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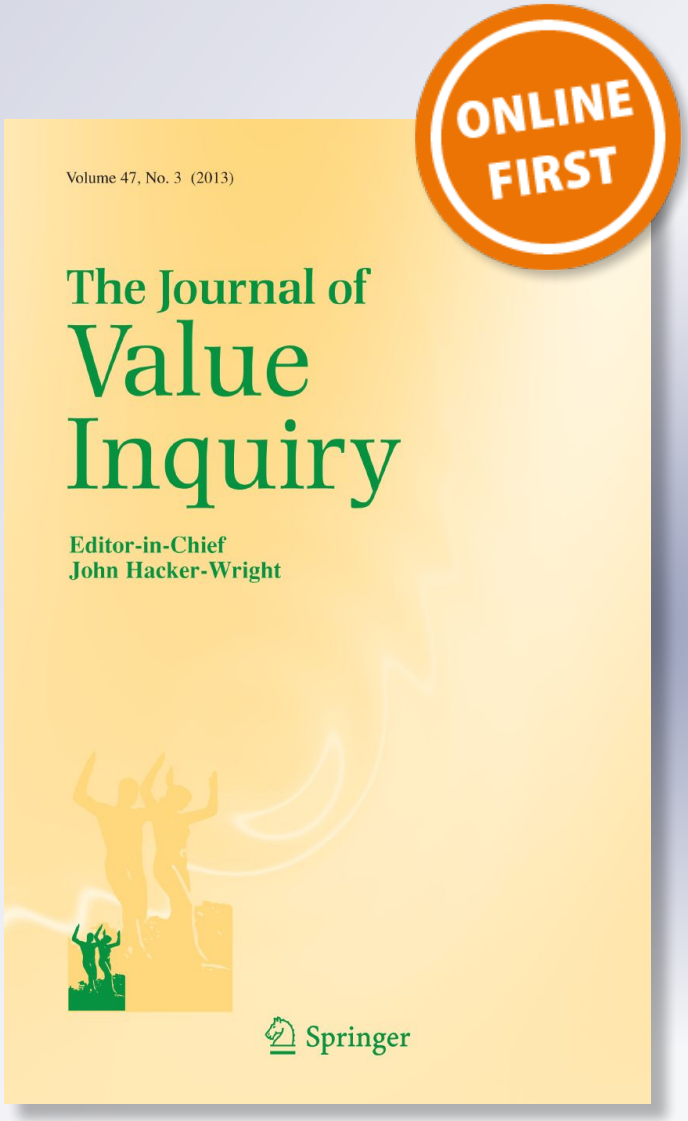

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1 Introduction

Forgiving is often hard; but it doesn't need to be. Sometimes it is easy. In such cases, we may naturally have overcome resentment directed at the wrongdoer despite our sustained judgement that the wrongdoer is morally responsible for the harm she inflicted on us. Maybe our resentment has simply faded over time as it often does. When the offender then signals a change of heart and issues a sincere apology for the wrong she committed, we may find it quite easy to forgive. Current approaches to forgiveness, I will argue in this paper, cannot explain such cases of easy forgiveness. This is because, according to philosophical orthodoxy, forgiveness must involve a causal process leading *from* the recognition of a suitable reason (e.g. a sincere apology) *to* the forswearing of resentment (or some other suitable attitude). Call this the *Process View*. When our resentment had already faded before the apology was issued then undergoing this causal process is simply impossible.

In this paper, I will present an account of forgiveness that does away with such a causal process requirement. Forgiveness, I argue, consists in the *endorsement* of one's having let go of resentment in light of the recognition of the right reasons. Call this the *Endorsement View* of forgiveness. One merit associated with this view is that it allows for cases in which forgiveness comes easy, because the person forgiving simply has no resentment left to be overcome.

In the next section, I will lay out some relevant facts about forgiveness. In section three, I will first present the process view and, thereafter, detail my own view. Next, I will argue that my view is supported by our considered intuitions about certain cases of forgiveness (section four), and that it can be buttressed by additional theoretical considerations (section five). In section six, I will show why, on my view, forgiveness is distinguished from various types of pseudo forgiveness such as simple forgetting.

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2 Common Ground

Forgiveness involves overcoming a negative reactive attitude. This attitude is standardly, but not necessarily (see below), taken to be *resentment*.[1] Furthermore, forgiveness depends, in some way to be specified, on the recognition of a certain type of reason (e.g. a sincere apology issued by the wrongdoer). We can summarize these ideas as follows:

(1) Forgiveness minimally involves letting go of resentment *in appropriate relation to* the recognition of a sincere apology.

