilt, resentment, and indignation invoke a concept of right" (Rawls 1999, 423) so that when we feel resentment, we are also implicitly claiming that we ought not have been treated the way we were treated. Rawls cautions that, "those who express resentment must be prepared to show why certain institutions are unjust or how others have injured them" (Rawls 1999,



467). Part of the unique character of resentment is that the affective state contains this information in the form of a blaming judgment against whatever individual or institution committed the wrong act.

Given Rawls' statement that resentment invokes a concept of right, it might seem useful to be able to point to the presence of resentment as an indicator of harm. Despite this, resentment has a bad reputation and most people need to be convinced of its merit – whether prudential or moral. Resentment has a longstanding negative connotation. Agents are often blamed for feeling resentment, even if their resentment is a reaction to a moral wrong. Similarly, “resentful” is not a commonly appreciated character trait. Thus, there is some tension between philosophical views of resentment and its utility and everyday views of resentment. Much of this tension stems from common conflation of resentment with other similar or “neighboring” affects and behaviors. For this reason, it will be helpful to further clarify these distinctions.

### **Resentment versus Anger**

Resentment can be confused with similar affects like vengeance, anger, malice, envy, and rage. As we have seen, though, resentment is unique from these other affects in that it is 1) a settled emotion and 2) it contains a judgment that one has been morally wronged. Although sudden rage might slowly give way into resentment over time, it is a mistake to think that rage and resentment are one in the same affect. Since some of the neighboring affects above are often accompanied by or followed by resentment, resentment can easily be confused with anger, envy, or revenge.

Butler's characterization of resentment as a species of anger is helpful in teasing out the difference between resentment and anger. Even though, as Butler suggests,

resentment is a “species” of anger, it is not synonymous with anger. As we have already seen, anger is an immediate response to an unjustified harm (Ben-Ze'ev 2001, 152). It comes on suddenly and thus “hot.” Though anger is phenomenologically intense, it is also fleeting. That anger is quick to come on and quick to fade is a major point of distinction between the two sentiments. Lingering resentment, or what might be colloquially referred to as something like a “grudge,” has a very different phenomenological character than anger. Anger sears while resentment simmers.

Anger is often confused with resentment because, like resentment, anger can still be a felt response to personal insult. In this way, anger can also have evaluative content. Anger can be a way of saying that “I oughtn’t have been treated that way.” However, unlike resentment, anger is not always a reaction to a *moral* slight. This is not to say that anger can never contain *normative* evaluations. In fact, anger is quite often normative insofar as it can express an agent’s view of how the world *should be*. For example, people might feel angry when their favorite sports team loses a game, when they receive parking tickets, and when they inadvertently step in gum on the sidewalk. In these cases, we can tease out the normative assumptions behind these instances of anger. Each of these cases reveals an implicit normative judgment about how the world ought to be (e.g., “My team should always win,” or “People ought to put their gum in the trash.”). These are not always judgments we are aware of having, but our anger betrays our views about how things ought to be.

Despite this, none of these normative judgments are obviously *moral* judgments. The Memphis Grizzlies might disappoint or even infuriate some fans when they lose a game, but no reasonable person would say that the Grizzlies acted in an *immoral* way by

losing. Hence, evaluative judgments can contain normative content without moral content. By that same token, some judgments can be both normative and moral. Take, for example, the following judgment: “Ben’s ex shouldn’t have slashed his tires.” Such a statement not only contains an expression about how the world ought to be (i.e., people should generally refrain from slashing tires) but it also holds an agent accountable for their behavior and assigns that person moral blame for their actions (i.e., Ben’s ex). Furthermore, in response to this slight, Ben could plausibly feel *both* anger and resentment. He could feel anger upon immediately walking to his garage and discovering his new flat tires and feel resentment toward his ex for slashing them when he goes to replace the tires. In feeling these affects, Ben’s anger and resentment are directed at a particular person in a way that is both moral and normative.

Admittedly, there are cases where it may be contentious whether a judgment is moral or “merely” normative (i.e., non-moral normative judgment). But for my purposes, I am content to rely on basic intuitions, namely, that in most cases a rough and ready difference exists between moral judgments and merely normative judgments. Correspondingly, a robust account of this difference is not needed to show that anger and resentment can coexist in cases like Ben’s. Anger *can* be an evaluative affect insofar as it can contain a judgment. However, in order for the affect to be called “resentment,” the judgment in question must also be moral and not *merely* normative.

### **Resentment versus Envy**

Envy is another affect where it is necessary to separate the moral content from either normative content or evaluative content. Some authors, such as Marguerite La Caze (2011), claim that both resentment and envy are moral emotions. However, envy

does not obviously always have a moral “object” as its target. Envy concerns a “negative evaluation of our undeserved inferiority” (Ben-Ze’ev 2001, 151). Although the affect contains an evaluative judgment, as with the case of anger, envy’s evaluation is not necessarily moral. It does not necessarily contain any normative content about how people ought to be treated or about how the world ought to be (Ben-Ze’ev 2001, 152). Envy can refer to a general state of affairs without having a moral agent as its object. This means that, like anger and resentment, envy can have normative content. Envy can point to an agent’s judgment of how a given state of affairs *ought to be*. Envy of a neighbor’s new vehicle can express the judgment that “it is unfair that she has a new car and I don’t.” We might have the evaluative judgment that it is bad for us that we do not have a new car. However, our neighbor’s possession of a new vehicle is typically a non-moral action. So, even when we think that it is bad for us that we do not have a new car, we are not making a moral claim. Thus, envy can betray implicit claims we might make about whether certain states of affairs should be the case or are good for us, but it does not always reveal a *moral* claim. As Rawls notes, unlike resentment, envy is not a moral feeling – “no moral principle need be cited in its explanation” (Rawls 1999, 467).

### **Resentment versus Revenge**

Agents are often blamed for feeling resentful when agents should really be blamed for acting upon the desire for revenge or vengeance. Feeling resentment does not automatically entail seeking revenge. Brian Rosebury defines revenge as “any deliberate injurious act against another person which is motivated by resentment of an injurious act or acts performed by that other person against the revenger, or against some other person or persons whose injury the revenger resents” (Rosebury 2009, 4). Thus, the distinction

between resentment and revenge is quite straightforward. Revenge is an action. And certainly resentment can supply the motivation for revenge. Still, agents are often incorrectly blamed for *feeling* resentful when blame should be more appropriately placed on the agent's vengeful *action*. As discussed above, the feeling of resentment by itself can serve as an indication that an agent has been morally wronged in some way. Even so, feeling resentment does not entail vengeful action.

### **Between Resentment and Forgiveness**

Having discussed a general sketch of some definitions of forgiveness and resentment, let us now reconsider the relationship between them. As already noted, despite disagreements about the exact nature of forgiveness, there is widespread agreement that agents must attempt to limit or control their resentment. One important point of disagreement in the literature with respect to the definition of forgiveness is whether forswearing resentment by itself suffices for or essentially amounts to forgiveness. Howard McGary, for example, accepts a definition along these lines. For McGary, forgiveness *just is* forswearing all resentment toward the wrongdoer. By contrast, other accounts of forgiveness identify the forswearing of resentment as one necessary component of the forgiveness process among others (Murphy 1982; Murphy & Hampton 1988; Griswold 2007). Both accounts of forgiveness include the agent's *moderation* of resentment as a necessary (if not sufficient) component to forgiveness.

In some accounts, except those that acknowledge forgiveness as an unconditional duty, the perceived dangers of resentment (as opposed to the goodness of forgiveness) supply a warrant for the claim that a good or virtuous agent should try to forgive (McGary 1992). In addition to, or even in the absence of, possible moral reasons to

foreswear resentment, some philosophers point out that there are also strong prudential reasons for an agent to foreswear resentment (McGary 1992; Pettigrove 2012; Hallich 2013). Correspondingly, there are a number of pop psychology and self-help books that praise the prudential value of forgiveness (Simon and Simon 2009; Luskin 2010; Tipping 2010; Enright 2012). Both philosophers and non-philosophers alike cite the destructive nature of vindictive emotions such as resentment and claim that agents who forgive can gain certain psychological benefits to their health and well-being should they choose to forgive.

In short, despite the ways that resentment can be distinguished from other harmful negative reactive attitudes and behaviors, there seems to be a tacit agreement in both philosophical and non-philosophical literature that, all things being equal, forgiveness is preferable to resentment. Here are a few common reasons to forgive:

- One ought to always pursue forgiveness, full stop. There are a few iterations of the “dutiful forgiver” view: a platitude in the Western Christian cultural narrative, a view within Christian ethics, deontological claims for forgiveness’ merit, and any claims that appeal to forgiveness as an intrinsic value would fall under this category.
- Forgiveness is desirable because it is morally correct. Usually, this view is construed in consequentialist terms. The modern historical *locus classicus* of the consequentialist formulation is Bishop Butler; but the view has a number of contemporary variations (Beatty 1970; Murphy & Hampton, 1998). “Consequentialist forgivers” claim that resentment produces worse outcomes (more harm) for all involved than forgiveness. But there are also

non-consequentialist, Aristotelian views that argue that forgiveness is a virtue (Griswold 2007; Downie 1965). “Virtuous forgivers” claim that virtuous agents should strive to forgive whenever their good judgment dictates that they ought to forgive, where, as we saw, this judgment turns on a consideration of certain conditions.

- Forgiveness is desirable because it is the prudential thing to do. “Prudent forgivers” emphasize the negative psychological effects of harboring resentment on the agent. Although this view is not unique in that respect, it emphasizes the negative effects resentment has on the agent alone, as opposed to both the agent and the wrongdoer (McGary 1992; Pettigrove 2012; Hallich 2013; Simon and Simon 2009; Luskin 2010; Tipping 2010; Enright 2012). All other things being equal, one should forgive on this view because resentment is uniquely bad for the agent and any negative effect resentment has on others is only a secondary reason to forgive.

Crucially, in all these views except the first, resentment (or a related species of reactive attitude) and its detrimental effects play a role in an agent’s motivating reasons to forgive. Even non-consequentialist views such as Griswold’s acknowledge that an agent may choose to relinquish resentment for psychological reasons, although such reasons do not make this choice obligatory on such accounts. Although there are a few exceptions to this view, there is widespread agreement in the current literature on forgiveness that resentment is a “toxic” sentiment whose negative effects impact both the wronged party and the wrongdoer. These negative effects supply both the moral and/or prudential

reasons to *not* resent, and thus (typically) *to* forgive.<sup>2</sup> Rightly or wrongly, the view of resentment as a harmful sentiment often supplies the reasons for why resentment is unmerited.

It is worthwhile reiterating at this point that my dispute is not over the definitions of these terms – forgiveness and resentment – but rather the normative requirements surrounding when one ought to forgive versus when one ought to resent. Thus in the discussion that follows, I will assume a “status quo” account of forgiveness and resentment in the philosophical literature. Specifically, I take it that resentment is not a character trait, disposition, or inclination. Resentment is a response to events that pose a threat or actual harm to an agent (or persons the agent has a special relationship with). An agent’s experience of resentment expresses or contains a moral judgment that the agent has been wronged. And if an agent chooses to forgive, the agent must commit herself to mediating resentment in some way.

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<sup>2</sup> In some accounts, such as in McGary (1992), “not resenting” conceptually entails forgiving although most other accounts of forgiveness outline more robust conditions for forgiveness than simply “not resenting” or “ceasing to resent.”



### Chapter 3: The Merits of Resentment

#### Abstract

In this chapter, I explore existing claims in the literature about the merit of resentment. By “merit,” I mean to suggest that resentment can have prudential valuation like “advantages” or “benefits” or normative valuation like “worthiness” or “praiseworthiness.” Resentment can have merit in both of these ways as well. The primary way that it will be discussed in this chapter, however, is in the former sense; that of advantages or benefits. The normative aspect of resentment will be discussed in the following chapter. If there is *any* merit to resentment, even if that merit is only prudential, this already constitutes a challenge, however weak, to the dutiful forgiver’s thinking that forgiveness is *always* called for. This also, albeit indirectly, challenges the virtuous forgiver’s thinking that forgiveness (and with it, the forswearing of resentment) is *ideally* called for.

