



## Chapter Eight

# In Defense of Third-Party Forgiveness

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In March 2007, the popular American public radio show *This American Life* aired an episode that included “Redemption by Proxy,”<sup>1</sup> the true story of three people: Sophia, a high school teacher; Robert, her former, exceedingly troubled, student; and Lilly, his best friend. Robert rebelled, and Sophia came down too hard on him, keeping him after school, punishing him daily, and barring him from school events. Robert failed to graduate, he fell into violent company, and a year later he was shot and killed. Many of his friends blamed his teacher Sophia for his downfall; his friend Lilly was among them. Sophia herself “felt bad for not reaching him, bad for having been so hard on him” even before he was shot, and had guilty dreams of being confronted by his former classmates. She held herself partly culpable for Robert’s downward trajectory. Then one day, Lilly came to Sophia’s classroom and handed her a note. She called it a “letter of appreciation” from Robert but Lilly herself had written the note, which recounted her past conversations with Robert. After he failed to graduate, the note explained, only Lilly had remained angry. Robert had experienced a change in attitude. Despite everything, he came to feel grateful because Sophia had cared enough to hold him accountable, and that gratitude provided a context in which to understand her punishment of him. Interestingly, Lilly’s motives for the note focused on her relationship to—and care for—Robert: she wanted to redeem his reputation, even posthumously, to prove that he was someone who understood his responsibilities even if he couldn’t meet them, and to express the attitudes he had not. What she had not expected was the note’s profound effect on Sophia: Sophia kept the note in her wallet from then on, feeling that it “lifted away years of guilt.” In the podcast, the relief in her voice was palpable.

Many contemporary philosophers would agree that this is a moving story, but few would easily accept it as a story of forgiveness. Their objection might



go something like this: however much Sophia might crave and deserve forgiveness, and however much Lilly might well have intended to offer it to her, Lilly can never forgive Sophia for something Sophia did to Robert. Robert was the victim of Sophia's blameworthy actions, so only Robert can forgive Sophia. In the oft-quoted words of John Dryden, "forgiveness to the injured doth belong."<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I will take issue with the philosophical position that many have interpreted Dryden's line to express: namely, that only victims of wrongdoing are in a position to forgive.

This chapter offers both a defense and a philosophical account of third-party forgiveness.<sup>3</sup> Most people agree that there are situations in which third parties (individuals other than the victim or perpetrator of a wrong) find themselves called upon to make conciliatory gestures or to adopt and express attitudes we would ordinarily describe as forgiving were they articulated by a victim.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, these third-party actions can potentially fulfill some of the same moral functions as forgiveness: repairing relationships damaged by wrongdoing, releasing repentant wrongdoers from self-recrimination and guilt and thus relieving excessive suffering, and expressing values of reconciliation. They may even function to support the victim's own healing.

I argue that we make best sense of both the nature and the value of such acts if we are willing to go further and recognize them as third-party forgiveness, a variant of forgiveness that is related but not reducible to victim's forgiveness. When we deny the conceptual possibility and potential moral value of acts of forgiveness performed by those other than the victim of wrongdoing, we subscribe to a hyperindividualized account of wrongdoing that risks overmoralizing the victim's position and ignoring the complex, distinct roles played by third parties, including witnesses, bystanders, and secondary participants. Third-party forgiveness is not necessarily *good*, wise, or appropriate forgiveness, any more than all acts of victim's forgiveness are—indeed, there are heightened moral risks and concerns associated with it. Yet these risks do not negate its possible contributions to ongoing moral repair. When we deny the possibility of third-party forgiveness, we limit our understanding of the role such forgiveness can play—for better or for worse—in complex circumstances of multiple, mutual wrongdoings and hostility. Finally, in acknowledging the possibility of third-party forgiveness, I claim, we can better and more subtly assess morally problematic instances.

My defense takes the following form. First, I briefly discuss what it means for one person—any person—to forgive another. Second, I develop what it would mean to forgive *as* a third party by asking what—if not sheer victimization—gives one person the standing to forgive another.<sup>5</sup> Rather than arguing for universal forgiveness, I suggest that legitimate acts of third-party forgiveness are grounded both in an appropriate external relation between the forgiver and a primary actor (victim or perpetrator) and in the would-be

forgiver's empathetic engagement with the appropriate perspectives. I then consider how this account holds up against standard moral and conceptual objections to third-party forgiveness, and conclude with some remarks on the relationship between third-party forgiveness and victim's forgiveness. Throughout my discussion, I draw on two narratives: the story of Sophia, Robert, and Lilly, described earlier, and the fictional story of Eva Katchadourian and her difficult, ultimately murderous son Kevin, from Lionel Shriver's disturbing novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin*.<sup>6</sup>

### WHAT DO WE DO WHEN WE FORGIVE?

*We Need to Talk About Kevin* is a harrowing exploration of the limits of forgiveness. Written as a series of letters, the novel narrates the fraught relationship between Eva Katchadourian and her son Kevin, an indecipherable and malevolent child who grows up to commit a vicious mass murder at his high school, not unlike the real-life murders that plagued Columbine and other American cities in recent decades. Throughout her correspondence, Eva agonizes over a guilty secret: she never liked her son very much, and she did not want to be a mother in the first place. They conducted a cold, often vicious, sometimes violent battle of wills throughout his childhood. While Eva is not responsible for her son's action in a strict sense of the word, at times her self-condemnation seems extremely well placed. Not surprisingly, Eva's letters return several times to the nature of forgiveness: as something she wants—or does not want—from the parents of her son's victims, as something she feels unable to offer to her son, and as something she does not understand.

I am not sure what “forgiving” Kevin entails. Surely, it doesn't involve sweeping *Thursday* artificially under the carpet or ceasing to hold him accountable, which couldn't be in his larger moral interests. I cannot imagine that I'm supposed to *get over it*, like hopping over a low stone wall; if *Thursday* was a barrier of some kind, it was made of razor wire. . . . I cannot pretend he didn't do it, I cannot pretend I don't wish he hadn't, and if I have abandoned that felicitous parallel universe . . . the relinquishment of my private if-only derives more from a depleted imagination than any healthy reconciliation for what's done is done. Honestly, when Carol Reeves formally “forgave” our son on CNN for murdering her boy, Jeffrey, who was already precocious enough at the classical guitar to be courted by Julliard, I had no idea what she was talking about. Had she built a box around Kevin in her head, knowing that only rage dwelled there; was our son now simply a place her mind refused to go? At best, I reasoned that she had successfully depersonalized him into a regrettable natural phenomenon that had descended on her family like a hurricane.<sup>7</sup>

Eva is not alone here. Contemporary philosophers also struggle over the precise nature of forgiveness.<sup>8</sup> In everyday English, to describe one person as having forgiven another might mean to say that he or she was no longer angry with him or her or that he or she had changed his or her opinion of his or her or attitude toward him or her (coming to see him or her as reformed, improved, potentially improved, or worthy of a second chance), or that he or she had accepted his or her apology, that he or she had chosen not to revenge him- or herself, that he or she initiated a reconciliation. This list is not exhaustive, only characteristic.