However, we can also choose a more abstract summary:

(2) Forgiveness minimally involves letting go of a certain negatively valenced reactive attitude *in appropriate relation to* the recognition of the right kind of reason.

This paper is about the correct interpretation of the expression "in appropriate relation to"; it is neither about the exact nature of the reactive attitude, nor is it about the correct interpretation of the "right kind of reasons." Therefore, I shall only commit to the rather abstract statement **(2)**. However, for the purposes of a reader-friendly presentation, I will rely on interpretation **(1)** when illustrating, explaining, and defending my position; that is, I will rely, rather concretely, on the example of resentment as the relevant attitude and a sincere apology as the right kind of reason.

Before delving into the thick of things, I'll use the rest of this section to establish that statement **(2)** is common ground; i.e. I will introduce the relevant facts about negatively valenced attitudes, resentment, and the type of reasons involved in forgiving.

Resentment is a negatively valenced moral emotion. As such, it must involve, but is not sufficiently characterized by, concomitant evaluative judgements about the perceived wrongdoer. Being an emotion, resentment must also involve dispositional arousal as well as action tendencies.[2] Let me comment on each of these elements, that is, *judgement*, *arousal*, and *action tendencies*.

Resentment is an intentional attitude whose intentional object is the wrongdoer. Pamela Hieronymi[3] argues that resentment involves at least the following three judgements on the part of the person resenting:

[1] See e.g. Warmke, Brandon. "Articulate forgiveness and normative constraints." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 45.4 (2015): 490–514.; Murphy, Jeffrie G. *Getting even: Forgiveness and its limits*. (Oxford University Press, 2003).; Darwall, Stephen L. *The second-person standpoint: Morality, respect, and accountability*. (Harvard University Press, 2006).

[2] The idea that emotions are not exhausted by judgements is uncontroversial. Virtually all theorists agree that emotions *must* involve arousal states or motivational components. Disagreement usually concerns the extent to which judgements are constitutive for emotions. Luckily, philosophers do agree that forgiveness must involve certain judgements (see below). For an excellent introduction consult Mulligan, Kevin, and Klaus R. Scherer. "Toward a working definition of emotion." *Emotion Review* 4.4 (2012): 345–357.

[3] Hieronymi, Pamela. "Articulating an uncompromising forgiveness." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62.3 (2001): 529–555, 530.

Wrong. The act in question was wrong.
Responsible. The wrongdoer […] is someone to be held responsible and she is worth being upset by.
Self-worth. You, as the one wronged, ought not to be wronged.[4]

In forgiving, these judgements must not be abandoned. Otherwise forgiveness would be turned into something quite else. Abandoning **Wrong** — What she did wasn't bad after all. — would amount to *justifying* the act. Abandoning **Responsible** — She didn't know that it was the wrong thing to do. — would amount to *exculpating* the act. Lastly, abandoning **Self-worth** — Who am I to blame her for doing it? — would amount to *condoning* the act. Justifying, exculpating, and condoning, however, are quite different from forgiving. When Hieronymi states that forgiveness must be "uncompromising", she means that these three judgements must not be compromised. Others[5] have agreed with the assessment that compromising these (or similar) evaluative judgements would turn forgiveness into something else. Throughout this paper, I will assume that forgiveness must be uncompromising.

Next, Hieronymi acknowledges that resentment goes beyond *mere* judgment as it involves moral "protest" that "protests a past action that persists as a present threat."[6] Others have identified this emotional component to be "hostile feelings"[7] or moral anger.[8] In each of these cases (i.e. protest, anger, hostility) the feelings associated with resentment go beyond mere judgement. They each involve a component of dispositional arousal and certain action tendencies; for instance, the desire to retaliate to get even, or seek revenge.[9] I take it that an adequate theory of resentment should include such an emotional component as a necessary condition. As a corollary, we should acknowledge that forgiveness is compatible with letting go of resentment by way of letting go of these particularly emotional components of resentment. Letting go of resentment would then consist in the loss of one's moral anger, or protest. This is all I shall say about resentment.

Now, letting go of resentment by abandoning the relevant emotion while simultaneously retaining the three judgements from above is, however, not sufficient for forgiveness. Rather, forgiveness depends in some way on the recognition of the right kind of reason. Virtually everyone agrees that one of these reasons is an apology by

[4] These labels are taken from Warmke, op. cit.