There are two upshots to my discussion in this chapter. First, in addition to addressing the virtue-based and the duty-based views of the value of forgiveness, this chapter also addresses the consequentialist claim that forgiveness produces superior individual and social outcomes. If it is the case that there are also individual and social merits to resentment—and there is ample suggestion in the literature that this is indeed the case—then the consequentialist case for forgiveness loses some of its steam as there may be circumstances where forgiveness does not produce the best outcomes.

Second, the defense of the plausibility of resentment’s merit will create the necessary conceptual space for a two-pronged claim that I will make in Chapters 4 and 5, namely, that (1) resentment may be both permissible *and* required for the agent and (2) if

this is correct, then the current approach to restorative justice must be modified in light of an agent's duty to resent. This chapter is intended to supply the justification for the first prong of claim (1): that resentment is permissible. Thus, the aim in this chapter is to give a rough account of the permissibility of resentment. One upshot of this account is that resentment can also have prudential value.

### **The Initial Bitter Taste of Resentment**

Resentment is a prickly sentiment. Not only is it uncomfortable to experience within ourselves, we tend to condemn it in others. We urge forgiveness in part because we have an aversion to resentment. Despite our antipathy toward the sentiment, it is nevertheless an inescapable part of our cognitive and emotional landscape because it is connected to our feelings of moral injury. Hurt and suffering is an inescapable part of the human experience. We are, in a way, condemned to feel resentment from time to time.

Adam Smith speaks eloquently of our complex social relationship to resentment in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. For Smith, hatred and resentment are grouped together as the “unsocial” passions with a dual character: on the one hand, they are the “guardians of justice.” They appear whenever we have been slighted or wronged. However, on the other hand, the appearance of these emotions in others causes us to experience a “natural aversion” to the sentiment and those who feel it (Smith 1853, I.ii.3.4). Smith compares the sentiment of resentment to a prison or a surgical instrument. Prisons are brutal institutions and a great deal of misery and suffering occurs behind their walls. Surgical instruments, when introduced to human flesh, produce tremendous amounts of pain. Both prisons and surgical instruments produce immediate effects that are “disagreeable.” Nevertheless, both prisons and surgical instruments have utility.

Prisons (arguably) protect society and execute justice. Surgery cures ailments and injuries. Thus, while the immediate effects of prisons and surgery are disagreeable, the remote effects are “agreeable.”

Such is the case with resentment. Although the sentiment of resentment has utility, we are nonetheless disgusted by it even when it is “justly provoked” (Smith 1853, I.ii.3.5). Resentment inspires revulsion: “The hoarse, boisterous, and discordant voice of anger, when heard at a distance, inspires us with either fear or aversion. We do not fly toward it, as to one who cries out with pain and agony” (Smith 1853, I.ii.3.5). We avoid sympathizing with resentful people. And if we do sympathize or condone resentment, we tend to sympathize with resentment only in circumscribed ways. We sympathize with a person’s resentment when we would *also* resent the insult committed and when others would expect us to resent the insult committed (Smith 1853, I.ii.3.8).

And yet, few can deny resentment’s utility. There are several accounts of the merit of resentment across the history of philosophy up until the present day. My discussion here is to discuss those accounts while maintaining a sharp focus on the merits of resentment. Although at times I will need to discuss a given philosopher’s broader theory of emotion in order to say something about resentment, the discussion will mostly adhere to discussing the merits of resentment, insofar as those merits are largely prudential. In this chapter, I will draw on existing literature to show that there are several prudential merits of resentment: (1) resentment reflects positively on an agent’s character, (2) resentment has epistemic value to an agent insofar as it lets agents know when they have been injured, (3) resentment is an emotional expression of a moral code, (4)

resentment is connected to social welfare—specifically, resentment is connected to justice.

### **Ancient Perspectives on Resentment's Merit**

Unlike modern and contemporary philosophers, ancient philosophers do not readily distinguish between anger and resentment. As we have seen in Chapter 2, philosophers like Butler count resentment as a species of anger while contemporary thinkers such as D'Arms and Jacobson view resentment as a cognitive sharpening of anger. Given that the differentiation between anger and resentment occurs later in the history of philosophy, ancient perspectives on resentment can only be indirectly gleaned from ancient perspectives on anger. Moreover, many ancient perspectives on anger fall outside the scope of this chapter because there are ancient perspectives on emotion that will necessarily exclude emotion as having any major role in the good life (e.g., the Stoics). Further still, the Presocratics were not known to write extensively on the topic of anger (Harris 2001, 88). In short, the account of anger in the ancient period in this chapter is in no way intended to be comprehensive. Instead, the intent of this section is to gather a rough sketch of ancient perspectives on anger. Given that this discussion is so specifically circumscribed, the focus will be on Plato and Aristotle's treatment of anger.

The clearest discussion of the prudential value of anger in Plato occurs in the *Laws*. In the *Laws*, Plato distinguishes between several types of anger but sees only "righteous indignation" as the kind of anger that has any special merit to it. He claims that crimes and other wrongdoings must be addressed with punishment. We can look to anger to identify the proper target of punishment. Our feeling of "righteous indignation" toward a wrongdoer or a wrong act is the necessary condition for the possibility of

punishment (Plato 1997, 731b). Without a felt sense of indignation, there would be no motivation to punish wrongdoers. It stands to reason that, without anger, there could be no sense of justice in society.

Plato nevertheless cautions against feeling anger toward *all* individuals who act unjustly. He does not see merit in indiscriminately getting angry at every single person who commits a wrong act. “[T]here are some criminals whose crimes are curable, and the first thing to realize here is that every unjust man is unjust against his will...in general, the unjust man deserves just as much pity as any other sufferer” (Plato 1997, 731c). Instead of being angry we should “pity the criminal whose disease is curable” (Plato 1997, 731d).<sup>1</sup> Plato seems to have in mind an idea that some wrongs (and thus some wrongdoers) are redeemable whereas others are not.

In cases of wrongdoing that is done out of vice such as “when you have to deal with complete and unmanageably vicious corruption,” Plato claims that we “must let anger off its leash” (Plato 1997, 731d). Given this distinction Plato makes between curable crimes and unmanageably vicious corruption, it seems that the differentiating factor between the proper target of anger has to do with the degree to which the agent intended the wrong act as well as whether we, as moral observers, think that wrongdoer is redeemable in some way. He says that “it must be the good man’s duty to be high-spirited or gentle as circumstances require” (Plato 1997, 731d). From this, we can infer that Plato believes that cases of wrongdoing should be evaluated on an individual basis. We should reserve righteous anger for cases where injury is done deliberately and to an extreme degree. Changes in circumstance will change the “appropriateness” of our anger. In the

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<sup>1</sup> Another way to read this is that Plato might have in mind people who are unable to act justly (perhaps the mentally ill). This suggests that people who might not count as agents might be included.

case of deliberate malice, Plato uses very strong normative language to describe the appropriateness of anger. He says that we must let our anger off its leash and have anger at the deliberate, irredeemably vicious wrongdoer. In cases of deliberate wrongdoing, righteous anger not only supplies the motivation for correct punishment, but Plato also seems to think that righteous anger is *normatively* required in these cases. This is obviously grist for my overarching thesis. However, for now I am most interested in the connection between righteous anger and justice (qua punishment). For Plato, the merit of righteous anger lies within its connection to righting wrongs and supplying the motivation for justice.

Plato's views on anger share some similarities with Aristotle's views on anger. Both philosophers agree that the practical value and "appropriateness" of anger will vary tremendously on the individual circumstance. However, Plato's notion of righteous anger seems more tempered than Aristotle's definition of anger in *Rhetoric*. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines anger as a "desire accompanied by pain, for a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight at the hands of men who have no call to slight oneself or one's friends. If this is a proper definition of anger, it must always be felt toward some particular individual, e.g. Cleon, and not man in general. It must be felt because the other has done or intended to do something to him or one of his friends." (Plato 1997, 1378a30-1378b-2). Like Plato, Aristotle sees anger as a direct response to wrongdoing. And, like Plato, anger is connected to the righting of wrongs. Where Plato and Aristotle differ is in their conception of what counts as the proper righting of wrongs: it is a case of justice versus vengeance. Punishment and revenge are different responses to wrongdoing. Despite this

fact, the key similarity in both accounts is that anger is classified as a correct reaction to intentional wrongdoing and is connected with justice.

In light of this definition of anger, Christopher Gill claims that Aristotle's view on anger in *Rhetoric* suggests that Aristotelian anger is a lot like Strawsonian reactive attitudes insofar as it is accompanied by a judgment that the agent has been wronged in some meaningful way (Gill 2003, 209). Thus, since reactive attitudes contain a cognitive component (e.g., the judgment that one has been wronged), this type of reactive attitude is considered by Aristotle to be both valid and reasonable (Gill 2003, 211).

This interpretation of anger as a reactive attitude can also be seen in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Unlike the Stoics who were critical of the role of emotion in the moral life, Aristotle saw that anger could play a role in the life of the virtuous person. For Aristotle, the virtuous person is *not* the person who expresses no emotions whatsoever nor does she strive to express only a pre-prescribed set of "acceptable" emotions. For Aristotle, the virtuous person is completely free to express anger. The only stipulation is that the agent's anger must be directed at the right object, at the right time, and to the right degree in order to be virtuous (Aristotle 1999, 1126a7). The virtuous person will express anger in this way whereas the vicious person will either overdo it or underdo it in one of those key areas. For instance, the vicious person may misdirect her anger at the wrong person, express it at inopportune time, or express too little anger.

According to Aristotle, the praiseworthy person is neither emotionless nor overly passionate. A good temper is the middle state of anger. The person with a "good temper" ought to be praised. A good-tempered person will be "angry at the right things and with the right people, and, further, as he ought, when he ought, and as long as he ought"

(Aristotle 1999, 1125b32-34). Thus, on Aristotle's account, one need not disavow anger entirely to be virtuous. In fact, Aristotle appears to think that people who completely fail to express anger have a defect of character (which, for him, is tantamount to a defect in ethical behavior). Those who do not express any anger at the proper times are "fools" and deliberately putting up with poor treatment from others makes one "slavish" (Aristotle 1999, 1126a4-8). Suppressing anger is both servile and contrary to our nature since he considers anger to be a natural response to insult. He writes, "reason or imagination informs us that we have been insulted or slighted, and anger, reasoning as it were anything like this must be fought against, boils up straightaway" (Aristotle 1999, 1149a31-34). A lack of anger in the face of insult should not necessarily garner praise. Rather, a lack of anger might prevent us from defending ourselves against insult or wrongdoing.

However, none of this is to say that the correct expression of anger is wholly unconnected to reason. "Proper" anger (that is, anger that is directed at the right people, at the right time, and in the right manner) is not always our most natural, instinctual, or base reaction. The good-tempered person does not act only from instinct. The good-tempered person strives to express anger correctly. To do so, she must rely on reason or wisdom to adjudicate the correct expression of anger. The good-tempered person is not good-tempered on accident because she will mediate her anger through reason. Reason allows the agent to dictate the manner in which anger gets expressed and, in this way, "anger listens to reason" (Aristotle 1999, 1149a26).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Eva-Maria Engelen further claims that, for Aristotle, anger has a regulative function for both the individual and the community (2009, p. 397) insofar as it is connected to wrongdoing.



## Modern Perspectives on Resentment's Merit

Modern perspectives on resentment continue the Ancient line of thought that connects the felt experience of anger with the perception of moral wrongdoing. As philosophy in the modern era develops, philosophers begin to describe resentment as an emotion separate and distinct from anger. This marks an important development in thinking about resentment as different theories of emotion become more fine-tuned. Modern philosophers also begin to distinguish resentment from other similar emotions like hatred and vengeance. And yet, although modern philosophers distinguish between anger and resentment, modern accounts nevertheless tend to retain the notion that Plato and Aristotle upheld, namely, that resentment is connected with a felt experience of wrongdoing. As I explained at the outset of this chapter, we may not readily sympathize with a person who shows resentment. Despite that, the sentiment remains the “guardian of justice” (Smith 1853, I.ii.3.4).