How can philosophers make sense of these permutations?<sup>9</sup> There are a couple of options available: one might take the examples listed above to represent a cumulative set of necessary conditions. Someone forgives when he or she manages to do all these things; that is, when he or she stops being angry and appropriately adjusts his or her perception of the wrongdoer and accepts his or her apology, and so on. This makes forgiveness very attractive, at least from the perspective of the wrongdoer, but perhaps less appealing and ultimately very difficult to achieve for most potential forgivers. An act of genuine forgiveness becomes a rare event. Or philosophers could view these instances disjunctively: to forgive is either to overcome angry feelings or to accept an apology or to stop holding the wrong against the wrongdoer, etc. Certainly, there are significant points of overlap between no longer being angry, for example, and viewing someone differently. Seeing someone as improved or reformed naturally lessens the victim's anger toward him or her. Perhaps the very best cases of forgiveness manage to achieve all of these conditions, but each on its own represents a minimal threshold for what might count as forgiveness.<sup>10</sup> And finally, there is a third option: one might accept all of these as examples of everyday, pre-theoretical use of the word "forgiveness" but argue that only one represents a genuinely reflective understanding of the concept. For the most part, philosophers of forgiveness have opted for the third strategy, arguing that whatever else a single act of forgiveness might entail, it necessarily involves the victim overcoming his or her resentment, moral anger, or other retributive emotions.<sup>11</sup>

I have argued elsewhere for a broad understanding of forgiveness, claiming that a philosophical account should reflect and clarify recognizable everyday forgiving practices, even if these are not uncomplicated—especially if we wish to pay due respect to the narratives, responses, and self-understandings of victims.<sup>12</sup> A philosophical account should distill those features and functions that are central to the concept as it emerges from everyday practices and develop a rational or regulative ideal that best reflects them. If these cannot be unified into a single, universal paradigm, it is better to sit with complexity than to deny the phenomenology of moral experience. Examining practices

of forgiveness reveals an overlapping set of personal reactions to wrongful harm, typically characterized by certain changes in attitude, perception, and behavior and perhaps by the uttering of certain phrases. These reactions presuppose some confrontation with the wrong as a wrong, and they are grounded in ethical reasons. What these different phenomena have in common are their intended function(s). They all intend a certain transformation in relation to the wrong and wrongdoer: to *release* the wrongdoer from his or her wrong in some way, to *repair* some of the damage done to all parties by the wrong—perhaps even to reconcile with him or her, reaffirming an old relationship—or simply to offer some *relief* from the subjective experience of guilt. Identifying acts of forgiveness by their intended function means we must pay attention to how the concept is used by those in situ.<sup>13</sup> It is not something we can determine in advance any more than a disinterested observer can catch every gesture of love or apology, distrust or gratitude as they pass between intimates.

For my present purposes, however, I am prepared to remain relatively agnostic about the precise nature of forgiveness. We have good reason to embrace the possibility of nonvictim forgiveness, I claim, whether forgiveness is conceived primarily as a change in reactive attitudes (overcoming resentment) or outlined according to a more complex account. Moreover, proponents of narrow and wide accounts of forgiveness can at least agree that forgiveness is a personal reaction to wrongful harm; it differs, for example, from official, institutional responses like pardon or amnesty. The ability to pardon or grant amnesty depends upon political or judicial authority (and the power to wield it). Forgiveness does not depend on institutional support.

What then grounds or grants the ability to forgive? Philosophers have been quick to answer: victimization. The victim is the only individual whose personal connection to the harm is such that he or she is in a position to forgive it: “who suffers the harm . . . is in a position to grant or refuse” it.<sup>14</sup> Jeffrie Murphy and Joram Haber agree that forgiveness actually *belongs* to the victim’s agency.<sup>15</sup> Trudy Govier calls it “the victim’s prerogative,” Piers Benn describes an entitlement analogous to waiving one’s debts, and H. J. N. Horsbrugh argues that even the verb “to forgive” takes into account whether one has sustained a serious injury.<sup>16</sup> Agreement on this point is so widespread, it is treated almost as a truism: victims forgive.<sup>17</sup> Many formulations of the question of third-party forgiveness, moreover, tend to beg the question against it: to ask whether a third-party can forgive *on behalf of* the victim is to suggest that all forgiveness is already in some way victim’s forgiveness.

As with many apparent truisms, the content of this claim warrants some conceptual unpacking. Just what does it mean to claim that only victims can forgive? If most philosophers take forgiveness to be the effort to overcome

anger, resentment, and hostility for moral reasons, then this is surely a task that can be undertaken by others besides the primary victim of wrong.<sup>18</sup> In my initial example, Robert's friend Lilly struggled to overcome her anger and blame toward his teacher, Sophia, even though she was not the target of Sophia's punishments. Similarly, it seems that Lilly came to see Sophia differently after Robert's death, that she stopped holding Robert's death against Sophia and that the two came to achieve some kind of reconciliation. Furthermore, her actions appear to also have had the functions I attributed to forgiveness: releasing Sophia from her guilt, repairing some—though sadly not all—of the damage done, and assisting in reconciliation. In the following section, I suspend philosophical skepticism about third-party forgiveness and ask, what would it mean to take Lilly's actions for what they seem to be? How might we account for them as instances of third-party forgiveness?

### FORGIVING AS A THIRD PARTY

What does it mean to forgive as a third party and not as the victim of a particular wrongdoing? I have claimed that forgiveness is a personal reaction to wrongful harm; that is, if my capacity to forgive depends upon some fact about me in particular, that fact will be some personal relationship to the wrongdoing—some reason I have to take the wrongdoing *personally*—and not some power or authority I possess antecedently and independently of the wrong. This is one difference between forgiveness and a restricted performative power such as a presidential pardon. President Obama's power to issue pardons does not depend on the reasons he may have for doing so in any given case. He may be criticized for pardoning without reason or for bad reasons, but the pardon is not undone by the mere existence of bad reasons. In the case of forgiveness, whether or not I am in a position to forgive (or not forgive) any given wrong—what Glen Pettigrove refers to as the “standing to forgive”—appears to depend upon the circumstances that have drawn me into this predicament in the first place. This is partly why Claudia Card refers to forgiveness as a “moral power” held by some and not others.<sup>19</sup>

Suppose we accept that not everyone can forgive every wrong, that the capacity to forgive a given wrong is not universal but limited to those with personal connections to the act requiring forgiveness. We need not conclude that only victims can manifest an appropriately personal relationship of the kind needed. My personal connection to the wrong can be indirect; I may be drawn in and provided with reasons to take it personally, based not on my relationship to the act but my relationship to one of the primary actors. In other words, the personal quality of some connections possesses a kind of limited

*transitivity*; the personal nature of my connection to *V* (the victim) also provides me with a (fainter) personal connection to *W*, the wrongdoing, which *V* has tremendous reason to take personally.<sup>20</sup> Insofar as my relationship to *V* and *V*'s relationship to *W* are appropriately grounded (more on that shortly), my attempts to forgive or my refusals to do so are also legitimate—though whether or not they are virtuous remains an open question in need of further assessment, just as it does for individual cases of victim's forgiveness.