[5] E.g. Warmke, op. cit.; Murphy, op. cit.; Zaragoza, Kevin. "Forgiveness and standing." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 84.3 (2012): 604–621.; Allais, Lucy. "Wiping the slate clean: the heart of forgiveness." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 36.1 (2008): 33–68.; Roberts, Robert C. "Forgivingness." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 32.4 (1995): 289–306.

[6] Hieronymi, op. cit., 546.

[7] Garrard, Eve, and David McNaughton. "III—In Defence of Unconditional Forgiveness." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society (Hardback)*. Vol. 103. No. 1. Oxford, UK and Boston, USA: Blackwell Science Ltd, 2003. 39–60.

[8] Hughes, Paul M. "What is involved in forgiving?." *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 27.3–4 (1993): 331–340.

[9] Cohen, Dov, and Richard E. Nisbett. "Culture of honor: The psychology of violence in the South." *Boulder, CO: Westview Press Inc* (1996).

the wrongdoer signaling a change of heart.[10] Others maintain that one can equally forgive for alternative reasons such as the fact that the offender has suffered enough or has undergone humiliation.[11] In any case, we should agree that forgiveness involves the recognition of *some* appropriate reason. After all, it seems odd to think that one could decide to forgive by, say, flipping a coin.[12] Furthermore, forgiveness seems sensitive to the type of reason on the recognition of which it is based. Imagine, for instance, a person who was wronged forgave her wrongdoer because she liked his haircut. Clearly, the victim does not understand what forgiveness is.[13] This is all I shall say in explication of statements **(1)** and **(2)**.

3 Process vs. Endorsement – the Views

Let's now hone in on the actual topic of this paper; how should we think of the relation between letting go of resentment on the one hand, and the recognition of the right kind of reasons on the other. Most philosophers assume that this connection must be *causal*; i.e. the recognition of the right kind of reason must cause one's forswearing resentment. Hieronymi, for instance, explains that forgiveness is granted only if "an apology *brings about* a change in view or revision in judgement that allows one to forgo resentment" (my italics).[14] Hence, on her view, (the recognition of) certain reasons (e.g. an apology) must cause the agent to change her view, give up "moral protest" and, hence, overcome resentment. Similarly, Griswold affirms that forgiveness is "letting go of resentment *for* moral reasons."[15] Similarly, Murphy suggests that "[f]orgiveness is […] forswearing resentment *on* moral *grounds.*{…} A person who has forgiven has overcome those vindictive attitudes and has overcome them for a morally creditable motive—for example, being moved by repentance on the part of the person by whom one has been wronged."[16] All these proposals causally connect one's forswearing resentment to the recognition of the right kind of reasons, which is why forgiving is incompatible with the potential forgiver letting go of resentment before recognizing the relevant reasons. The following formulation nicely captures this causal account of forgiveness:

> **Process View.** Forgiveness requires that the forgiver undergo a certain process that leads *from* the recognition of the right kind of reasons (e.g. a sincere apology) *to* forswearing a negative reactive attitude (e.g. resentment).

Consider *Figure 1* an illustration of this view

[10] Hieronymi, op. cit.; Warmke, op. cit.; Zaragoza, op. cit.; Griswold, Charles. *Forgiveness: A philosophical exploration*. Cambridge University Press, 2007, 55.

[11] Murphy, Jeffrie G., and Jean Hampton. *Forgiveness and mercy*. Cambridge University Press, 1990.

[12] Milam, Per-Erik. "Reasons to forgive." *Analysis* (2018).

[13] Ibid.

[14] Hieronymi, op. cit., 545.

[15] Griswold, op. cit. 40.

[16] Murphy, Jeffrie G., *Getting even: Forgiveness and its limits*. Oxford University Press, 2003. p. 13.

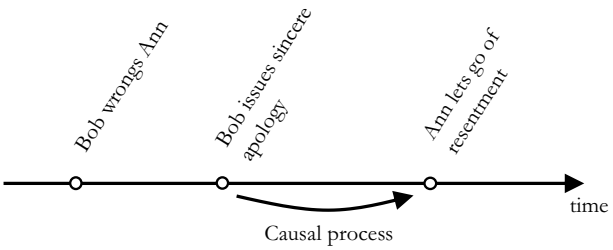

Figure 1 The process view

Undergoing this kind of process, as I will now go on to argue, is not necessary for forgiveness. Alternatively, forgiveness can be achieved by endorsing one's having let go of resentment; in these cases, it is irrelevant whether one's lack of resentment has the right causal history. Here is my preferred formulation for this view:

> **Endorsement View.** Forgiveness requires that the forgiver endorse her having let go of a negative reactive attitude (e.g. resentment) in light of the recognition of the right reasons (e.g. an apology).