Bishop Joseph Butler's account of resentment in *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* remains the starting point for most contemporary discussions of forgiveness and resentment. In Sermon VIII, “Upon Resentment,” Butler grapples with the tension between two competing dispositions in humans: the capacity to feel benevolence and the capacity to feel resentment. Butler asks: why do we have implanted in us from God, “a principle, which appears the direct contrary to benevolence” (Butler 1958, 121)? This question troubled Butler. Since the passion of resentment is God-given, Butler reasons that it cannot be wholly evil. At the same time, he also acknowledges that “men frequently indulge a passion in such ways and degrees that at length it becomes quite another thing from what it was originally in our nature” (Butler 1958, 122). In order to

start resolving these difficult questions about human nature, Butler presents the reader with a sort of taxonomy of resentment. As we shall see, only certain forms of resentment turn out to be “defective” or undesirable. Some forms of resentment will remain neutral for Butler while other forms of resentment will prove *desirable*.

In Sermon VIII, Butler distinguishes between two types of resentment: “hasty and sudden” resentment and “settled and deliberate” resentment (Butler 1958, 123).<sup>3</sup> An opposition to “sudden hurt or violence” characterizes sudden resentment. Butler suggests that this is the kind of passion that comes on quite hot. It is so rapid and intense in nature that we can sometimes be rendered completely blind to the relevant facts of the wrongdoing. He writes, “the real demerit or fault of him who offers that violence...does not in many cases so much as come into thought” (Butler 1958, 124). Sudden resentment has an almost reflexive, irrational quality about it as it “stands in our nature for self-defense” (Butler 1958, 125). Butler claims that this species of resentment can be found in individuals who find themselves in a sort of Hobbesian state of nature: “in the uncultivated parts of the world, and where regular governments are not formed...there is no time for consideration, and yet to be passive is certain destruction” (Butler 1958, 125). This seems to be, for Butler, an instinct in humans linked only to the most rudimentary sense of physical self-preservation and it is not rooted in reason (Butler 1958, 125). To this end, he claims that we share this passion (and with it, an instinct for self-perseveration) with both infants and lower animals.

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting here that Butler often uses the words “resentment” and “anger” interchangeably. At the outset of Sermon VIII, he says that he will distinguish between two types of resentment. As he moves through the Sermon, he uses the word “anger” interchangeably with resentment such that “sudden resentment” and “sudden anger” are discussed as one and the same passion.

Butler has an expansive notion of injury – it can include injuries committed by both agents and non-agents. For instance, we can imagine a case where a young man is going for a stroll in a densely wooded area. Out of nowhere, a spiny pinecone falls on this unfortunate man’s head and, in response, he swears at the pinecone. This is a clear-cut case of hasty or sudden anger since the passions expressed at the pinecone reflect the man’s desire for self-preservation: he resents his physical injury. Butler seems to think that this kind of anger is perfectly permissible insofar as it is a natural passion – by itself, it is subject to neither moral praise nor blame. However, while this is a case of injury, it would be wrong for the young man to have settled and deliberate resentment toward the pinecone because the pinecone did not commit any kind of wrong or injustice. Pinecones are not agents; they have no intentional states and thus cannot sensibly be accused of wrongdoing. There is no avenue for punishment because there was no wrong act committed. Resenting the fact that a pinecone has bruised one’s head is instinctual and justifiable. But resenting that fact on *moral* grounds would be absurd. In short, on Butler’s account, non-agents can injure us but they cannot do so *morally*.

Unlike sudden anger, settled and deliberate resentment is not “naturally excited by...mere harm without appearance of wrong or injustice” (Butler 1958, 125). This sort of resentment “raises indignation, somewhat of a desire that [the injury] should be punished” (Butler 1958, 125). Settled and deliberate resentment contains a normative judgment in addition to the felt passion of anger: it is “plainly connected with a sense of virtue and vice, of moral good and evil” (Butler 1958, 125). Not only does Butler connect the passion of deliberate resentment with moral virtue, he claims that resentment has additional personal and social value. Without resentment, we would be unable to “guard

against the violent assaults of others” (Butler 1958, 135). In this way, resentment can serve a protective function for the agent: an agent’s felt experience of deliberate resentment lets her know that she has been wronged. Butler describes this feeling as a “natural indignation” that is often raised by “private or personal injury” (Butler 1958, 135).

With respect to the social value of resentment, Butler claims that resentment has an important connection to justice. Ideally, wrongdoers would be brought to justice through the “cool consideration of reason” (Butler 1958, 135). However, Butler notes that reason does not often supply enough motivation to bring a wrongdoer to justice. He asks: “Is it cool reflection in the injured person, which, for the most part brings the offender to justice? Or is it not resentment and indignation against the injury and the author of it?...This [kind of resentment] however is to be considered as a good effect” (Butler 1958, 131). For Butler, the proper object of settled resentment is moral wrongdoing. Settled resentment provides the necessary motivation for the desire to punish. And, in this sense, resentment supplies a social good insofar as it is connected with the execution of justice.

Though Butler does not consider sudden resentment blameworthy and he identifies important epistemic and social functions in settled resentment, he remains skeptical about other expressions of resentment. In particular, Butler warns against abuses of resentment that amount to “extravagant and monstrous” resentment. Resenting without actual injury (and here I presume he means “moral injury”), or showing resentment that proportionally exceeds the initial wrong act can count as excessive expressions of resentment (Butler 1958, 129). Furthermore, resentment becomes dangerous when is gratified for its own sake and *not* for the sake of justice. Resentment

gratified for its own sake produces misery and is ultimately damaging to the moral community (Butler 1958, 139). Once resentment goes beyond the scope of preventing or remedying injury, “no other principle, or passion, has for its end the misery of our fellow creatures. But malice and revenge mediates evil itself...other vices eventually do mischief: this alone aims at it as an end” (Butler 1958, 140). The excess of resentment, here called malice and revenge, are the proper targets of our aversion to resentment.

As discussed above, Smith sees a similarly anti-social element to resentment in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. At the same time, Smith is in agreement with Butler, Plato and Aristotle that the “pitch” of the emotion is the key to unlocking its value. In order for resentment to be praiseworthy (and thus have moral and/or prudential value), it must be expressed at a more moderate level than we typically experience it. Smith writes: “resentment, is not disapproved of when properly humbled...violent resentment, instead of carrying us along with it, becomes itself the object of our resentment and indignation. Revenge, therefore, the excess of resentment, appears to be the most detestable of all the passions” (Smith 1853, II.i.5.8). Like Butler, Plato, and Aristotle, Smith cautions against the *excess* of resentment, not the sentiment itself. Smith is careful to distinguish between the helpful, tempered resentment that resembles Plato’s “righteous indignation” and the dangerous, destructive vengeance that Butler warns about. Although Smith acknowledges that we tend to have an aversion to seeing resentment in others, he nevertheless thinks that resentment is a moral sentiment. As such, Smith implies that we can also feel too little resentment: wrongdoings that are worthy of resentment are “such that we should become contemptable, and be exposed to perpetual insults, if we did not, in some measure, resent it” (Smith 1853, I.ii.3.8).

For Smith, actions that appear to deserve reward are the proper objects of gratitude, whereas actions that appear to deserve punishment are the “proper and approved object of resentment (Smith 1853, II.i.1.4)”. In this way, resentment is the “guardian of justice.” Resentment and gratitude are the two sentiments that are most closely linked to reward and punishment. Smith writes, “if the person who had done us some great injury, who had murdered our father or our brother, for example, should soon die of a fever...though it might soothe our hatred, it would not fully gratify our resentment. Resentment would prompt us to desire, not only that he should be punished, but that he should be punished by our means, and upon the particular injury he had done to us” (Smith 1853, II.i.1.8). Smith suggests two important things about resentment here. First, that resentment supplies the motivation to punish others for wrongdoing. Second, that resentment is *personal*. It is about a wrong that is done *to us* by someone else. This is why we have a personal stake in how that person is punished. It is not enough to see a wrongdoer suffer randomly. He must suffer specifically for his wrong committed against our individual person.

Unlike general suffering or misfortune, punishment is, rightly or wrongly, associated with justice insofar as it attempts to restore some kind of moral balance. On this account, our felt resentment supplies the motivation for punishment. To this end, Smith writes, “The natural gratification of [resentment] tends, of its own accord, to produce all political ends of punishment; the correction of the criminal, and the example of the public” (Smith 1853, II.i.1.8). Even though the sentiment of resentment relates to a particular harm done to our particular person, *society* also benefits from the criminal’s

punishment. On this view, a criminal is not just a criminal against my own person; he is a criminal to society as well.

This is not to suggest that Smith recognizes *all* instances of resentment as necessarily connected with justice. As stated above, we tend to disapprove of resentment that is not adequately “humbled.” So, resentment that goes beyond what is acceptably humble will not be a candidate for the kind of resentment that has value to individual agents or to society. He claims that the proper target of resentment is the target with which “every impartial spectator entirely sympathizes with him” (Smith 1853, II.i.2.2). Thus, “approved” resentment is resentment that is sympathized with by the impartial spectator. With this stipulation in place, an agent’s resentment can be marshaled as the grounds for punishment if and only if an impartial spectator can also sympathize with that resentment. For instance, Sandy’s resentment *seems* appropriate at first blush because *we* can sympathize with it. But a Smithian reading of the Sandy case discussed in Chapter 1 would stipulate that Sandy’s resentment is appropriate and permissible because the impartial spectator sympathizes with it. The impartial spectator represents the interests of all involved. Hence, resentment for Smith goes beyond the scope of our personal or individual sentiments – resentment has a social character as well.

The idea that passions or sentiments can provide motivation to act is not new. Prior to Smith, Hume already wrote on the distinction between passions and ideas and explained why reason cannot supply the sole motivation for action. For Hume, passions are impressions in the mind, and contrasted with ideas, which are copies of impressions. All impressions are either original (and arising from the senses) or secondary, when they arise in reflection such as with desires or emotions. Passions are of two sorts: calm and

violent passions. Calm desires are ones that are typically experienced without “sensible agitation” (McIntyre 2000, 83), though Hume himself does not correlate calm with “weak” and violent with “strong.” Calm passions can include benevolence and resentment, kindness to children, or the inclination to be good (Hume 2000, 2.3.4.8). These calm passions are distinct from reason, though “their nature and principles have suppos’d to proceed from the same faculty...because their sensations are not evidently different (Hume 2000, 2.3.4.8). Violent passions also influence the will but Hume describes them as less settled and deliberate than calm ones.

From here, Hume famously claimed that moral distinctions cannot be known primarily through reason. Though this argument is complicated, the relevant point is that, like all ideas, our ideas of morality are also copies of impressions, and specifically, our passions.<sup>4</sup> But, for the same reason, this is why when we make moral distinctions (what we would call moral judgments). We make moral judgments because we *feel* something, and correspondingly, have some *motive* to act accordingly (though it is a further question whether and why certain motives actually *move* us).

Moral distinctions—and by this we can take Hume to mean the passions—are supposed to motivate us to act. As Hume writes, “’Tis from the prospect of pain or pleasure that the aversion or propensity arises toward any object...Where the objects themselves do not affect us, their connexion can never give them any influence; and ‘tis

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<sup>4</sup> Morality cannot be grounded in reason alone because reason can only help us discover the proper object of pleasure or pain. As we can see from Hume’s description, reason is inert. This leads Hume to say that “[r]eason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them” (2.3.3.4). To that end, reason can only be concerned with matters of truth or falsity. Passions cannot admit of such a distinction. Given this limitation, Hume writes in 3.1.1.9 that “our passions, volitions, and actions, are not susceptible of any such agreement or disagreement; being original facts and realities, [they are] compleat in themselves.”



plain, that as reason is nothing but the discovery of this connexion” (Hume 2000, 2.3.3.3).