Third-party forgiveness rests on a personal but indirect relationship to the wrong. Indeed, this indirectness is precisely what distinguishes it from secondary or tertiary victim's forgiveness, even though the same person may be in a position to forgive both as secondary victim and as a relevantly connected third party (such as Lilly, who is a friend to Robert and a former student of Sophia's).<sup>21</sup> It also explains why third-party forgiveness is not necessarily a substitute or surrogate for victim's forgiveness. In forgiving as a third party, I do not forgive on behalf of the victim: I forgive alongside her or when she does not. Surrogate relationships aim, as much as possible, to reproduce the original; the more they approximate it, the more successful the surrogacy. But the successful third-party forgiver does not attempt to imitate or assume the victim's role. He or she does not believe him- or herself to be the victim of wrong, and neither does he or she aim to forgive *as* the victim or even on behalf of the victim. Instead he or she offers his or her own forgiveness as an addition or an alternative.<sup>22</sup> As I established earlier, if forgiveness is a personal reaction and if many acts of wrongdoing have multiple victims, then we already know that one person's forgiveness need not be a substitute for another's (at least in theory) long before we invoke the specter of third-party forgiveness. Decisions to forgive or to refuse forgiveness can be enacted again and again.

So what sort of connection provides the "appropriate grounding" for aspiring third-party forgivers? Put differently, when can we trust in the appearance of transitivity? It is instructive first to examine acts of apparent third-party forgiveness that fail to be so grounded.

After all, I was uneasy with the unsolicited tide of forgiveness that washed over the shipwreck of our family in the wake of *Thursday*. In addition to mail promising either to beat his brains out or to bear his babies, Kevin has received dozens of letters offering to share his pain, apologizing for society's having failed to recognize his spiritual distress and granting him blanket moral amnesty for what he has yet to regret.<sup>23</sup>

Eva Katchadourian is right to be uncomfortable with such random acts of "blanket" forgiveness. These (possibly) well-meaning strangers have missed the central point: they have jumped past the personal and the particular in

their “cheap . . . preening” and “conspicuous clemency.” Those who offer blanket forgiveness by e-mail do not understand the import of what Kevin did in the way that his victims did, their mothers Mary Woolford and Carol Reeves do, or even as his own mother does. The problem with “cheap” forgiveness from strangers is that it is ignorant, unthinking, and—most of all—uninvolved: “After reading a few pages from the merciful, I’d feel as if I’d just crawled from a vat of liquefied squash. I wanted to shake these people and scream, *Forgive us! Do you know what he did?*”<sup>24</sup>

But now consider Eva’s personal encounter with a stranger’s forgiveness earlier in the novel. She is waiting to visit her son in juvenile prison and finds herself in conversation with another mother, Loretta Greenleaf, who is also waiting: “we shared a sympathetic look, mutually marveling that kids who commit grown-up crimes still have their little-boy sweet tooth.”<sup>25</sup> Once Loretta realizes Eva is the mother of the infamous “K. K.,” however, the tone shifts with a quick intake of breath. “I could hear the reels in her head rewinding, as she grasped frantically after everything I’d said, to which she’d only half listened.”<sup>26</sup> There is silence and sudden, cold, even judgmental awkwardness. Loretta moves subtly away, but then the conversation continues. Eventually, she asks the familiar question: *why?* Eva snaps her response: “‘I expect it is my fault,’ I said defiantly. ‘I wasn’t a very good mother—cold, judgmental, selfish. Though you can’t say I haven’t paid the price.’”<sup>27</sup> Loretta is silent, judging. And then, surprisingly, Eva is granted a reprieve.

It hard to be a momma. Nobody ever pass a law say ’fore you get pregnant you gotta be perfect. I’m sure you try the best you could. You here, in this dump, on a nice Saturday afternoon? You still trying. No you take care of yourself, honey. And you don’t be talking any more a that nonsense.

Loretta Greenleaf held my hand and squeezed it. My eyes sprang hot. I squeezed her hand back, so hard and so long that she must have feared I might never let go.<sup>28</sup>

Let us outline the details of this encounter. First of all, Loretta’s actions are reasonably described as *forgiving*: her stance toward Eva shifts from negative judgment to sudden and spontaneous comfort; her words offer Eva relief and (temporary) release from her crushing guilt, and they repair the initial solidarity the two shared. Loretta does not say “I forgive you,” but her gesture speaks volumes regarding her attitudinal and cognitive shift. Of course, Loretta’s forgiveness is not directed at *Kevin* and his crimes, but at Eva and her self-attributed role in making *Kevin* the monster most people (including Eva herself) think that he is.

Loretta Greenleaf is not a victim of Kevin’s crimes or of Eva’s purported failures: not primary, secondary, or tertiary. Her only connection to both is



the long, humiliating wait to see their children and the guilty bewilderment she and Eva share at why they are there and how they might have failed as parents. Her involvement emerges from solidarity with Eva and from personal sympathy. We are also given evidence that her forgiveness is preceded by some imaginative effort to conceive of just what is at stake, both in her “frantic” grasping and her eventual question. We see her struggle with the import of what she has just learned and her initial desire to physically separate herself. Her subsequent gesture of forgiveness does not appear cheap or pruning or resemble a “vat of liquefied squash.” It is compassionate, generous, and knowing—Loretta does not absolve Eva by dismissing her responsibility for Kevin’s behavior altogether, but she offers much-needed comfort.

Can we identify the key difference between Loretta’s and Lilly’s actions and the letters from strangers? Both Loretta and Lilly knew something of the situation before they spoke. Lilly knew firsthand what Robert’s experience was, while Loretta’s experiences helped her to imagine what Eva’s might have been. In Lilly’s case, she was careful not to speak *as* Robert, although he represented her connection to Sophia and Sophia’s actions. In Loretta’s case, she drew on the partial identification she and Eva share without claiming Eva’s experience for her own. Lilly found herself drawn in through a relationship of *care* for Robert and Loretta was connected through one of *identification* with Eva.

Yet these relationships, described externally, are not yet sufficient to ground Lilly and Loretta’s forgiveness appropriately. Some imaginative effort is involved. We can imagine someone else in the waiting room with just as many reasons to identify with Eva, but whose capacity or willingness to engage empathetically is nonexistent. This other person might say, “Don’t worry about it” or “get over it” or “it’s not your fault” automatically, in order to distance herself from Eva, to avoid rather than establish connection, and thus to alleviate her own discomfort with the encounter. In so doing, this imagined interlocutor would resemble the anonymous purveyors of blanket forgiveness via mail—as would a different student of Sophia’s, if that student was concerned only to divest Sophia of blame or to end an embarrassing emotional encounter with a teacher.