I define endorsement as follows:

> **Endorsement.** An agent endorses her attitude *A* if, and only if, she has a *disposition to judge* that *A* is appropriate and she *believes* that *A* is appropriate.

Consider *Figure 2* an illustration of this view:

There is no canonical definition of endorsement, which is why we are somewhat at liberty to define this notion as we see fit. First, endorsing goes beyond the mere disposition to *believe*; it involves a disposition to *judge*. This characterization is important, because an endorsed attitude must be capable of being mentally affirmed, which likens endorsement to judgment.[17] On the contrary, not everything an agent believes is also mentally affirmed by that agent.[18] Think, for instance, of a person who holds deeply racist beliefs but who would never overtly judge that certain races are inferior. This person has racist beliefs but doesn't endorse that she does.[19] In a theory of forgiveness we want to retain the element of (dispositional) mental affirmation. This explains why endorsing involves a disposition to judge.

Next, I have characterized endorsement as a *disposition* to judge and not as a mere judgment. When thinking about forgiveness, this characterization has two distinct advantages. First, it does not require forgiveness to consist in a conscious

[17] Mental affirmation is a property Cassam attributes to judging, not endorsing.

[18] Cassam, Quassim. "Judging, believing and thinking." *Philosophical Issues* 20.1 (2010): 80–95. observes that "one can imagine someone who finds it psychologically impossible mentally to affirm to herself that *P* but who nevertheless believes that *P*".

[19] Some would argue that such tacit beliefs are not beliefs, but, rather, a different type of mental state which has been called "alief" (see Gendler, Tamar Szabó. "Alief and belief." *The Journal of philosophy* 105.10 (2008): 634–663.)

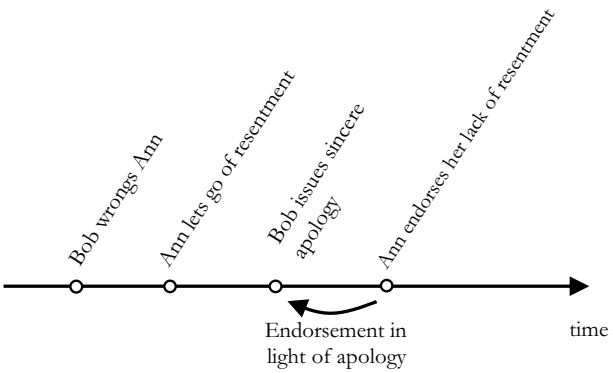

Figure 2 The endorsement view

mental act, and, thereby, allows for cases in which we recognize, in hindsight, that we've long forgiven a wrongdoer for her actions. In such cases, the agent notices that she's long acquired the disposition to make the relevant judgments without having made these judgments overtly. If, alternatively, forgiving consisted in judging, an agent couldn't forgive without undergoing a conscious mental act, excluding cases in which an agent forgives but only later realizes that she did.

Endorsing an attitude also involves the belief that this attitude is appropriate. The reader may wonder why this addition is necessary. After all, judging *entails* believing; at least many have thought that it does.[20] I agree; however, a *disposition* to judge does not entail believing. At most, if anything, it entails a *disposition* to believe, which is not strong enough for our purposes. To see this, consider a scientist who does not currently believe that some theory is true. Suppose that this scientist would come to believe that this theory is true, were she to exercise her disposition to judge that the theory is, in fact, true. In this case, the scientist is merely *disposed* to endorse the theory but does not currently endorse it. Hence, the belief-addition.

Lastly, endorsement may seem like a purely theoretical stance. But, in a sense, this is false. It has practical implications. Judging and believing that one's attitude is appropriate rationalizes acting in accordance with this attitude. Think, for instance, of the angry father who becomes furious upon finding out about his son's F in the math exam. Suppose the father judges this attitude to be appropriate given his son's low performance. In this case, he seems, other things equal, to have a reason for acting on his anger. This is different from the case in which he judges his attitude to be a complete overreaction, in which case he has a reason to regulate his emotion and not to act on his anger. Judging his attitude to be inappropriate provides a reason to discard and suppress his anger-related action tendencies. Likewise, judging one's

[20] For instance, Christopher Peacocke claims that ``to make a judgement is the fundamental way to form a belief'' (Smith, Barry C., Crispin Wright, and Cynthia Macdonald, eds. *Knowing our own minds*. Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 88.), and Tim Crane argues that ``judgement is the formation of belief'' (Crane, Tim. "Elements of mind: an introduction to the philosophy of mind.", Oxford University Press, 201.).

lack of resentment to be (in)appropriate provides a (not necessarily conclusive) reason for an agent to treat the resented in a certain way.