To this end, Hume classifies resentment as both an instinct and a passion. And, as a passion, resentment can motivate us to act. Hume’s account of resentment most clearly differs from Butler and Smith’s is Hume does not claim that the sentiment is accompanied by a rational judgment. The sentiment simply *resembles* rational judgment in the way that calm passions are often conflated with rational judgments. When a calm passion like resentment causes “no disorder in the soul, they are very readily taken for the determinations of reason” (Hume 2000, 2.3.4.8). Unlike Butler and Smith, however, Hume does not think that there is a separate cognitive judgment about wrongdoing that takes place at the moment we feel the passion of resentment. Settled or humbled resentment is simply a calm passion.

Conversely, resentment can also have a violent manifestation. Hume writes, “when I receive any injury from another, I often feel a violent passion of resentment, which makes me desire his evil and punishment, independent of all considerations of pleasure and advantage to myself. When I am immediately threaten’d with any grievous ill, my fears, apprehensions, and aversions rise to a great height, and produce a sensible emotion” (Hume 2000, 2.3.4.9). This description of the violent passion of resentment resembles Butler’s account of “hasty” or “sudden” anger. The passion comes on hot like Butler’s account of sudden anger, but, unlike Butler’s account, the target of violent resentment seems to be specifically concerned with intentional wrongdoing toward the individual person rather than injury in general. In both cases, the passion of resentment –

whether calm or violent – is the moral judgment that we have been wronged and supplies us with the motivation for punishment.

We might resent someone and judge that her character is vicious. However, for Hume, judging that an individual's character is vicious or virtuous is “nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very feeling constitutes our praise or admiration” (Hume 2000, 3.1.1.2.3). Thus, virtue produces satisfying and pleasurable feelings in the observer while vice produces a feeling of pain. Hume explains that this so because “vice” and “virtue” lack any kind of real existence that can be discovered in the relations between objects. We only have these “particular kinds” of feelings in response to a person's character (or more specifically, a person's actions which we take to be indicative of her or his motive). Thus, insofar as we feel the need to punish wrongdoers, justice is an artificial virtue. Nevertheless, resentment plays a role in our desire to exact justice upon wrongdoers to the extent that the sentiment of resentment supplies the moral motivation to act. Pragmatically speaking, whether the desire to punish comes from a place of passion or reason, there seems to be agreement thus far that the sentiment of resentment plays a significant role in supplying the motivation for punishment.

In *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, Reid disagrees with Hume's assertion that resentment is always a passion regardless of its manifestation as calm or violent. Reid writes that resentment can be a rational judgment: “a man may be sensible of an injury without being inflamed. He judges coolly of the injury, and of the proper means of redress. This is resentment without passion” (Reid 2010, 572). In a different circumstance, the same person might, on another occasion “think of nothing but

immediate revenge, and feels a strong impulse, without regard to consequences, to say and do things which his cool reason cannot justify. This is the passion of resentment” (Reid 2010, 572). Despite this disagreement, notice that, once again, a common thread in the modern discussion of resentment is a distinction between a resentment that is removed, cool, and distant in its character versus a kind of resentment that is intense, immediate, and hot in character. The former seems to be more respected and trusted than the latter.

Reid explicitly agrees with Butler in distinguishing between the types of resentment that manifest in deliberate ways as opposed to hasty resentment. However, Reid re-describes “sudden” resentment as “animal” resentment. Like Butler, Reid sees animal resentment primarily as defense against harm (Reid 2010, 568-69). For Reid, deliberate resentment requires a rational principle that animals lack. Reason enables us to distinguish between different kinds of injury. Injuries that are like the pinecone case can arouse our animal resentment whereas injuries like the Sandy case can arouse our deliberate resentment. The latter is attached to a moral component. Reid claims that both the animal and the deliberate forms of resentment can work together against injustice: the animal instinct produces an immediate aversion to injury while the rational capacity forms a judgment against the wrongdoer (Reid 2010, 570).

To sum up, Plato, Aristotle, Butler, Hume, Smith and Reid all seem to think that moderate expressions of resentment are necessary for the sentiment to have any proper relationship to justice. As Reid writes, “every malevolent affection...is never to be taken without necessity; and even then no greater than the necessity requires” (Reid 2010, 570).

## Contemporary Perspectives on Resentment's Merit

Compared to modern perspectives on resentment, the contemporary literature on the merits of resentment is somewhat thin. Further still, literature that covers the possible *merits* of resentment is harder to come by. I believe this is due in part to the general bias against resentment discussed previously and in part to the rapidly growing body of literature on forgiveness. So long as forgiveness is broadly understood as a virtue and the cessation of resentment is a condition for the possibility of forgiveness, there is not much of an impetus to explore the merits of resentment. That said, one theme that emerges in contemporary discussions of resentment is the connection between resentment and moral judgment.

When thinking about whether we should resent a wrongdoer, Rae Langton notes that there are two ways we can consider the question: whether the resentment is accurate and whether the resentment is useful (Langton 2001, 256). Per Langton, these metrics can be run together when evaluating merits of resentment when it is instead more helpful to consider them separately. Evaluating resentment's accuracy requires an evaluation of whether the agent's resentment is, in fact, responding to vice on the part of the wrongdoer. This is to rule out "inappropriate" resentments (a topic I will discuss in further detail next chapter). Evaluating the usefulness of resentment requires an assessment of resentment's outcomes. Therefore, on a broadly consequentialist analysis, there may be cases where resentment is useful insofar as it can have good outcomes. Good outcomes could include resentment that leads to a wrongdoer modifying the behavior that caused the resentment in the first place (Langton 2001, 257). Therefore, there are cases where resentment can be both accurate and useful, inaccurate but

nevertheless useful (such as a case where the resentment felt brings about a positive outcome, but not because the resentment was apt), accurate and not useful (where resentment creates a worse outcome – perhaps this is where vengeance would fit in), and inaccurate and not useful. Langston only gestures at the specific ways in which resentment could be useful, but nevertheless acknowledges that there are cases where it can bring about good outcomes.

In “Freedom and Resentment,” P.F. Strawson discusses an example of someone stepping on his hand. In one case, the person who steps on his hand does so accidentally. In another case, the person does the same action but with malicious intent. In that latter case, Strawson claims that we will feel intense resentment. That felt resentment is a “reactive attitude” (Strawson 2008, 6). While previous understandings of resentment have taken resentment to be an emotion, sentiment, or passion, a reactive attitude is *not* (for Strawson) by definition an emotion. Rather, it is emotion-laden. For Strawson, a reactive attitude expresses a kind of sensitivity to how people are regarded (i.e., with good will or with ill will) in their everyday interactions. The difference between whether or not we feel resentment (among other reactive attitudes) depends on whether or not someone committed an act with good will. Ill will is indicative of a violation of a moral code. Reactive attitudes like resentment contain normative content insofar as they contain a demand that interactions with others be reflective of a basic stance of good will. The reactive attitude of resentment upon having been intentionally hurt by another is a way of saying, “I ought not have been treated in this way.” Strawson writes:

[Reactive attitudes] invite us to see the *injury* as one for which [the agent] was not fully, or at all, responsible. They do not suggest that the agent is in any way an inappropriate object of that kind of demand for goodwill or regard which is reflected in our ordinary reactive attitudes. They suggest instead that the fact of

injury was not in this case incompatible with that demand's being fulfilled, that the fact of injury was quite consistent with the agent's attitude and intentions being just what we demand they should be (Strawson 2008, 8).

Marguerite La Caze makes a claim about the relationship between resentment and justice that both departs from and follows Strawson. La Caze claims that resentment is “an emotional recognition of injustice in the form of injury” (La Caze 2001, 39). So, unlike Strawson, La Caze thinks that resentment is not emotion-laden, but an emotion unto itself. However, like Strawson, La Caze makes the connection between justice and resentment. We tend to resent those things that we think are unjust. While Strawson claims that resentment expresses our moral attitudes, La Caze argues that resentment and moral attitudes arise together.

La Caze and Strawson are not alone in linking resentment to claims regarding justice. In *Theory of Justice*, Rawls describes resentment as a “moral feeling” (Rawls 1999, 416). Like Strawson, he claims that our experience of resentment (among other emotions) requires the invocation of a moral concept: “Just as the feelings of guilt and shame have different principles in their explanations, they lead us to anticipate different attitudes in other persons. In general, guilt, resentment, and indignation invoke the concept of right, whereas shame, contempt, and derision appeal to the concept of goodness” (Rawls 1999, 423). That is to say, in order to explain why someone feels resentment, we must also evoke a concept of “the right” to complete this explanation. For resentment in particular, we must be able to point toward some kind of unjust situation or intentional injury in order for resentment to be justified (Rawls 1999, 467). Therefore, for Rawls, La Caze, and Strawson, the merit of resentment lies in its ability to make appeals to justice.

Thomas Brudholm takes Rawls' claim a bit further. Brudholm argues that experiencing and expressing resentment is not merely tied to a moral concept (such as justice) but, in certain circumstances, expressing resentment can be a moral act by itself. On Brudholm's view, resentment is the emotional correlate of a person's belief that a moral code has been violated. Such expressions, Brudholm writes, are "as permissible and admirable as the willingness to forgive or forgiveness proper" (Brudholm 2009, 171). Although it is not exactly clear how Brudholm's account differs from the modern account that separates the affect from the cognitive judgment of wrongdoing, Brudholm is abundantly clear that there is moral value to resentment. Similarly, Jeffrie Murphy also claims that resentment can be a moral act insofar as resentment bears a relationship to self-respect. Resentment is a response to wrongdoing against the self and, in that way, Murphy argues that resentment is self-preserving. Murphy writes that "proper self-respect is essentially tied to the passion of resentment, and that a person who does not resent moral injuries done to him...is almost necessarily a person lacking in self respect" (Murphy 1982, 16). Thus, Murphy seems to agree with Aristotle that too little resentment suggests a defect of character.

## **Conclusion**

There is a surprising amount of continuity among philosophers ranging from the Ancient era to the contemporary era regarding the role and value of resentment. Although there are some minor differences in how the sentiment is conceptualized, there is a clear precedent for thinking resentment is valuable: for the individual, for society, and for the practice of exercising moral judgment. Correspondingly, it is unclear why it would be thought *more* intuitive that it is *always* better for an agent to release and forgo their

resentment as both duty-based and virtue-based accounts of forgiveness tend to assume.

At the very least, in light of the long tradition defending the value of resentment, it cannot be thought obviously contentious to consider more carefully the possibility that we might sometimes have a *duty* to resent, as I have hypothesized earlier.



## Chapter 4: When Not to Forgive, or When to Resent

### Abstract

In this chapter, I argue that there are some cases where agents should resent wrongdoers on moral grounds. The argument of this chapter is as follows: First, so long as certain fittingness conditions for resentment are satisfied, it is possible that an agent's resentment is both fitting and *also* obligatory. Second, if an agent's failure to resent a wrongdoer amounts to undermining her self-worth (here defined as a necessary condition for satisfying one's duty to oneself), then I argue that the agent is obliged to resent her wrongdoer. Further, I argue that forgiveness can only be normatively required in cases where two agents view one another as persons of equal value, and the nature of some harms obviates, even for the future, that possibility. I will close this chapter with a discussion of duties to the self and how an agent's feeling resentment can fulfill such duties.

### Is Forgiveness Always Right or Desirable?

The relatively uncontroversial claim that resentment can be a natural or fitting response to wrongdoing, coupled with its potential merits, re-opens the question whether forgiveness is always the *right* or even most *desirable* option (both practically and morally) for an agent. In this chapter I will argue that it is not. Some agents *should* resent wrongdoers.