Both Loretta and Lilly take time before forgiving: for Lilly, this is a matter of months, while Loretta moves away for only a moment. But that space of time is suggestive; their subsequent words indicate that they have done reflective work to get to the forgiveness they express. Insofar as they possess credit as forgivers, both have done something to *earn* that credit. The content of Lilly’s work is explained to us in her own words; she had to learn to see things from Robert’s perspective, to understand his side of the conversations. Loretta’s work is left to the reader’s imagination, but it is not hard to read

into her subtle move away from Eva, the question she couldn't avoid asking, and her warm and direct generosity to Eva's breakdown. She goes from being unable to imagine how a creature like Kevin could be possible ("Why?") to seeing only too well how he came to be—and perhaps how he could have come to be in her own home. This reflective work gives them insight into Sophia's and Eva's plights that, arguably, Sophia and Eva themselves do not possess (given their understandable guilt).

We might generalize from Loretta and Lilly to describe (one) avenue to third-party forgiveness. A successful third-party forgiver is committed to the *moral* interests of the victim and wrongdoer, that is, to getting the decision whether to forgive "right" and, at the same time, demonstrates some deference to the victim or wrongdoer's own understanding of those interests, even if that understanding ultimately diverges from the forgiver's own.<sup>29</sup> Yet this combination of commitment and deference cannot be automatic and unthinking if we are to avoid the "vat of liquefied squash" Eva warns against; some work is required, and this work is best described as imaginative sympathy. The successful third-party forgiver engages in an experience that David Velleman describes as the following: she "imagin[es] the world as experienced by him—as seen through his eyes and traveled in his shoes" if only for a moment.<sup>30</sup>

Adam Smith famously describes imaginative sympathy as taking place in two stages: first, we "enter as it were into [the other's] body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations" and then we bring these same feelings "home to ourselves," adopting and "[making] them our own."<sup>31</sup> The experience of "Smithean" sympathy is not literally to feel the other's pain; after all, we sometimes feel for another "a passion of which he himself seems to be altogether incapable; because, when we put ourselves in his case, that passion arises in our breast from the imagination, though it does not in his from the reality."<sup>32</sup> Rather, it is to experience pain that arises from our attempt to view the world from the other's perspective, and our subsequent effort to bring that perspective "home"—to understand and experience it as our own. In sympathizing—at least, in the imaginative sense Velleman and Smith describe—I thus align myself both what I understand to be the other person's interests and what I imagine to be his or her perspective.<sup>33</sup> But I do both with the understanding that they are his or hers and not mine; I do not confuse the two.

Needless to say, such imaginative exercises are fallible, to say the least, and are also asymptotic at best. The Lillys and Loretas of the world cannot ever experience exactly what Sophia and Eva feel, let alone understand what it is to be Robert, in Lilly's case, or Mary Woolford, in Loretta's. To imagine otherwise is hubris, and the temptation it presents—to presume more knowledge than can really be gained from an imaginative exercise and then

to offer forgiveness on the basis of that presumed knowledge—represents a significant moral risk.<sup>34</sup>

In Lilly's case, the risks are minimal. From what we are told of Robert, it seems he would appreciate her efforts, whatever nuances or details she missed. But things are not so simple in the example of Loretta. After all, her empathetic connection is with Eva and not with Kevin's victims. How then is her exercise sensitive to their needs, voices, and perspectives? To answer this, we must consider with what Loretta engages: that is, the attitudes and understandings expressed by Eva.

Eva is by no means a perfectly contrite wrongdoer. She is bitter ("you can't say I haven't paid the price"), wary, and defiant and is still working through what it means to be the mother of Kevin. Indeed, the novel's narrative itself functions as her bewildered and horrified confession of ambivalence. But what Loretta recognizes and finds familiar in Eva's anger is its self-directedness. Ultimately, Eva is as unrelentingly in her self-condemnation as Mary Woolford is in her attacks on Eva—indeed, she shares Mary Woolford's appraisal. Furthermore, Eva is all too aware of how her actions may have affected Kevin's development, and she is consumed by her own shame and regret. When Loretta places herself imaginatively in the shoes of a wrongdoer, she engages with a wrongdoer who has already taken on the victims' assessments and perspectives on her wrongdoing and who cycles endlessly through the subsequent guilt and self-recrimination. Loretta's task might be significantly more challenging were she to engage imaginatively with a careless and unrepentant wrongdoer in denial about their culpability (and thus their moral interests and obligations). It is highly unlikely that exercise would end in forgiveness if, as I have stipulated, the third party is committed to the moral interests of the wrongdoer. As things stand, Loretta offers Eva relief that Eva is not prepared to grant herself.

The multiple connection grounding a potential third-party forgiver to the wrong he or she would forgive is perhaps best described as moral solidarity, a term I borrow from Jean Harvey.<sup>35</sup> Many examples of moral solidarity are found in individual intimate relationships. Family and friends of the victim and wrongdoer may be best placed to listen and to gauge appropriate reactions: one person comes to forgive another for what he or she did to a third, through the forgiver's caring relationships to both victim and wrongdoer, and his or her empathetic reconstruction of both people's experiences. But relations of moral solidarity may also be built through common experience. Eva meets Loretta in the waiting room of the juvenile detention center. Only Eva is mother to a so-called monster, but both of them have been externally branded as parental failures. The notion of moral solidarity is equally fruitful when applied to allegiances that are formed through shared social and

political identifications: that is, when those involved share meaningful group identities, especially when these identities are partly responsible for their vulnerability to harm. I think here of those who face social exclusion and violence, particularly members of minority groups and those who have experienced or witnessed hate crimes. In her psychological studies of forgiveness, Sharon Lamb focuses on female survivors of sexual abuse and violence; her empirical research suggests that most often decisions to forgive or to refuse forgiveness are grounded in a sense of solidarity with others in the same situation.<sup>36</sup> For those who are socialized to discount their own subjectivity and individual value, it may be easier to confront shared wrongs indirectly, through sympathetic identification with other victims.<sup>37</sup>

### THE VALUE OF THIRD-PARTY FORGIVENESS

Thus far I have outlined the features of successful instances of third-party forgiveness, emphasizing its double grounding in imaginative sympathy and transitive personal relations of identification and care. In this section, I argue that acknowledging the existence and value of third-party forgiveness leads us to subtler and more attentive assessments of the aftermath of wrong.

First, third-party forgiveness is occasionally the only forgiveness left to those carrying guilt. Consider, for example, the effect of Lilly's note on Sophia: Sophia had been carrying a terrible burden—arguably heavier than she deserved. She was plagued by doubts about her own teaching style and its effects on Robert, and this guilt even manifested itself in dreams of accusation and condemnation. She held herself responsible for his alienation and failure. Sophia had taught many other students, many who succeeded admirably and many who adore her; in feeling guilty, she wasn't craving general affirmation of her teaching style or her moral worth. Rather, she wanted something very specific in relation to her actions toward Robert: she wanted to be forgiven for those deeds in particular, but Robert himself was dead and could no longer forgive her. In the radio interview, his friend Lilly says she is not even sure Robert would ever have written such a note, even though he held the beliefs and sentiments expressed in it. But a note from Lilly *about* Robert offered Sophia what it was she wanted and, it appears, what Robert would have wanted for her. It may even have allowed Sophia to forgive herself.