Throughout the preceding discussion, I have acted as if the only candidate for the right reason grounding forgiveness is a sincere apology; but this is not so. In fact, the abstract formulation the *right reason* can take many values. Let me provide a drastic example. Hieronymi argues that resentment involves, apart from the three judgements adduced above, a fourth judgement: that "the event in question makes a threatening claim."[21] On her view, the threat consists in the fact that a wrong that was done to you "says, in effect, that you can be treated in this way."[22] Forgiving, on her view, implies judging that the past wrong doesn't pose a present threat. Now, suppose Hieronymi were right, in which case we should say that one of the right reasons in light of which one's lack of resentment must be endorsed is that the wrongdoer's past action does not currently present a threat. In this paper, I don't wish to take a stance on this issue. My point is rather that such considerations should *not* be tied to the overcoming of resentment. Overcoming resentment is one thing and it can precede the recognition of the right kind of reasons; endorsing it in light of the right reasons is quite another. Hieronymi's analysis about the relevant threat-related judgements implicated in forgiveness might well be on target. However, making these judgements should count towards endorsing one's lack of resentment, not towards forswearing resentment.

4 Process vs. Endorsement – Cases

When characterizing the endorsement view, we should analyze two types of cases: First, cases in which a subject endorses her having let go of resentment although resentment was lost long before the forgiver recognized the presence of the right reasons to forgive. The view presented here labels these cases to be instances of genuine forgiveness. Their analysis will be crucial to distinguish my view from the process view. Second, we are also interested in cases in which an agent does *not* endorse that she has let go of resentment and in which, intuitively, we would not want to say that the person who was wronged has forgiven. To be sure, the latter type of case is not so much important to set the two views apart, but, rather, to further explore the independent plausibility of my own account. Let's work through both types of cases in turn. Consider the following vignette an example in illustration of the first kind of case:

> **Ignorant Husband.** When Mia got remarried, she moved in with her new husband Marsellus and his son Ian. At the time, Ian was a truly unbearable 18-year-old. Among other things, he'd always expect her to clean up after him, he'd lie to her, and steal money from her. When she brought this up to Mar-

[21] Hieronymi, op. cit. 548.
[22] Hieronymi, op. cit. 546.

sellus, he'd simply dismiss her complaints saying "look, he's not your son". Marsellus' demeanor continued for three years until Ian finally moved out to go to college. Throughout this time, Marsellus made no efforts to make Ian treat Mia better. 10 years later, Marsellus finally comes to see how wrong his behavior had been judging that it was his responsibility to make Ian treat Mia with respect. – a view that Mia shares. Marsellus issues a sincere apology for his own behavior and asks Mia to forgive him. Mia's resentment, however, was short-lived and had long subsided. She accepts his apology and forgives him.

Intuitively, it seems that Mia does forgive Marsellus for his actions. Forgiveness, in this case, comes easy to Mia. It is a fortunate situation: Marsellus needs forgiveness and Mia grants it to him without much effort. According to the process view, however, forgiving is not an option for Mia. Her loss of resentment simply has the wrong causal history; but intuition tells us that forgiveness remains an option. It would be strange if the right answer for Mia to give to Marsellus were: "Honestly, if it were up to me, I would love to forgive you. However, given that my resentment had faded long before you apologized, I literally cannot forgive." Forgiving, in this case at least, is easy, not impossible.

Mia's forgiving Marsellus for his transgression does not make a big difference to her. In this sense, it is unlike cases in which a person makes a real effort to overcome her resentment. Mia's act of forgiving is not paradigmatically virtuous; but although forgiving might not mean much to *her* it might still mean a lot to *Marsellus*. Presumably, when Marsellus asks for forgiveness, he doesn't just want to know whether Mia is still mad at him; rather, he wants to be *forgiven*. If this opportunity had an expiration date, marked by the time of Mia's overcoming resentment, then such forgiveness would be unattainable for Marsellus, and he would, in turn, be trapped in a perpetual state of unresolve. This, I take it, would be an undesirable consequence of a theory of forgiveness. Forgiveness does not have an expiration date.