My argument will share similarities with Audre Lorde's well-known views on anger. Like Lorde, I see resentment as a correct response to wrongdoing: "My anger is a response to racist attitudes, to the actions and presumptions that arise out of those attitudes" (Lorde 1997, 278). I also share her view that anger (and once again, I am

treating resentment as a species of anger here) is a powerful motivational force that can bring about positive psychological, interpersonal, and political outcomes (Lorde 1997, 283). Where I depart from Lorde is not in her analysis of the benefits of anger but rather her normative position on anger.

In this regard, Lorde does not appear to differ from accounts of anger like Aristotle's that allow that resentment is permissible in certain cases of wrongdoing so long as it is expressed in the right way and to the right degree. Lorde is also not very different from proponents of forgiveness, such as Griswold or Butler, who grant that there are certain cases where resentment is appropriate.<sup>1</sup> In short, Lorde's analysis of anger in terms of its value and potential for change amounts to yet another set of conditions for when it is *permissible* for an agent to be angry with a wrongdoer. In Lorde's case, these conditions might roughly be generalized as "the extent to which an agent's anger can contribute to political change." Indeed, like the views discussed in Chapter 3, Lorde's account shows that anger or resentment *can* lead to good outcomes. Accordingly, a view like Lorde's could say that it is simply more prudent to be angry than to forgive, because there are cases where it leads to qualitatively better outcomes. Similarly, a view like Lorde's could be marshaled to answer the consequentialist forger who forgives for the sake of good outcomes. However, also like the other views discussed in Chapter 3, Lorde's approach would not substantiate the view I want to advance, namely, that there are some cases when *forgiveness* wins the consequentialist

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<sup>1</sup> However, unlike Lorde, Butler or Griswold would go on to claim that an agent must at least attempt to give up resentment under certain conditions.

calculus, but loses to an overriding deontological reason to *resent*. That is to say, there are cases where one both can *and* ought to resent.<sup>2</sup>

Here roughly, are the elements of the view I will develop and defend. On my view, the agent who does *not* resent a wrongdoer when it is fitting to do so is not only making an incorrect prudential calculation about the “best” course of action, but the agent who fails to resent when he should can *also* fail to fulfill a moral obligation or duty to himself. To build the case for this view, I will make two major component claims. First, I will specify some minimally plausible fittingness conditions for resentment. Second, if the fittingness conditions for resentment are satisfied, then it is possible that the agent’s resentment is also obligatory *if* failing to resent amounts to undermining her self-worth (where self-worth is a necessary condition for satisfying one’s duty to oneself). In other words, an agent’s resentment must first be fitting in order for her to be obligated to resent. If the agent’s resentment is fitting *and* failing to resent results in a violation of her duty to herself, then she is obligated to resent her wrongdoer.

### **Fittingness Conditions for Resentment**

With respect to the fittingness conditions for resentment, my central task will be to identify the characteristics of those cases where an impartial observer would conclude that it is “fitting” for an agent to resent a wrongdoer. It has already been established in Chapters 1 and 3 that there are at least some cases where an impartial observer would say that it is “appropriate” or “permissible” for an agent to resent a wrongdoer, and would do

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<sup>2</sup> I duly note that Lorde’s view does *not* provide an adequate answer to the rather uncritical view that holds that forgiveness is a virtue full stop or arguments, which command us to forgive whenever it is possible to do so, regardless of the consequences, because forgiveness is intrinsically valuable.

so independently of whether the agent is (also) required to attempt to forgive the wrongdoer. In this section, I will argue that there are also cases where resentment is not merely appropriate or permissible, but fitting, where “fittingness” marks a stronger normative kind of correctness. More exactly, my aim is to develop a more granular understanding of the sorts of cases that would fall into the scope of an agent’s obligation to resent. Obviously, these cases would be cases where resentment is already “appropriate” or “permissible.” What I am further specifying here is that resentment must be “fitting” rather than merely “appropriate” or “permissible.” This is because I take it that “fittingness” is a special kind of normative criterion that describes a response to a specific event.<sup>3</sup>

Importantly, I take it that the “fittingness conditions” for resentment are distinct from “sufficient reasons” to resent. There are two reasons to distinguish between fittingness conditions and sufficient reasons in the case of the duty to resent. One has to do with the nature of resentment itself and the other has to do with answering the consequentialist view of resentment. With respect to the first reason, some, but not all, accounts of resentment suggest that resentment contains a cognitive component or a judgment. As I explained in Chapter 2, I wish to remain largely neutral about what *exactly* resentment is. For this reason, I want to stay away from a notion of “fittingness” that essentially amounts to “correct judgment” since not all accounts of resentment would concede that resentment has a cognitive component, and I see it as a feature of my account that it is also applicable to those accounts of resentment that claim it is a moral

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<sup>3</sup> I am using “fittingness” here instead of “appropriateness” because “appropriateness” is much too broad for my purposes here. “Appropriateness does not make clear what the normative component consists in and “fittingness” is able to specify a particular set of normative conditions that “appropriateness” cannot specify

emotion or some other purely affective state, which does not contain a cognitive component or judgment.

Second, and more to the crux of the issue, if we accept an understanding of the “fittingness conditions” as “sufficient reasons” for resentment, then the consequentialist could reply that the “overall good” of all parties involved provides a “sufficient reason” to resent. Thus, in this way, the person who resents for consequentialist reasons could say that her resentment is “fitting” because she has “sufficient reasons” for resenting. Again, since the aim of this discussion is to supply *deontological* justification for resentment, I want to take this option away from the consequentialist. Thus, I reject an understanding of “fittingness” that could be re-described as “sufficient reasons.”

The notion of fittingness I have in mind here is something along the lines of what McHugh and Way describe as a “basic” view of fittingness. This means that fittingness is a “basic normative property from which the rest of the normative and evaluative domain is constructed” (McHugh and Way 2016, 576). Why adopt the view of fittingness as basic in the case of resentment? First, it is not obvious in our own lived experience that resentment is always accompanied by a cognitive judgment. Although there is agreement in the literature that resentment contains some kind of judgment, our own phenomenological experience of resentment does not necessarily square with this claim. For most of us, resentment is experienced as a feeling or an affective state. When someone wrongs us, we immediately *feel* slighted. We may later come to judge the act as wrong, but the wrongness of the act often registers first as a feeling. For this reason, “resentment” (or any other sentiment or reactive attitude) cannot, in every case, be representational in the way a belief about a given state of affairs can represent its object.

Even if resentment *does in fact* contain beliefs in all cases despite what resentment feels like to us, the beliefs that are contained in resentment (such as the ones discussed by Strawson or Rawls) are beliefs *that* one has been “wronged.” The state of being “wronged” is *thick* – it has normative content.

Our belief that we have been stabbed is importantly distinct from the belief that we have been wronged. We might think that “stabbing” is just one species of wrongdoing, but, on more careful reflection, the act of stabbing can be stripped of moral content and described simply as an action. In doing so, we will see that not all stabbings are inherently morally suspect: a person can be accidentally stabbed or even consensually stabbed. While a person can believe that she has been stabbed *and* believe that she has been wronged, believing that one has been *wronged* has different epistemic content. The belief that one has been wronged reflects the agent’s general stance that a moral code has been violated, but that stance may not have *propositional* content in the way that “I have been stabbed” has propositional content. The belief that “I have been wronged” is too normatively thick to point to any concrete propositional content.

This is why I choose to use “fittingness” conditions. Fittingness can be adapted to actions as well as mental states that lack propositional content. These mental states can include sentiments and affects. A “basic” account of fittingness “understands value in terms of the fittingness of a certain kind of response” (McHugh and Way 2016, 585). McHugh and Way further claim that “the fittingness of a response is a matter of the satisfaction a certain standard, internal to that response” (McHugh and Way 2016, 598). With this in mind, all that is needed is with respect to resentment is to decide whether the expression of the sentiment satisfies a standard specific to that response. The standards

that I propose here are those standards that I believe someone like Roderick Firth's "ideal observer" would agree to when determining whether or not an agent's resentment is fitting.<sup>4</sup>

The task, then, is to decide what, exactly, are the fittingness conditions for resentment. To do this, I will first work backwards by discussing a patently obvious case that would *fail* the "outside observer" test. This should begin to tease out some of the fittingness criteria for resentment. I will then re-consider Sandy's case – a case that seems to *pass* the "outside observer" test. This will serve to further refine the fittingness conditions for resentment.

### **A Failing Case of Fittingness**

Consider the hypothetical case of "Aaron." Aaron works in an office. One day, Aaron's colleague, Brittany, accidentally spills ink all over his brand new (and very expensive) jacket. He is immediately angry with Brittany and resents her for her clumsy behavior. The next morning, Aaron is about to leave for work again. He goes to put on his jacket and sees the faint outline of the ink stain from the previous day. Aaron's resentment toward Brittany violently resurfaces in his mind. From that morning forward, Aaron would repeat this pattern for the next six years: Aaron puts on his jacket and re-lives his resentment of Brittany with pronounced clarity and intensity. When he sees Brittany, he cannot help but despise her more and more with each passing day. After six years, he donates the blemished jacket to Goodwill. Shortly thereafter, Brittany accepts a position at another company. Even after getting rid of the jacket and seeing Brittany gone

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<sup>4</sup> For Firth, "x is right" roughly means the following: if there were a person who could be omniscient, omnipercipient, disinterested, and dispassionate, but in every other respect normal, then that person would approve of x.

from his life for the foreseeable future, Aaron continues to deeply resent her with the same degree of intensity as he did the moment she spilled ink on his jacket six years ago.

It almost goes without saying that this is a clear (perhaps even absurd) case where no reasonable outside observer would judge that Aaron's resentment in this case is fitting.

There are at least a few reasons why:

- Aaron's resentment is too great compared to the degree of harm done; Aaron's life was in every other way unaffected by the ink spill.
- Given that the jacket had no unique sentimental significance to Aaron, from an objective standpoint, an ink spill on a jacket is a relatively minor social blunder.
- Brittney's mistake was purely accidental and made without any kind of malicious intent.
- Aaron's resentment lasted too long. Even if some resentment were justifiable in this case, most reasonable people would agree that resentment spanning the course of several years is inappropriate in this case.

From this example, it is clear that there are a number of considerations that should be taken into account when determining whether or not an agent's resentment is fitting. In a sense, determining whether or not an agent's resentment is fitting resembles an Aristotelian analysis of virtue. That is to say, for Aristotle, whether or not an agent is acting in accordance with virtue depends on a multitude of factors. An agent's virtue cannot be determined by whether or not she acts in accordance with any hard and fast universal rules. There are always cases where the cultivation of a certain character trait will demand different behaviors at different times. Aristotle's example of Milo the



wrestler shows that the correct approach is often relative a situation. When deciding how much is appropriate to eat, “if ten pounds are too much for a particular person to eat and two too little, it does not follow that the trainer will order six pounds; for this is also perhaps too much for the person who is to take it, or too little—too little for Milo, too much for the beginner in athletic exercises” (Aristotle 1999, 1106a35-1106b3).

Cultivating the virtue of moderation, for instance, may require occasionally indulging in excessive food and drink—perhaps when social obligations seem to demand it. And, in other contexts such as during religious observations, the moderate action would be different. Ascertaining the virtue of an agent’s character requires flexibility. Determining the fittingness of resentment requires a similar kind of flexibility. Above all else, it requires that we adopt a willingness to look at individual cases on their own terms when deciding whether or not an agent’s resentment is fitting, just as we would when determining whether or not an agent’s character is virtuous.

For this reason, it is not possible to articulate the fittingness conditions for resentment in a way that yields universal rules. My account of the value of resentment needs to accommodate a wide number of cases. Thus, I propose that the following guidelines can be used to determine whether or not an agent’s resentment is fitting:

*1) What is the severity of the harm done?*

An impartial observer should take into account the various factors that contribute to the impression of the severity of the harm. This can include things that are outwardly quantifiable. For instance, we might consider the sheer number of people immediately affected by a particular wrong act – perhaps, for instance, the number of people killed in

a mass shooting. The number of people directly affected can certainly contribute to a sense of severity. However, that is only one dimension of severity.