Second, in theorizing about wrongdoing and the repair that follows it, there is a tendency to schematize the players and relationships involved: *X* the victim forgives *Y* the wrongdoer for *Z* the wrong committed. Such an idealization, while perhaps necessary, fails to acknowledge the important roles played by witnesses, bystanders, beneficiaries, and others who stand in

solidarity with the primary victim—or the primary perpetrator. The roles and relationships we take on are often complicated and overlapping. If we understand forgiveness as the personal reaction appropriately grounded in moral reason that leads to a transformative release from guilt, then it is not always clear we can know from where or from whom such forgiveness will come. In the case of Robert and Sophia, it could not come from Robert because he was dead, but there are other instances in which a third party might be called upon to step in. We forgive agents for particular acts they have committed, but in many cases isolated incidents of wrongdoing take place in the context of an ongoing interpersonal relationship, which in turn takes place against a broader background of social and political power dynamics. In very few of such complex scenarios are the parties involved easily identified as “victim” or “wrongdoer” in general, but only in relation to a particular act. As a result, there are often cases in which the victim of a discrete wrong is more dangerous to the wrongdoer than vice versa. Here the role of appropriately situated third parties becomes even more important.

Forgiveness has multiple functions in the aftermath of wrongdoing: I categorized these as release, relief, and repair. Forgiveness can bring peace of mind to the victim, to the wrongdoer, or both; it can reaffirm values of trust, compassion, and goodwill; and it can function as an important epistemological reassessment of our initial attitudes to moral wrongdoers. Thus forgiveness can be a good—something sought by either party, and with good reason—when further relations between them, even the minimal contact needed to communicate or instantiate forgiveness, is not a wise or a safe idea. In these instances and in others, the forgiveness of third parties may take on a comforting or supportive role. We can certainly imagine another, happier scenario for Robert in which his struggles and choices do not have the same consequences. He leaves school, hits bottom, pulls himself together, and decides to come back. In this alternate scenario, Lilly still finds herself handing Sophia a note because Robert is too shy or too afraid to do so himself. The forgiveness Sophia receives from Lilly might, in this case, be the first step to a mutual reconciliation and release from the past for all parties concerned.

By ignoring the multiple roles played by forgiveness and the multiple players capable of stepping in to enact it, the philosophical literature has tended for the most part to advocate what Sharon Lamb calls “a hyper-individualized notion of personal harm.”<sup>38</sup> Some have accepted this notion as a natural consequence of “common sense” moral individualism.<sup>39</sup> But as Lamb notes in her empirical work on forgiveness, such an approach ignores the role of group identities and identifications in situations of trauma and harms: it mattered that Lilly was also a student of Sophia’s, that she had witnessed Sophia’s relationship to Robert and her treatment of him, that Lilly was Robert’s best friend. Lilly was impli-

cated and engaged in the situation as a participant, if not as a victim. If we treat “hyper-individualized” paradigms as normative frameworks for evaluating more complicated moral experience, such as those of Sophia, Lilly, and Robert, we risk distorting moral reality. As Govier and Verwoerd write, “forgiveness has an implicitly communal dimension . . . the relationship between the primary victim and the wrongdoer is not the only pertinent one.”<sup>40</sup> Accepting that forgiveness, as one potential strategy for coping with harm, is available to others beyond the primary victim of wrongdoing gives us a more accurate understanding of the relational nature of both harm and its repair.

Third and finally, one of the most important reasons to recognize third-party forgiveness is so that we can appropriately acknowledge the weight and value of its refusal. As Card notes, “refusal to forgive is equally an exercise of power.”<sup>41</sup> Much attention has been paid to the issue of forgiveness in situations of damaged self-respect. Murphy has argued that given the value of self-respect, the virtues of forgiveness have been overemphasized, and the virtues of maintaining anger and resentment underappreciated.<sup>42</sup> We are in danger of promoting forgiveness to the point of servility, he maintains. While I am less fearful than Murphy of the dangers of forgiving, here he makes a valuable point. If a serial wrongdoer is forgiven again and again by a too-willing victim, appropriately grounded third-party refusals to forgive can be important demands that the wrongdoer be held accountable, that his or her actions be taken seriously, and that moral values be respected.<sup>43</sup> When victims are coerced into forgiveness and reconciliation by abuse and oppression, third-party refusals are a particularly significant gesture of solidarity with the victim’s actual moral interests. But if we deny that such third parties *could* have forgiven at all, the gesture loses much of its power. For someone’s refusal to act to be significant, it must be the case that he or she could have acted should he or she have chosen. To paraphrase Hume: in this case the need to insist on “ought not” requires we acknowledge “could have.”

### ONLY VICTIMS: THE CASE AGAINST THIRD-PARTY FORGIVENESS

In light of (what I take to be) the compelling case for third-party forgiveness, why do so many philosophers remain skeptical? Buried in the claim “only victims forgive” are two different arguments against third-party forgiveness: one is conceptual and the other moral.

The conceptual case against third-party forgiveness stipulates that, for example, whether or not Lilly did the right thing in writing her note to Sophia, what she did simply was not forgiveness. While it is perfectly possible to sim-

ply draw the line here (forgiveness just *is* what only victims do), proponents of this argument must take on the burden of explaining just what is happening if not third-party forgiveness because third parties do use words, gestures, and behaviors that are relevantly similar to victims' forgiveness and appear to have similar moral and emotional effects. One approach is to argue that third parties are employing a figure of speech—just as we do when we declare a current or historical event to be “unforgivable” as a measure of extreme and heinous wrongdoing, without seriously entertaining the decision whether to forgive or even the thought that my forgiveness is in question, or when we describe a minor oversight as “forgivable” to emphasize its moral unimportance.

Yet many third-party efforts to forgive go beyond measures of wrongfulness. Imagine, for instance, that Lilly were to say: “I tried to forgive Sophia for what she did to Robert, but I just couldn't do it” or, as was the case, “I was astonished, after writing the note, to realize I really had forgiven Sophia for what she did to Robert.” More than a figure of speech is at stake. We can hear the effort expended in her words and recognize the disappointing conclusion in the first case and the optimism in the second. Furthermore, the figurative account seems limited to acts of verbal or articulated acts of forgiveness: it seems nonsensical to claim that I have figuratively overcome my anger or hypothetically come to see someone differently. Moreover, if all forgiveness utterances by third parties were purely figurative, there would be no sense in which some parties are in a comparatively better position to forgive than others or have better grounds for doing so. Yet it matters to the story that Lilly was a student of Sophia's, that she was Robert's best friend. Lilly felt *called upon* to forgive in a way that a less connected witness might not. Indeed, someone else who performed the very same action might have appeared presumptive or arrogant to Sophia and would thus fail to grant her the release she welcomed from Lilly. As I argued earlier, Lilly is appropriately able to offer the note because she is personally connected to the wrong in a way that others are not.