Let's now analyze the second type of case in which a person who was wronged does not feel resentment and yet judges that it would be appropriate to do so:

Inappropriate Resilience. John and Alice are married. Their marriage is average at best and not filled with lots of joyful moments. One day, Loge kills Alice. As a result, John is horribly depressed and hurt. Naturally, he feels immense resentment towards Loge. Five years later, John has adapted to the situation. He found a new wife. This time his marriage is spectacular. He found his true match. He has no nostalgic thoughts about his former wife and feels no anger towards Loge. Reflecting on his own emotional indifference concerning the death of his former wife he is shocked by how fast he has adjusted and by how quickly he couldn't bring himself to have angry thoughts about her murderer. Surely, he judges that what Loge did was wrong, but his judgement is akin to the disinterested judgements of disapproval concerning homicides covered on the late news on MSNBC. One day, Loge issues a sincere and heartfelt apology for what he had done. John judges that, despite his apology, Loge's deed was so horrible that he doesn't deserve forgiveness; not having resentment, John judges, is not the appropriate attitude to have.

Intuitively, I think, we wouldn't want to say that John forgave Loge for his misdeed. Going beyond mere intuition, we should notice that John's judgement gives him a reason to treat Loge *as if* he still resented Loge for his act. Given such treatment, I think, we shouldn't say that John forgave Loge for his act.

A critic might wish to object that **Inappropriate Resilience** does not actually present a case of forgiveness, because, the objection has it, John still feels resentment towards Loge. Why else would he disapprove of his own emotional indifference? The only reason, it seems, for why one might judge the absence of one's resentment to be inappropriate is that one still, at least tacitly, feels resentment. Therefore, John's attitude seems to reveal an inconsistency. Let me answer this challenge by providing three considerations (two short, one a bit longer).

First, having an emotional attitude seems to be logically independent of the evaluative judgements about this attitude. One can start seeing this by analyzing cases in which a person has a reactive attitude and yet judges that this is the wrong attitude to have. Think, again, of the angry father who gets furious upon finding out about his son's F on the math exam, but who also notices, upon reflection, that fury is not the appropriate response to a quite meaningless F. Certainly, the father's judging his own attitude to be inappropriate does not show that he's not that angry after all. Both are true: He really *is* angry, but he *judges* this not be an appropriate attitude to have. If we allow that an agent can have an attitude such as anger while judging this attitude to be inappropriate, it would seem at least puzzling if the reverse case (i.e. disapproving of not having an attitude) were deemed impossible.

Second, John's disapproval of his not feeling resentment could have several sources. Maybe his religious studies have led him to believe that guilt stays for forever and that resentment is always appropriate and required. In any case, it doesn't seem that his higher-order judgement concerning the appropriateness of his resentment *must be* explained by his tacit resentment. It may well have other sources.

Thirdly, and most importantly, cases in which agents lack a certain emotional attitude and judge this lack to be the inappropriate state of mind seem to be widespread. The relevant facts come from recent, and extensive, findings from resilience research of bereaved spouses. The relevant normative observations come from Dan Moller.[23] Let me explain.

Over the past 20 years, cognitive scientists have established that a significant proportion of the population exhibit a staggering degree of emotional resilience. These individuals experience quick emotional recovery after the loss of a loved one. To be precise, the leading researcher on this topic defines emotional resilience as follows: "[T]he ability of adults in otherwise normal circumstances who are exposed to an isolated and potentially highly disruptive event such as the death of a close relation or a violent or life-threatening situation to maintain relatively stable, healthy levels of psychological and physical functioning as well as the capacity for generative experiences and positive emotions."[24]

[23] Moller, Dan. "Love and death." *The Journal of Philosophy*104.6 (2007): 301–316.

[24] Bonanno, George A., et al. "Resilience to loss in bereaved spouses, bereaved parents, and bereaved gay men." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 88.5 (2005): 827. 20f.

Naturally, most research on resilience has focused on resilience in bereaved individuals. However, after discussing some of these findings, we will be able to draw the relevant conclusions for our purposes.