There are also less immediate but nevertheless related outcomes of a particular act that can contribute to its severity. In the example of the mass shooting, both the individuals immediately affected by the wrong act as well as those who are connected to the victims can be affected by a single wrong act. For instance, friends and family members connected to the victims might fit the diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder – and thus live with the impact of PTSD for a significant portion of their lives. Friends and family will also grieve for lost loved ones. Dependent family members may struggle to make ends meet. As we can see, the severity of an act encompasses more than just the direct or immediate targets of wrongdoing. It also includes indirect outcomes that affect all involved.

That being said, severity can be difficult to assess because it is not always quantifiable. The harm done is something less tangible than “number of people killed” or “number of people who fit the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder.” These cases might include psychological harm that cannot clinically be accounted for such as betrayal, deception, or psychological manipulation. These sorts of cases are significantly more difficult to quantify, but the presence of these kinds of harms nevertheless contribute to our sense of the severity of a wrong act. Aaron’s case fails the “severity” test as the degree of harm in his case is trivial – only Aaron was affected, and Brittany had no ill-will toward Aaron (thus ruling this out as some kind of act of deliberate malice).

2) *What is the tenor of the resentment felt by the agent?*

It is not enough that an agent feels or does not feel resentment toward a wrongdoer, the degree and intensity of her resentment factors into its fittingness as well. Too much resentment or resentment expressed in the wrong way is more like vengeance, which can have negative outcomes for both the individual and the agent. Fitting resentment is resentment that an impartial observer would judge to be expressed at an appropriate pitch, level, or degree. In Aaron's case, it might be fitting to feel a small bit of anger, resentment, or indignation in the moment that the ink was spilled on his jacket. It may even be fitting to feel this way in the days following the incident. However, we would expect these feelings to be fleeting and mostly tied to the time surrounding the incident. Therefore, it might make sense to feel some lingering resentment when, for example, Aaron picks up his jacket at the cleaners only to find that the stain was inadequately removed. However, his feelings of intense and unwavering resentment in the *years* following the incident seem profoundly misguided and inappropriate. Why does it strike us as absurd that Aaron's feelings of resentment never diminish or change?

It is because his feelings of resentment are not fitting; the tenor and the intensity are inappropriate. We have a common-sense idea of what a resentment reaction in the "appropriate" range would be and Aaron's resentment falls outside of that range. The impartial observer would judge that Aaron's resentment is not fitting. Everything in Aaron's case seems to be askew: he resents for too long when it should be more fleeting or momentary and the resentment is too emotionally "hot" compared to the severity of the wrong. As we have already seen, these determinations cannot be made with universal rules. They must be made on a case-by-case basis and with a thorough assessment of the numerous factors that contribute to an agent's experience of resentment. Aaron's case

shows that resentment cannot be fitting if it lasts longer than it ought to and is felt with a greater sense of intensity than it ought to.

One might object that relying on the model of the impartial observer is unrealistic for making determinations about the fittingness of resentment. When assessing on-the-ground cases, no one individual could realistically have the traits that the impartial spectator would have: no one person could be omniscient, omnipercipient, disinterested, or dispassionate. While this is true, there are two reasons why I think the impartial observer is a useful moral metric. First, the impartial observer simply reflects the stance that we *ought* to strive for when evaluating these cases. When determining whether or not resentment is fitting, that determination should be made once we have made our best effort to know the facts and assess the situation from a disinterested perspective. Second, and more importantly, I believe that when we make lay or common-sense moral calculations, we generally make a good-faith *attempt* to assume the stance of the impartial observer. We genuinely *want* to know the relevant facts, we *strive* to be unbiased, and we try to gain distance from our emotional reactions. Our judgments of fittingness are a result of these attempts. This is why Aaron's case seems to patently clear. Not only do we not think Aaron's resentment is fitting, we surmise that *no* reasonable person would accept Aaron's resentment as fitting.

### 3) *What is the proximity of the harm to the agent?*

Regardless of the particulars of the nature of resentment, there is a general consensus that we feel resentment when harm is done against our particular person. As Jeffrie Murphy writes, "resentment...functions primarily as a defense, not of *all* moral values and norms, but rather of certain *values of the self*. Resentment is a response not to general wrongs but

to wrongs against oneself” (Murphy & Hampton 1998, p. 16). I will shorthand refer to the condition that resentment functions as a defense against harm to the self as “Murphy’s Condition as it will become more important for my argument. Aaron’s resentment is absurd in part because the harm done was to an inanimate object in his possession; Aaron’s person was not betrayed or injured. That said, I do not think that only those wrongs that affect a person directly are candidates for fitting resentment. Common sense morality tells us that we have certain special obligations to other people. We do not want harm done to persons who are close to us in some capacity such as friends, family members, or colleagues. When people we are close to are harmed, we often resent the wrongdoer – even if we were not directly affected by the wrongdoer’s action. I think this is covered by Murphy’s Condition because, on some level, those who are close to us are part of our conception of our self. We identify with those who we are close to. We can extend this even further to the kind of righteous anger or resentment toward harms done against groups of people. These feelings may come from the fact that we identify with the affected group or can empathize with the affected group’s struggle. If we cannot empathize, sometimes these feelings come from the degree of sympathy we feel toward the affected group.<sup>5</sup> Thus, proximity to the self is crucial since we tend *not* to resent wrongs done to persons we have no connection to, or groups that we do not identify with, or groups we have lack empathy or sympathy for.

### **A Passing Case of Fittingness**

The difference between our assessments of Aaron’s case and Sandy’s case becomes more evident when we compare Aaron’s case with Sandy’s with an eye toward

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of collective resentment, see Stockdale (2013).

the fittingness conditions outlined above. In every respect, Sandy's case differs from Aaron's in these following respects:

- The degree of the harm done. Sandy suffered from extreme physical, sexual, emotional, and mental abuse at the hands of her brother. Moreover, her parents were complicit in that fact, thus compounding her mental and emotional suffering.
- The harm done to her was a harm done to her person. Sandy's resentment in this case is due to the fact that some harm was done to her *self*. This is importantly different from Aaron's case. In Aaron's case, the harm was done to an item in his possession and it had no implications for his immediate person. Even if he were to argue that his jacket is, in some profound way, deeply connected to his person, the wrong act was done unintentionally – and, therefore, was never intended to be a wrong against his particular person. At every step of the way, the wrongs done against Sandy were done intentionally and with the implicit support of her parents.
- Her degree of resentment. Sandy's degree of resentment is not so little that she immediately forgave her brother after some prodding from her family. She even considered the possibility of reconciliation so long as her brother could admit to wrongdoing. When the possibility of reconciliation was foreclosed, Sandy's resentment never exceeded reasonable expression. Sandy never sought revenge, nor brought harm against her brother's person. Sandy made a self-preserving decision.

Taken together, the above considerations show that the ideal observer would find Sandy's resentment fitting. Given that her resentment is fitting, we should then ask if Sandy *should* resent her brother. We can already see in Aaron's case that his resentment is not fitting. Since his resentment is not even fitting, he cannot possibly be obligated to resent Brittany.

However, Sandy's resentment *is* fitting. Does it follow from this that Sandy ought to resent her brother? Let us bracket, for a moment, the question of whether it is more *prudent* for Sandy to resent her brother. Indeed, we already saw that she had prudential reasons to do so (e.g. resenting him was a means to preserve the "truth" of her experience). However, it is not enough for my claim here that her resentment has prudential value. The prudential value of her resentment does not tell us if her resentment has any *moral* value. However, what I now want to argue is that her resentment *does* have moral value insofar as her resentment is fundamentally connected to wrongs done against her *person* (i.e., the self). And since – as we saw in the discussion of what made her resentment fitting - Sandy's fitting resentment is indicative of a wrong done to her person, she is morally obligated to resent her brother. A refusal to resent her brother in the face of resentment that concerns a harm done to the self is tantamount to refusing to respect the self. Denying one's resentment in this case is another way to deny that one's own person was injured. This denial of the self would, in essence, prevent Sandy from fulfilling her duty to protect herself from harm.

Now, there are cases where it might be fitting but not obligatory to resent a wrongdoer. Consider a different version of Aaron's case. Suppose in this version of Aaron's case, Brittany spills ink on Aaron's jacket. Afterward, Aaron briefly resents

Brittany for her carelessness and, after a week, he no longer feels a vivid sense of resentment. Aaron's resentment in this version of the example seems fitting, but it does not have the sense of obligation that Sandy's case has. In another more personal example of fitting yet non-obligatory resentment, my mailbox was stolen last week. At random, someone ripped my mailbox out of the wall and absconded with it. Naturally, I resent this thief to an extent. I do not, however, feel *obligated* to resent the thief. Why might this be? The fittingness criteria outlined above are met. One, the severity of the harm *matches* the tenor of the resentment. In my case and in the new Aaron case, the felt sense of resentment is roughly proportional to the wrong done – a mild resentment for a mild inconvenience. However, the new Aaron case and my mailbox case both seem to miss the Murphy condition in an important way. It is true that the ink spill and the mailbox theft are both wrongs that affect two people. But the Murphy condition is not concerned with whether a wrong act affects an individual person but rather wrongs done to the *self*. That is what makes those cases of resentment morally salient. Aaron's diminishing sense of resentment is not tied to a wrong done against his self nor is my stolen mailbox a harm done to my person.

Returning then to Sandy's resentment. How does her fitting resentment fulfill a duty to herself? Consider her primary moral alternative to resentment: forgiveness. One of the reasons sometimes given for forgiveness, as we saw, is that forgiveness is morally valuable intrinsically and/or for the social consequences it produces. For instance, we have seen that forgiveness promotes social harmony or balance (Bishop Butler, Beatty 1970, Murphy & Hampton, 1998). And, to the extent that forgiveness is fundamentally concerned with interpersonal relationships, forgiveness is intended to restore the moral



balance between two equal agents. Forgiveness has, as Charles Griswold puts it, a fundamentally *social* character about it such that the “two individuals [involved] are the fundamental moral units” (Griswold 2007, 48). In other words, the moral value of forgiveness partially consists in its ability to repair relationships that have been damaged through wrongdoing. This is why forgiveness is often said to have a “restorative effect” – it can restore an otherwise fractured relationship.

But there are a few problems with pro-forgiveness views like this. To begin with, in order for this kind of forgiveness to even be possible, the wrongdoer must be able to exercise some degree of sympathy to come to understand the harm that he has done to a particular agent. In a case like Sandy’s, the original wrong acts in question are fundamentally *anti-social* in nature. Part of what made it possible for Sandy’s brother to abuse her (and continue to deny his culpability) is that he did not view Sandy as an equal agent participating in an equal social relationship nor could he sympathize with her pain. In other words, even if Sandy *were* to forgive her brother, it is not clear if 1) her brother would have the ability to exercise the sympathy necessary for forgiveness to be possible or if 2) Sandy and her brother had a relationship with her brother that *could* be rehabilitated because it was never a relationship between equals. Thus, it is not clear how Sandy could forgive if her brother is unable to participate in the process of forgiveness. Even if he could, it would be forgiveness between two unequal agents. If true forgiveness is not possible – and I do not think it is in this case – then it would certainly be impossible to say that Sandy could have any *obligation* to forgive since ought implies can.

Forgiveness can only be required in cases where two agents view one another as persons of equal value *before* a wrong act is committed. And, by “equal” I mean to say that both parties must have a roughly equal view of one another in terms of mutual capacity for sympathy or mutual respect for one another’s personhood or dignity. A thin appeal to species membership (i.e., shared humanity in the literal sense of the word) is not enough. In “Two Kinds of Respect,” Stephan Darwall distinguishes between recognition respect and appraisal respect. In the former kind of respect, we must give adequate consideration of a particular fact and act accordingly. “To respect something is thus to regard it as requiring restrictions on the moral acceptability of actions connected with it...To have recognition respect for something is to regard that fact as itself placing restrictions on what is permissible for one to do” (Darwall 1977, 40). In the latter kind of respect, we may hold something or someone as worthy of esteem, but doing so does not necessitate a change in behavior (Darwall 1977, 39).