But perhaps I have underplayed Lilly's connection to the tragedy. Is Lilly able to forgive only because she is also a victim? Trudy Govier and Wilhelm Verwoerd argue that apparent cases of third-party forgiveness are actually forgiveness by secondary or tertiary victims. For example, while Kevin's classmates and teacher were his direct targets, he also caused unthinkable distress to their parents, family, and friends (his secondary victims) and to the wider community (his tertiary victims). Eva marvels at the forgiveness offered by some parents:

Honestly, when Carol Reeves formally “forgave” our son on CNN for murdering her boy, Jeffrey, who was already precocious enough at the classical guitar to be courted by Julliard, I had no idea what she was talking about.<sup>44</sup>

Equally, Eva blankly accepts the condemnation of others like Mary Woolford, who break her eggs in the supermarket, paint her house crimson, and attack her publicly and legally.<sup>45</sup> Both Carol Reeves and Mary Woolford are secondary victims of Kevin's violence, even if they were not present in the gymnasium; and because they have this status, their deciding that they are entitled to decide whether to forgive can be understood without the need to invoke third-party forgiveness at all. It only requires that we acknowledge they are two of many victims.

I believe it to be a serious mistake to assume that every time someone forgives, he or she does so out of a sense of victimization; that is, that we forgive only to the extent that we ourselves have been harmed and only for whatever and however *we* have been harmed, even if that harm comes in the form of injury to someone else we care about. This confuses the *object* of every third party's concern. Indeed, part of why it is important to acknowledge third-party forgiveness as a distinct phenomenon is so we can recognize those cases in which, in forgiving, the forgiver does not focus—and does not want to focus—on his or her own, secondary distress. Consider two statements Lilly might have uttered to Sophia: “I do/do not forgive you for taking Robert from me” or “I do/do not forgive you for what you did to Robert.” The difference is not merely a matter of phrasing: Lilly spoke to Sophia about Robert's experience of Sophia, not her own experience of Robert's loss; the story is not about Lilly blaming and then forgiving Sophia for taking Robert away. Just as we may have genuine desires and wishes for others' well-being—for their sakes and not for our own—so too may we take up the question of their wrongful distress and feel this personally, for their sakes and not for our own. When I engage in imaginative sympathy as Adam Smith describes it, my feeling distress for another's sake is not reducible to my feeling his or her distress as he or she would feel it, namely, feeling the distress of someone who takes him- or herself to have been victimized. Rather, the focus of my attitude is outward on *how things are for her*. I am not the object of my own concern.

By collapsing any experience of forgiveness into a victims' experience, we fail to distinguish being personally affected—for someone else's sake—from being victimized, and thus appropriate an experience that belongs to victims alone. If we have reason to be wary of any extension of the prerogative to forgive, surely we have at least as many if not more reasons to be wary of extending the title “victim.” As Kathryn Norlock notes, this approach also fails to respect the distinct moral agency of the third party properly.<sup>46</sup> Lilly was clear in her interview and to Sophia that her own reactions had differed from Robert's; in fact, she had learned from him. She was not forgiving Sophia for herself, but offering something to Sophia about and from Robert. In order to recognize and respect the agency of victims and of third parties properly, we



need an account of third-party forgiveness claims that recognize our ability to respond to the distress of others deeply and personally without appropriating it as our own.

At root, the most credible case against third-party forgiveness is the moral argument: third parties can, but *ought* not, engage in decisions to forgive. This injunction against third-party forgiveness is motivated by a desire to respect the victim's own unique and painful relationship to the wrongdoing; it rests on an intuition that forgiveness of a wrong is one of the few powers remaining to the victim, and that its power depends on its exclusivity. I agree that it is morally important that no one else can forgive *for* the victim, that the power to forgive cannot be snatched away like some ethical power of attorney.

But because forgiveness is a personal reaction to wrongdoing, there is no reason why several persons cannot take it upon themselves to offer or refuse forgiveness. This is uncontroversially true in situations of multiple victims, for example. Kevin Katchadourian murders seven fellow students and a teacher; the ramifications of each death spread outward through the entire community. Some parents find themselves forgiving Kevin while others do not. It is not a contradiction to say that Kevin is both forgiven and unforgiven.<sup>47</sup> But then, just as a single wrongdoer can be both forgiven and unforgiven if his or her act had many victims, there seems to be conceptual and moral room for him or her to be both forgiven by the victim and unforgiven by relevantly connected third parties, or vice versa. The possibility of diverging attitudes to forgiveness and diverging decisions to forgive exist even without third-party forgiveness: two or more victims might hold such diverging positions.

Furthermore, there may be victim-centered reasons to advocate nonvictims' forgiveness. Third-party forgiveness is not always a rebuke to the victim. Sometimes it is in support or agreement with him or her, as appears to be the case with Robert and Lilly. Lilly's forgiveness expresses and relates an understanding that Robert originally shared with her. In no sense is it a rebuke to Robert; she intends to defend and support him. Third parties can even reinforce a victim's forgiveness with their own, in the face of community disapproval: if Sophia's entire class had turned against her, a gesture by Robert's best friend would go some way toward restoring the peace. That a third party like Lilly is able to lift the burden of guilt is also particularly relevant when the victim is no longer capable of doing so, that is, when he or she is absent, incapacitated, or dead, as Robert was. Third parties may also step in when the victim is simply unable to comprehend the magnitude of his or her victimization (through shock or trauma, for example). Lilly's act of forgiveness emerged from her investment in Robert's wishes.

Respecting another person does not always entail that we comply with his or her wishes or even remain silent about them. Sometimes respect for another's moral agency requires that we communicate when and where he or she has gone wrong and attempt to provide a better example of moral action. Discussions of forgiveness tend to overly moralize the victim's position; while bad things do happen to good people, they also happen to bad people—or, more gently, to excessively angry, recalcitrant, or unforgiving people. Equally, while cruel and immoral people do bad things, so too do more or less good people in moments of weakness, anger, or confusion. It does not silence victims everywhere to admit that sometimes grudges are held too long and too cruelly any more than it does to acknowledge that the "victim" of one particular wrong may be, in the broader context, more perpetrator than victim. Finally, insisting on a strict victim's prerogative to forgive would have the peculiar consequence of rendering unforgivable every infraction, however minor, against someone who is now deceased, incapacitated, or incorrigibly stubborn.<sup>48</sup>

The specific arguments against third-party forgiveness are perhaps more easily dismissed than the nagging worry behind them: fear of a blanket forgiveness that is cheap and automatic, which skips past the painful and messy business of confronting viciousness and violence, and honoring the discomfiting reactions of those who have been affected by it. If nonvictims cannot replicate the visceral, gut-wrenching experience of being intentionally victimized, then they may be more likely to push for reconciliation, for the return of pleasantries and social harmony. They may try to forgive in the abstract, appealing to cheap truisms about human frailty rather than facing the stark reality of human violence, thus rendering their forgiveness morally inappropriate and even dangerous—and thus they sully the good name of (victim's) forgiveness. And here I share the skeptic's worry; our disagreement is over how best to address and account for this worry. I believe the solution lies in acknowledging and accounting for third-party acts, thus providing us with tools for parsing the better and the worse and for advocating better practices of third party acts and refusals.