Not everybody is resilient; but many, that is, around half of the population, are. Studies show that resilient individuals return to a baseline welfare level often after only four month after being bereaved.[25] Such individuals do not exhibit heightened signs of depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress when compared to a non-bereaved group. Furthermore, such resilience seems to be a naturally occurring process and can, therefore, not be helped by various forms of counseling. Litz et al.[26], and Jordan et al.[27] found that counseling can even *impede* natural resilience. Bonanno et al. summarize these findings as follows:

> [M]any, and sometimes the majority, of bereaved individuals exhibit only short-lived grief-reactions and a relatively rapid return to baseline functioning. Bereavement theorists have tended to assume that the normative responses to loss involve either chronic suffering or gradual recovery lasting at least several years; the relative absence of distress during bereavement is thought to be both rare and psycho-pathological. Recent research has provided a strong challenge to these views: The relative absence of grief symptoms and the continued ability to function adequately following the death of a close relation do not appear to reflect denial or pathology but rather an inherent and adaptive resilience in the face of loss.[28]

Given this research, we can be reasonably confident that resilience is real, and widespread, although not ubiquitous.

One may be tempted to take these facts as welcome news: in the face of severe loss, one tends to be less afflicted than one would have predicted. However, one might, alternatively, think of resilience as an unfortunate feature of our psychology because it "deprive[s] us of our ability to care about those we love to their full measure after they are gone, and so deprives us of insight into our own condition."[29] According to Moller, a resilient individual's lack of grief for her lost spouse is an inappropriate attitude, because it doesn't adequately reflect the caring and loving relationship between the lost spouse and the bereaved. Moller concludes that "[p]art of what being the vulnerable creatures of flesh and blood that we are means is that we are subject to staggering losses in the form of the deaths of those we love yet our reaction to those losses is utterly incommensurate with their value."[30] Now,

[25] Ibid.; Zisook, Sidney, et al. "The many faces of depression following spousal bereavement." *Journal of affective disorders* 45.1–2 (1997): 85–95.

[26] Litz, Brett T., et al. "Early intervention for trauma: Current status and future directions." *Clinical psychology: science and practice* 9.2 (2002): 112–134.

[27] Jordan, John R., and Robert A. Neimeyer. "Does grief counseling work?." *Death studies* 27.9 (2003): 765–786.

[28] Bonanno, George A., et al. "Resilience to loss in bereaved spouses, bereaved parents, and bereaved gay men." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 88.5 (2005): 827.

[29] Moller, op. cit., 310.

[30] Ibid.

this is certainly not the place to discuss whether Moller is correct in his assessment. However, cases in which agents judge their own resilience to grief to be inappropriate seem to be conceivable and indeed natural. They don't involve an inconsistency.

Although there is no empirical research concerning resilience to resentment in particular, we should not be surprised if resentment, and not just grief, could also naturally fade over time. There are several reasons suggesting that this is true. First, it seems plausible that the degree of resentment a person experiences is somewhat dependent on how much she suffers from the wrong that was done to her. Reconsider **Inappropriate Resilience**; it seems much harder to believe that John's resentment should fade while he continues to suffer from the loss of his wife. Rather, what we would expect is that his resentment would, by and large, fade in proportion to his fading grief. Second, as Moller[31] reminds us, cognitive science has produced evidence that humans naturally adjust to a whole range of negative conditions such as disappointment, disillusion, or sickness.[32] Given these facts, it seems plausible to suppose that resentment can naturally fade over time and that it may often fade much faster than we would think it does; when it does, agents may well judge their own resilience to these feelings to be inappropriate.

The objection stated above – that it is inconsistent to judge one's lack of resentment to be inappropriate – is dispelled. It is, I conclude, possible to lack appropriate resentment, and simultaneously judge this lack to be inappropriate. If this happens, I conclude, we have not forgiven.

Let me summarize. We've explored two interesting cases. First, we examined a case in which forgiveness is granted although resentment has simply faded; i.e. it wasn't forsworn *for* the right reasons. Second, we saw that, in certain cases, not feeling resentment while recognizing a sincere apology does not suffice for forgiveness; rather, one's lack of resentment also needs to be *endorsed*.

5 Knowing Whether we Forgave

In this section, I will lay out the unfortunate consequence of the process view that, if it were correct, people would generally not be in a position to know whether they forgave. This is because, although people may often know the attitudes they happen to have, agents don't have reliable knowledge of the causes of these attitudes. In the case of forgiveness, this problem is particularly daunting: forgiving often takes months or even years; concomitantly, it seems particularly

[31] Ibid. 306.