The kind of respect that must exist between persons of equal value is that of recognition respect. Specifically, recognizing a person as someone of equal value is to give requisite weight to the fact that she is a person in the most robust sense of the term (Darwall 1997, 39). Proper recognition respect for an individual’s person means that our actions toward that person will be affected in light of that fact. In Sandy’s case, for instance, her brother did not have adequate recognition respect for her person. If he *did* have the proper respect for her person, he never would have abused Sandy in the way that he did. Regardless of any “objective” morality surrounding Sandy’s brother’s treatment, his respect for her person would have made it impermissible for him to abuse her. Therefore, adequate recognition respect for Sandy’s person would have entailed that her

brother would not have abused her. Moreover, if Sandy's parents had adequate recognition respect for her person, they would have treated her testimony with more credibility than they had.

Given that it is clear that Sandy's brother had no respect for her person *and* that an impartial spectator would judge that her resentment is fitting, let us ask again whether Sandy *ought* to forgive her brother. The dutiful forgiver, the prudential forgiver, the consequentialist forgiver, and the virtuous forgiver are all in basic agreement about what forgiveness entails (more or less, a better social state) – even if they do not agree on the conditions for when we should forgive (i.e. the conditions on when this social good is obtainable). But no matter the view on what the *conditions* are for forgiveness, without this foundation of mutual respect, i.e. some pre-existing point at which there was a relationship of mutual respect, it now seems for all these views there is no reason an agent should be *obligated* to forgive. For it is no longer clear that there is any social good in play to begin with. Not only that, there does not seem to be any relationship to repair if the wrongdoer never viewed the victim as a person of value to begin with.

The upshot is, in a situation where the wrongdoer lacked any kind of positive regard for the personhood of the agent, the agent's only genuine recourse is to continue to have appropriate resentment toward the wrongdoer in order to preserve her sense of self-worth.<sup>6</sup> In the absence of a positive duty to forgive, it is difficult to see what other duties remain that would not otherwise be excluded by the fittingness of the resentment. For

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<sup>6</sup> This is true provided that forgiveness necessarily entails or requires the forswearing of resentment and that the presence of resentment entails non-forgiveness. Granted; there are other ways we can cope with wrongs done to our person. For instance, we could forget instead of forgive. My argument here is aimed at those who think that forgiveness and resentment are intertwined and that forgiveness *should* be the proper response to wrongdoing.

instance, in a world where something like a duty to exact revenge upon a wrongdoer is excluded by what would be judged as a fitting expression of resentment, few other duties would remain except for those duties that an agent has to him or herself. Given that resentment seems to function in part as an epistemic “tracker” of harm that alerts agents to the fact that they have been wronged, feeling appropriate resentment may be the type of action that makes possible a kind of Kantian duty to oneself to preserve one’s own life, for instance. Thus, the remaining work of this chapter will explain how resentment could fulfill such duties. In doing so, my intent is not to present a robust defense of any particular moral framework, and specifically, a Kantian one. Rather, my intention is to use the Kantian framework as a foil to further substantiate the claim made by Murphy (1998) that resentment can be tied to self-respect.

### **A Duty to Resent**

In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant distinguishes between formal and material duties to the self. Of these duties, we have negative duties to the self and positive duties to the self (Kant 1997, 6:419). Negative duties forbid us from acting against the end of our nature and are concerned with “moral self-preservation.” Positive duties, on the other hand, compel us to make a certain object our end with the goal of perfecting the self. These duties are then separated into duties that arise from our “animal” nature and our “moral” nature (Kant 1997, 6:420). With respect to our animality, our animal nature aims at self-preservation, preservation of the species, and preservation of the capacity to enjoy life at the animal level (Kant 1997, 6:420). Our duties to our animal self and the duty to aim at self-preservation means that it is a violation of a duty to ourselves to harm ourselves.

Kant discusses suicide, sexual pleasure, and drunkenness as examples of such violations. It is easy to disagree with the details of these moral views when they are assessed from a more contemporary perspective. Today, we do not think there is anything inherently wrong with enjoying a few beers, for instance. Nevertheless, I do not believe this is a reason to outright dismiss Kant's larger point – namely, that we have a duty to self-perfection; a duty to improve ourselves as moral beings. And, we also have certain animal duties to ourselves which include our own self-preservation.

Among these moral duties, Kant includes refraining from lying, refraining from “miserly” or “greedy” avarice (Kant 1997, 6:432), and a duty to regard oneself as a human being. More specifically, Kant writes that a human being “can and should value himself by a low as well as by a high standard... Since he must regard himself not only as a person generally but also as a *human being*, that is a person who has duties his own reason lays upon him” (Kant 1997, 6:436). Again, this suggests that Kant has something on his mind quite a bit more robust than mere species membership. In this case, recognizing the self as a human being is not just a matter of species membership but also a matter of recognizing the inherent dignity or humanity within the self.<sup>7</sup>

As we have already seen, resentment has a number of important functions. Chief among these functions is resentment as an “epistemic tracker” of harm. Feelings of resentment are tied to our perception of various moral codes. When we resent a person, we are also making the judgment that we have been wronged in some way. For this reason, an agent may be obligated to resent in those cases where her resentment is

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<sup>7</sup> The last of the duties to the self Kant recognizes is the duty to be our own innate judge of our own actions (Kant 1997, 6:438). I will not come back to that final duty as it does not apply immediately to the discussion of the nature of a duty to resent.

indicative of some harm done against her person. This person would be justified and obligated to resent insofar as she is obligated to protect her own person from harm. In this way, agents have an “animal” duty to resent. To the extent that we are obligated to protect the self, we are also obligated to resent threats to the self. In Sandy’s case, her brother threatened both her physical and psychological safety on repeated occasions. Her resentment reflects a basic stance of self-protection and self-preservation. If she were forbidden to resent her brother, she would, in essence, be forbidden from protecting herself. This is an outcome no sensible or moral person would agree to. Sandy could be *merely* permitted to resent her brother, but resentment’s permissibility does not quite capture how we actually think about vulnerable persons. Just as we would not say that we are merely permitted to protect ourselves from harm, we would not say that Sandy is merely permitted to resent. Thus, a stronger normative claim must be made: Sandy is obligated to resent (insofar as her resentment reflects a basic stance of self-preservation). We could also extend this claim to our duty as moral beings to ourselves. Sandy’s resentment also is a testament to her own sense of dignity. If, as Rawls claims, resentment contains an implicit moral demand that we ought to be treated a particular way, then resentment is also a moral demand to be treated with dignity and respect.

The condition for the possibility of certain grave wrongdoings is that the person who commits the wrong act fails to see the victim as an equal person of value, equally worthy of respect and dignity. Requiring agents to forgive in this circumstance violates the moral duty agents have to themselves to view themselves as persons of dignity and value. In Sandy’s case, her brother never recognized the inherent value and worth of her person. In fact, Sandy is the only one who did acknowledge this fact, and, moreover, she

was able to acknowledge this face of herself in and through her resentment. Thus, resentment may be one of the few ways that an agent can acknowledge the value of her person and do so in a way that is not contingent upon the response or behavior of the wrongdoer.

## **Chapter 5: Resentment in Agent Centered Restorative Justice**

### **Abstract**

This final chapter of the dissertation concludes the project by bringing my positive view of resentment from Chapter 4 to bear on issues pertaining to restorative justice and forgiveness. Here, I claim that my positive view of resentment gives us further reason to be skeptical of the social and political efficacy of forgiveness. In particular, I focus on appeals to forgiveness in contexts where agents have suffered what I shall call, “deep harm.” Deep harms are wrongs that fundamentally disregard the humanity and personhood of the victim. In these contexts, I argue, agents risk having their sense of self-respect undermined, and thus can have obligating reasons to resent. I conclude this chapter—and with it, the project—with a discussion of how resentment can play a role in notion of restorative justice that is agent-centered.

### **Resentment in Social and Political Contexts**

One of the most significant implications of my view concerning resentment is that it changes our perception of “unforgiving victims” who continue to resent wrongdoers. Victims who resent are neither petty nor calloused; they are rationally self-interested and morally justified in their resentment. With this view in place, we avoid “double-victimization” wherein the victim is wronged first by the offender and wronged again by the moral condemnation she receives for refusing to forgive. Such an understanding of resentment has a powerful effect on individual victims in a private context. It can also have implications in the public sphere as well. Forgiveness is often called upon to restore order in both political contexts and in criminal contexts (Philpott 2013). Rather than one-on-one relationships, relationships are more broadly construed in social and political



contexts to include the relationship between citizens and governments or relationships between victims and perpetrators.<sup>1</sup> Forgiveness is often applied in these contexts and, moreover, it is taken to be both a virtue in itself and a desirable prudential outcome in these contexts. If Chapters 1 through 4 have convinced us of resentment's merit in interpersonal contexts, then our views on resentment in political contexts should follow suit. My positive view of resentment creates new problems for appeals to forgiveness in social and political contexts. While there are many possible applications for my discussion in social and political contexts, I focus here on restorative justice. Specifically, in this section, I will show why it is sometimes against the best interest of agents to participate in restorative justice processes if doing so violates a duty to resent.

### **Restorative Justice Defined**

Restorative justice has emerged as an alternative to retributive justice in response to criminal wrongdoing. The aim in restorative justice is to hold criminals directly responsible to the individuals they have wronged. The process generally involves wrongdoers and those affected by the wrong act coming together to try to find a way to meaningfully address the wrong act (Morris 2002). Discussion points can include what should be done to repair the harm and what can be done to prevent further wrongdoing (Johnston and Ness 2007). Restorative justice is distinct from other concepts of justice in this regard: it is often characterized as a *community* process that addresses the needs of *all* persons affected by a crime or wrong act. In this way, restorative justice focuses on

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<sup>1</sup> Given the understanding of forgiveness as a private and interpersonal act, we might doubt whether forgiveness properly operates in the public sphere. While I believe that such skepticism is ultimately correct, it seems to ignore how forgiveness is used and deployed in practice. For that reason, my discussion here assumes that forgiveness is applicable in social contexts because it is, correctly or incorrectly, applied in these contexts in practice.

empowering *all* lives affected by the crime – and, importantly, this includes the wrongdoer (Johnston and Ness 2007). The general aim of restorative justice is to hold offenders accountable for their actions by giving offenders an opportunity to make amends. Restorative justice is one means for offenders to compensate victims for the wrong acts they committed. This is typically done in a manner that is guided by certain principles such as, for example, respect for others.

Further still, restorative justice is distinct from other approaches to justice in that it creates a special role for forgiveness. That is not to say that restorative justice *requires* forgiveness. It is more the case that forgiveness is considered a powerful tool in achieving restorative justice among proponents of restorative justice. Marilyn Peterson Armour and Mark Umbriet have offered the clearest account and most well-researched account of the connection between restorative justice and forgiveness. In their account, they identify six dimensions in which to consider the relationship between forgiveness and restorative justice. They are as follows:

- 1) Forgiveness requires that victims make a conscious decision to overcome negative emotions or affects in connection with the offense and the offender.
- 2) Forgiveness reinstates offenders into the moral community. Thus, the goal of restorative justice is to restore the bond between community members by mending the fractured relationships that are the result of the wrong act.
- 3) Forgiveness is transformative. Through forgiveness, victims can come to see offenders and offenses in a new light.