### VICTIMS' AND NONVICTIMS' FORGIVENESS

My purpose in this chapter has been to extend our understanding of forgiveness to others beside the victims of wrongdoing. I have argued that we can recognize a distinct variant of forgiveness, third-party forgiveness, which is appropriately grounded in an imaginatively engaged, caring relationship of moral solidarity. I have also argued that when we deny third-party forgive-

ness, we misconstrue the nature of harm and wrongdoing; we overmoralize the victim's position and overlook the complex roles played by witnesses and secondary participants.

Acknowledging a role for third-party forgiveness does not guarantee that all such acts are therefore morally best any more than the victim's having the standing needed to forgive guarantees that all acts of victim's forgiveness are therefore the morally best option. Third parties, like victims, face the risk of forgiving too easily or too often on the one hand, and of being too unforgiving on the other. Indeed, given the imaginative work needed to enter into the victim's standpoint, third-party forgiveness holds particular moral risks that victims' forgiveness does not. The indirectness of the personal connection increases the imaginative distance involved and so there is more danger of cheapening the act with "blanket amnesty." Even the most careful philosophical accounts cannot protect against all hasty or misguided forgiveness, just as they cannot guard against recalcitrant resentment and grudges held too long. Yet insofar as they are appropriately grounded and cautiously bestowed, the work of third-party decisions to forgive contribute significantly to practices of post-conflict repair.<sup>49</sup>

## NOTES

1. Ira Glass, "By Proxy," *This American Life* (National Public Radio, March 9, 2007), <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/327/by-proxy>.

2. John Dryden (1631–1700), "The Conquest of Granada," Part II.i, date unknown.

3. The account put forth here expands and further develops an earlier sketch of third-party forgiveness. See Alice MacLachlan, "Forgiveness and Moral Solidarity," in *Forgiveness: Probing the Boundaries*, ed. Stephen Bloch-Schulman and David White (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2008), 3–16.

4. I do not address self-forgiveness by perpetrators of wrongdoing in this chapter. For rich discussion of self-forgiveness, see Robin Dillon, "Self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect," *Ethics* 112 (2001): 53–83; Kathryn J. Norlock, "Why Self-Forgiveness Needs Third-Party Forgiveness," in *Forgiveness: Probing the Boundaries*, ed. Stephen Bloch-Schulman and David White (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2008), 17–30; Kathryn Norlock, *Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).

5. Credit for shifting the conversation from talk of the victim's "prerogative" to the victim's "standing"—which strikes me as a more accurate expression—belongs to Glen Pettigrove, "The Standing to Forgive," *The Monist* 92, no. 4 (2009): 583–603.

6. Lionel Shriver, *We Need To Talk About Kevin* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2003). The novel was adapted for film in 2011, directed by Lynne Ramsay and starring Tilda Swinton.

7. *Ibid.*, 230.

8. Notable contemporary philosophical discussion of forgiveness include Jeffrie Murphy, *Getting Even : Forgiveness and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Charles Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Norlock, *Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective*; Glen Pettigrove, *Forgiveness and Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Margaret R. Holmgren, *Forgiveness and Retribution: Responding to Wrongdoing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Martha Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

9. I discuss this question further in Alice MacLachlan, “Forgiveness and Mercy,” *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics* (Elsevier, 2012).

10. Charles Griswold’s account of ideal or paradigmatic forgiveness, which he calls “forgiveness at its best,” takes something like this approach. See Griswold, *Forgiveness*.

11. For noteworthy examples of this approach, see Jeffrie Murphy and Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Margaret R. Holmgren, “Forgiveness and the Intrinsic Value of Persons,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (October 1, 1993): 341–52; Pamela Hieronymi, “Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62, no. 3 (2001): 529–55; Griswold, *Forgiveness*.

12. I elaborate on this objection in Alice MacLachlan, “Practicing Imperfect Forgiveness,” in *Feminist Ethics and Social and Political Philosophy: Theorizing the Non-Ideal*, ed. Lisa Tessman (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 185–204. My concern with the dominant model is partly a matter of exclusion. If we only *really* forgive when we overcome all our resentment or moral anger, in the right circumstances and for the right reasons, then we are forced to dismiss many actual practices of forgiveness as imperfect, incomplete, false, or pseudo-forgiveness. This approach also eliminates aspects of a particular act of forgiveness that may be most important to the forgiver or forgiven. Murphy insists that “forgiveness is primarily a matter of how I *feel* about you (not how I treat you),” but to the recipient, how she is treated may be far more important than Murphy allows. See Murphy and Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, 21. Being “let back in” can be as much a matter of social gesture and ritual as it is a moment of deep emotional change. The two may not even be separable.

13. R. J. O’Shaughnessy, “Forgiveness,” *Philosophy* 42 (1967): 336–52.

14. B. Lang, “Forgiveness,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (1994): 107.

15. Murphy and Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy*; J. G. Haber, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Study* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991).

16. T. Govier and W. Verwoerd, “Forgiveness: The Victim’s Prerogative,” *South African Journal of Philosophy* 21, no. 2 (2002): 97–111; P. Benn, “Forgiveness and Loyalty,” *Philosophy* 71 (1996): 369–83; H. J. N. Horsbrugh, “Forgiveness,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 4 (1974): 269–82.

17. There are, however, notable exceptions to this consensus. Kathryn Norlock presents a trailblazing argument against assimilating all forgiveness to victim’s forgiveness in *Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective*. Glen Pettigrove and Linda

Radzik also discuss the role of third parties in forgiving harms to others and acknowledge the role of third-party forgiveness. Pettigrove, “The Standing to Forgive”; Linda Radzik, “Moral Bystanders and the Virtue of Forgiveness,” *Forgiveness in Perspective* 66 (2010): 69–88.

18. To argue that forgiveness only overcomes the reactive attitude of resentment, and then to define resentment as only that anger I experience on behalf of injuries to myself, seems to beg the question against third-party forgiveness. It is not obvious that our emotional lives remain so individualistic or so compartmentalized. See Alice MacLachlan, “Unreasonable Resentments,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41, no. 4 (2010): 422–41.

19. Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 166. Card remains rather enigmatic about moral powers, referring to them as capacities and forms of address that emerge in the wake of serious harm and wrongdoing. For an extended discussion of moral powers, see Alice MacLachlan, “Moral Powers and Forgivable Evils,” in *Evil, Political Violence, and Forgiveness: Essays in Honour of Claudia Card*, ed. Andrea Veltman and Kathryn J. Norlock (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 135–58.