- 4) Mediators ought to maintain neutrality about forgiveness as an outcome. Though it is important to consider alternatives to retributive justice, it is crucial that victims do not feel obligated to forgive. This may be difficult since “restorative justice has its roots in religious and spiritual traditions and values forgiveness.” Victims can be re-traumatized by prescriptions for forgiveness.
- 5) Forgiveness ought to be implicit. Forgiveness could be a byproduct of the restorative justice process, but should not be considered the primary end.
- 6) Forgiveness is a bilateral process and restorative justice is based on a premise that the victim and the offender are engaged in a dialogue to “potentially help heal the other.” Thus, forgiving in the context of restorative justice is necessarily a bilateral process. (Armour and Umbriet 2005, 492-494)

As shown from the points above, one of the central aims of restorative justice is reconciliation and forgiveness is one possible means to that end. In this context, reconciliation can include reconciliation between the victim and the offender as well as the offender with the moral community at large. While reconciliation is not always possible, it is nevertheless the aim or *telos* of restorative justice, which part of what makes it distinct from retributive justice.

As such, reconciliation is taken to be a “good” in restorative justice contexts just as forgiveness is generally taken to be a “good” in moral contexts. However, if my arguments in Chapters 3 and 4 hold – namely that resentment has both prudential value

and moral value, then there are significant reasons to reconsider any appeals to forgiveness. First, resentment may not only turn out to be a competing prudential “good” with restorative justice, but a victim may have an overriding obligation to *not* participate in restorative justice practices as they are commonly understood. Granted, restorative justice does not always require forgiveness, but forgiveness is often a “byproduct” of the restorative justice process.

### **Reconsidering Restorative Justice**

Generally, as I have already discussed, we are not morally neutral about forgiveness. Lay moral assessments of restorative justice outcomes lead most people to perceive restorative justice outcomes that result in forgiveness more favorably than an outcome that does *not* have forgiveness as a byproduct. One example of this is the high-profile case of restorative justice for Kate and Andy Grosmaire. Kate and Andy are two parents who pursued restorative justice for their daughter’s murder in 2010. Their daughter, Ann, was killed by her fiancé, Conor McBride. Kate and Andy ultimately decided to forgive McBride for murdering their daughter. The Grosmaire’s case was brought to public attention because Kate and Andy’s willingness to forgive the murder of their daughter was remarkable. If the restorative justice process had a different outcome and forgiveness was *not* a “byproduct” of that process, it is unlikely that the Grosmaire’s case would have received as much praise from the public. Though we can hedge our bets and say that forgiveness is not technically required for restorative justice, we nevertheless seem to have a strong preference for forgiveness.

That said, there were some critics who claimed that the attention generated by the Grosmaire’s case might lead some to think that murder is permissible if it can be so easily

forgiven. I think this criticism is ham-fisted in part because it underestimates the real emotional labor involved in forgiveness and it assumes that the Grosmaire's forgiveness was facile. Be that as it may, that criticism does touch on my central concern in Chapter 4. Namely, that forgiveness is not always the most appropriate or desirable outcome in any given situation. I claim that this is especially true in grave cases of wrongdoing like deep harms. Deep harms are wrong acts that fundamentally disregard the humanity and personhood of the victim. They are of the sort that would make an agent's resentment both fitting and required. These kinds of harms are distinct from petty or victimless wrongs.

Given these troubles with forgiveness, we should ask if restorative justice is a desirable or appropriate goal in cases where harms perpetrated against individuals or groups of individuals are also fundamentally anti-social in nature. Part of what rankled a small segment of the public about the Grosmaires *was* their willingness to forgive. Their forgiveness seemed to imply a kind of de-facto permissibility of unspeakable wrongs.

The Grosmaire's case poses another secondary issue for restorative justice aside from forgiveness: the agent who was most directly affected (Ann) is now deceased. Given that restorative justice is a community endeavor and the victim is considered part of the community, the victim usually plays a large role in the restorative justice process. In the Grosmaire's case, they could only guess what Ann *would have* wanted, but had no access to her actual desires and feelings about reconciliation. Thus, the Grosmaire's case was exceptional for restorative justice insofar as it did not include the victim and only centered around the people who were most directly affected by the wrong act: her

parents. The stated purpose and intent of restorative justice is to bring about healing and closure to both the victim and other parties directly connected to the victim.

The point of restorative justice is to bring everyone to the table, in a manner of speaking, for the betterment of all involved. The problems I have raised for forgiveness and the established merit of resentment put into question the efficacy and the ethics of restorative justice, insofar as restorative justice is intended to bring healing and closure to all parties involved, most especially the victim. I argue that current notions of forgiveness, restorative justice, and reconciliation and restorative justice ultimately undermine agents in cases of “deep harm” like Sandy’s where a) the wrong is profoundly antisocial and b) the victim continues to be affected by the wrong act.

In cases like Sandy’s, I argue that restorative justice cannot meaningfully consider the full spectrum of the needs of the victim unless it also includes sustained resentment (and with it, un-forgiveness) as not only a permissible outcome, but a potentially *desirable* byproduct of the process. There ought to be a re-conceptualization of restorative justice that focuses on the flourishing of the agent. In the restorative justice process, the agent is forced into the tremendously difficult position of taking her wrongdoer’s needs into account to reach a satisfactory outcome for all involved. This is especially problematic in cases of deep harm because the very condition for the possibility of that harm was the wrongdoer’s abject failure to recognize the agent as a person of equal worth and value. Thus, when the agent “comes to the table” for restorative justice talks, she is not negotiating from a place of strength. She is instead forced to cater to the interests and needs of her oppressor.

An agent-centered restorative justice that seeks to repair and elevate victims in cases where deep harm has been done requires a more nuanced understanding of how and why wrong acts were committed. This will require looking at cases on a granular, case-by-case basis. Restorative justice might be more appropriate in cases where wrongdoing was either not terribly severe or accidental. Theft and property damage, at first blush at least, seem like good candidates for traditional restorative justice. With enough effort, evidence of contrition on the part of the wrongdoer, and willingness to reconcile on the part of the victim, order and balance can probably be returned to the affected community.

Traditionally conceived restorative justice seems *inappropriate* in cases where wrong acts are committed from a basic stance of anti-social behavior. These are acts that are committed with intent to harm the other person. These acts are made possible by a profound failure of the worth and value of the other person. In a positive relationship, both parties assume that one another is a roughly free and equal person of value. This recognition is foundational in at least two respects. First, there is the sort of base-level recognition the other person is “another human being” in the literal sense of “the human species.” This sort of recognition is relatively uncontroversial benign—there is no dispute here about whether or not the parties in a positive relationship would recognize one another in this way.

The second and more relevant “level” of recognition is morally relevant: it is the recognition of the other person as a person of value. This level of recognition concerns whether or not a person is recognized as worthy of respect. For example, when we decide to repair a pre-existing relationship or create a future positive relationship, it is because we have recognized a relevant fact about that person that influences our decision to repair

or restore the relationship. That fact is that the person is a person of value. Stephen Darwall calls this sort of respect “recognition respect.” When we have recognition respect for another person, we modify (or fail to modify, in a case of disrespect) our behavior in ways that might be required by the recognition of a given fact about them. To put it another way: wrongdoers fail to modify their behavior in light of an appropriate level of recognition respect for the other person as a person of value.

Wrongdoers may not only lack adequate recognition respect, they may also exhibit a lack of empathy for the victim and lack of concern for how their actions can affect the lives of others. Restorative justice is inappropriate in cases where wrongdoers fail the test of recognition respect, but it is also inappropriate in cases where wrongdoers fail to understand how her or his behavior affected the victim. The wrongdoer would need to demonstrate an authentic desire to change their behavior. Such a desire must come from the wrongdoer’s personal moral compass. Restorative justice cannot be an option for those who, for prudential reasons, would simply like to avoid retributive justice.

To explain this in terms of Sandy’s case, there are at least two ways to give an account of Sandy’s abuse from the perspective of her brother. Either Sandy’s brother had appropriate recognition respect toward Sandy and failed to modify his behavior in light of that fact *or* he never considered the fact that she is a person of value in the first place. Given that Sandy’s mistreatment began in childhood and continued throughout adulthood, it seems that the latter is the case.

Let us not forget that Sandy’s brother’s acts of violence were criminal. In a hypothetical situation where Sandy pressed charges against her brother and her brother



was convicted, restorative justice (as opposed to retributive justice) might have been pursued given that Sandy's abuse occurred within a "family" or "community" context. If Sandy's brother had appropriate recognition respect toward her but either neglected to or could not constrain his behavior accordingly, then reconciliation (and possibly forgiveness as a byproduct of reconciliation) would be an appropriate avenue to pursue, so long as Sandy desired it. This situation would be a clear-cut case where "restoration" of a once-positive relationship might be possible.

However, if Sandy's brother had totally failed from the outset to recognize her as a person of value, then traditional restorative should *not* be pursued. It would be fitting for Sandy to resent her brother for failing to recognize her as a person of value. In cases where a wrongdoer fundamentally fails to acknowledge a victim as a person of equal worth and value, the victim may not be able to participate in the restorative justice process without violating her self-respect in the process. In this case, failing to resent her brother when she should is equivalent to a violation of something like "recognition self-respect" as a foundational requirement for her duty to herself. Thus, in this case, it is not only fitting that Sandy resents her brother; but she is also obligated to resent her brother. Restorative justice requires that the needs of the wrongdoer be placed alongside the needs of the victim but this would require the victim to violate her sense of self-respect.

One might argue that restorative justice is still possible in the case of a "total failure" of recognition because restorative justice does not mandate forgiveness. A call for restorative justice is still inappropriate in this case. This is because restorative justice seeks to restore balance to a *community*. Committing an act of deep harm might probably entail failing to recognize an agent as a person of value. By failing to recognize the

victim as a person of value, the wrongdoer also demonstrates that he does not consider the victim as part of the community. Therefore, in cases where wrongdoers fail to recognize agents as persons of value, restorative justice is not consistently the best choice for the victim.

The pursuit of restorative justice would be counter-productive for a case like Sandy's. Restorative justice has the potential to disproportionately serve the interests of the wrongdoers and those connected with wrongdoers rather than the interests of victims. Sandy's case shows how this can occur. Sandy's family demanded that she forgive her brother. This demand was not placed on Sandy because forgiveness is virtuous. Her family demanded forgiveness because they wanted her brother be returned to the fold of their individual moral community thus making their lives more pleasant. Sandy's preferred means of coping with the wrongs she had suffered was to stop speaking to her brother. Her family disapproved of Sandy's way of coping not because it was unpleasant for the family, not because it was bad for Sandy. No one appears to be remorseful or contrite in Sandy's case, least of all her brother. Yet, both her brother and her family wish for Sandy to forgive. This shows that individuals like Sandy come to restorative justice talks from a disempowered place; there are cases where reconciliation is the desirable outcome because it unfairly benefits wrongdoers.

Sandy's case shows that there are cases where restorative justice would be inappropriate. Calls for restorative justice in instances where victims have endured deep harms have at least two harmful potential outcomes. First, a blind appeal to restorative justice harms the agent by making her need for resentment subordinate to a need for community reconciliation. Moreover, this is *despite the fact* that the condition for the

possibility of her harm was her exclusion from the relevant moral community in the first place. Restorative justice only serves to re-affirm the inequality at the basis of the relationship between the agent and the wrongdoer. If that agent does in fact have a duty to resent, restorative justice asks the agent to violate that duty to herself in order to serve the needs and interests of the community. It is difficult to see what incentive the victim would have to participate, given that it would be against her interests to do so.

Second, a demand for restorative justice renders reconciliation contingent on the views and will of the wrongdoer. If the wrongdoer committed the wrong act because he did not perceive the victim as a person of equal worth and value, restorative justice will not be effective until the wrongdoer undergoes the necessary personal transformation to see the wronged agent as a person of value. In many cases, reconciliation might require that wrongdoers giving up a certain degree of social dominance and privilege. This also places the interests of the wronged individual beneath the interests of the wrongdoer. Reconciliation, if possible, occurs on the wrongdoer's terms.

One important implication of my project is that, in cases where an agent is obligated to resent a wrongdoer, that agent should also be released from any obligation to participate in restorative justice process as restorative justice is currently practiced. Adequate recognition of an agent's duty to resent in effect forecloses the possibility of a restorative justice process that values and respects the experience of the victim. A duty to resent ultimately demands a new approach to justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation in social and political contexts.

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