20. The notion that personal connections possess even a limited *transitivity* is intuitively plausible, if we consider how the projects, hobbies, loves, and family of a beloved can take on a significance to us that they wouldn’t otherwise, over time. We may become invested in them in a way that depends upon and is responsive to our personal investment in the loved one, not the hobby, project, or family. For evidence of this transitivity, we need only consult parents in attendance at their child’s school play or a romantic partner who has learned to appreciate and even love the idiosyncratic musical tastes of his or her beloved. Determining the details and especially the limits of such transitivity, however, must be put aside for my present purposes.

21. Secondary and tertiary victims are also harmed by their personal or social relationship to the primary victim. The family member of a murder victim is a secondary victim; community members whose sense of safety is threatened after an act of random violence are tertiary victims of that act.

22. A common complaint about failed attempts at third-party forgiveness is that the aspiring third-party forgiver does behave as if he or she believes he or she is the victim; he or she makes it all about *him or her*.

23. Shriver, *We Need To Talk About Kevin*, 328.

24. *Ibid.*, 329.

25. *Ibid.*, 162.

26. *Ibid.*, 163.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, 164.

29. Note that the commitment is to the *moral* interests and not the prudential interests of the appropriately involved party. The wrongdoer has already demonstrated him- or herself to have an imperfect grasp of his or her own moral interests, and an unrepentant wrongdoer’s grasp of the situation will be very different than that of anyone who is in a position to forgive.

30. David Velleman, *Self to Self* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 350.

31. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 9.

32. *Ibid.*, 12.

33. Some might wish to use “empathy” rather than sympathy here, in line with modern usage. I use “sympathy” for two reasons: first, because it reflects the language that Adam Smith employed, and I rely substantially on his philosophical description of the imaginative act involved. Second, the kind of emotional engagement I describe, moral solidarity, is framed by caring concern for the object of engagement. It thus seems appropriately sympathetic and not merely empathetic. For a useful discussion of the differences between the two, in Smith among others, and the relationship of both sympathy and empathy to care, see S. L. Darwall, “Empathy, Sympathy, Care,” *Philosophical Studies* 89 (1998): 261–82.

34. This moral risk is not unique to third-party forgiveness, but attends any reliance on exercises of imaginative sympathy, or empathy. Indeed, the danger and the sheer presumption of imagining we can know how others feel have fueled notable feminist critiques of empathy. See Lorraine Code, “I Know Just How You Feel: Empathy and the Problem of Epistemic Authority,” in *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations* (New York: Routledge, 1995). [AQ1]

35. Harvey does not discuss moral solidarity in the context of forgiveness, but her discussion illuminates a morally valuable bond, which depends on both a commitment to the other’s interests and a willingness to engage, empathetically, with his or her experience and perspective of those interests. See Jean Harvey, “Moral Solidarity and Empathetic Understanding: The Moral Value and Scope of the Relationship,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 38, no. 1 (2007): 22–37.

36. Sharon Lamb, “Forgiveness Therapy in Gendered Contexts: What Happens to the Truth?,” in *Trauma, Truth and Reconciliation*, ed. Nancy Potter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 229–56.

37. I am prepared to extend instances of third-party forgiveness to those whose sole connection is imaginative; that is, to someone who forms a relationship to the primary victim based on his or her outrage and indignation at the victim’s plight. Glen Pettigrove describes someone whose outrage at the treatment of workers in the *maquiladoras* along the U.S.-Mexican border leads her to become an activist and take up their cause, on behalf of “people she has never met and to whom she is connected by no more than their shared humanity.” See Pettigrove, “The Standing to Forgive,” 587. It seems possible that for some, shared humanity is enough to ground the kind of rich imaginative engagement required for moral solidarity; sadly, though, the imaginations of the rest of us are more limited. For us, such attempts may dissolve into the emotional equivalent of “liquefied squash” that Eva Katchadourian despises. I anticipate an inverse relationship between the strength of the existing external relationship and the kind of imaginative effort involved. Furthermore, given the limited nature of our imaginations, the dangers of “ungrounded” or illegitimate attempts to forgive as a third party increase as the

closeness of the relationship decreases. We can imagine difficult or “limit” cases, in which the desire to forgive emerges from a morbid or unhealthy fascination with wrongdoing: picture a television news junkie who craves stories of depravity, cruelty, and violence simply to imaginatively “enter into” the victims’ experiences and then forgive the perpetrators. It is not clear that anything of value is accomplished here—certainly not the kind of moral repair, relief, or release from guilt we typically associate with forgiveness. Many people intuitively resist this experience *as* forgiveness, out of the sense that insofar as imaginative work is being done, it is not the *right* sort of imaginative work. A (potential) forgiver should not, one presumes, go seeking or cause occasions on which it is warranted. On the other hand, the neurotic compulsion to forgive (and the craving for wrongdoing simply to induce forgiveness) is equally problematic for the moral value of victim’s forgiveness.

38. Lamb, “Forgiveness Therapy in Gendered Contexts: What Happens to the Truth?,” 45.

39. Griswold, *Forgiveness*, 118.

40. Govier and Verwoerd, “Forgiveness: The Victim’s Prerogative,” 108.

41. Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil*, 213.

42. Murphy, *Getting Even*.

43. It seems Shriver’s character Eva Katchadourian agrees with me here, when she remarks, “my brother Giles’ staunch incapacity to pardon us . . . is a grudge I treasure.” Shriver, *We Need To Talk About Kevin*, 328.

44. *Ibid.*, 230.

45. *Ibid.*, 3–6.

46. Norlock, *Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective*, 115–36.

47. Though it may be fair to say that one act of forgiveness can preempt another, making the wrongdoer’s *need* for forgiveness less urgent. If eleven of my twelve victims have forgiven me, my quest to obtain forgiveness from the holdout may have less urgency than it did for the first. On the other hand, the holdout victim may come to have exaggerated importance for me, if I am wracked with guilt.

48. The character of Mr. Darcy initially makes an excellent example of a too stubborn, doggedly recalcitrant victim: “‘No’—said Darcy, ‘I have made no such pretension. I have faults enough, but they are not, I hope, of understanding. My temper I dare not vouch for. It is, I believe, too little yielding—certainly too little for the convenience of the world. I cannot forget the follies and vices of others as soon as I ought, nor their offences against myself. My feelings are not puffed about with every attempt to move them. My temper would perhaps be called resentful.—My good opinion once lost, is lost forever.’” See Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: The Zodiac Press, 1950), 47.

49. The arguments in this chapter have taken some time to come to fruition, and I am grateful to the many, many people who challenged and improved them in their infancy. I wish to extend my thanks especially to Steven Burns, Daniel Groll, Duncan MacIntosh, Glenn Pettigrove, Linda Radzik, Greg Scherkoske, Susanne Sreedhar, and Lisa Tessman, for their assistance—and, above all, to Kate Norlock for her editorial guidance.

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