[32] Brickman, Philip, Dan Coates, and Ronnie Janoff-Bulman. "Lottery winners and accident victims: Is happiness relative?." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 36.8 (1978): 917. show that patients with a debilitating spinal cord injury are surprisingly resilient. Gilbert, Daniel T., et al. "Immune neglect: a source of durability bias in affective forecasting." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 75.3 (1998): 617. present evidence that people, quite generally, overestimate the emotional reactions to negative events. Riis, Jason, et al. "Ignorance of hedonic adaptation to hemodialysis: a study using ecological momentary assessment." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 134.1 (2005): 3. provide evidence that subjects underestimate how quickly they will adapt to severely impoverished health.

unrealistic to suppose that agents could retrace the actual processes that led to their state of not feeling resentment. On the process view, having the right causal history is necessary for forgiveness, which is why knowing whether one forgave requires knowledge of the causal history of one's lack of resentment. A person who doesn't know whether she's undergone the right sort of history, is, therefore, also not able to tell whether she has or has not forgiven. To start seeing all this more clearly, consider the following case:

> **Diffuse Causes.** Maria cheats on her husband Daniel. She confesses; and they get divorced. Daniel, however, doesn't recover right away and keeps feeling deep resentment towards Maria. Two months after their divorce, Maria reaches out to Daniel and issues a sincere and heartfelt apology. Daniel cannot overcome his resentment right away. He tells her that he can't forgive her right now, and that he needs more time. Five years later, he thinks back of her apology and, on reflection, notices that he doesn't feel resentment towards Maria.

Intuitively, Daniel is now in a position to sincerely forgive his former wife for her misdeed. However, on the process view he can only do so if his current lack of resentment is causally connected to the recognition of Maria's apology. This causal path may or may not be true of his actual recovery process. To see this, consider two possible histories leading to Daniel's lack of resentment:

> **Apology Path.** His lack of resentment is (at least in part) caused by the recognition of Maria's apology. (Had Maria not apologized, he would still have been resentful.)
> **Resilience Path.** His lack of resentment is entirely explained by his natural resilience and his capacity to adjust to his new situation in life. (Had Maria not apologized he would nevertheless not have felt resentment.)

In the preceding section, I reviewed evidence according to which negative emotions can quickly attenuate naturally. Therefore, we should agree that the second of these histories is at least a plausible contender; i.e. Daniel *may well* have lost his resentment through natural resilience and adjustment. The second of these histories is, as it were, a live-option. The endorsement view is ecumenical between both options. The process view, on the contrary, renders forgiveness compatible only with the first of these histories. If Daniel cannot tell which of these histories is true of him, and if both are at least feasible explanations for his current attitude, then, according to the process view, he can't know whether or not he forgave Maria for her transgression.

There is a long line of experimental research in cognitive science suggesting that agents, quite generally, do not have reliable access to the causes of their current mental states. Importantly, in the absence of such knowledge, agents will often confabulate the causes for their attitudes, citing causes that amount to mere rationalizations of their attitudes. Note that skepticism about knowledge of the *causes* of one's mental states is very different from skepticism about knowledge of one's present

mental states. The latter claim is a minority position defended by only a few philosophers.[33] The former view is much less controversial.[34]

The classic paper summarizing experimental research in favor of the conjecture that people don't have reliable introspective access to the mental causes of their mental states is Nisbett and Wilson.[35] In one study, 90 subjects were asked to watch a movie. Some subjects viewed the movie with distracting noise; for other subjects this noise was absent. After the film, subjects had to rate the film based on its interestingness. Furthermore, subjects in the noise distraction condition reported that the noise negatively influenced their rating of the movie. In fact, the rating had no such influence. According to Nisbett and Wilson, subjects falsely identified the distracting noise to have influenced their ratings.

Another body of evidence comes from hypnotization experiments. Carruthers[36] and Wegner[37] discuss experimental cases in which subjects carry out an instruction that was given to them under hypnosis and who "will often confabulate an explanation for their action citing some or other particular intention."[38] For instance, subjects will follow the instruction "when I see the book on the table, I shall place it on the shelf."[39] When later asked why they placed the book on the shelf, subjects confabulate an intention such as that they intended to tidy the room.

Thirdly, and most strikingly, Johansson et al.[40] demonstrated that subjects will, under certain circumstances, confabulate reasons explaining why they chose a certain option even though they had previously made an explicit decision *against* this option. In this study, participants had to choose between pairs of faces based on their attractiveness. Subsequently, participants indicated their choice by pointing to the relevant picture. Unbeknownst to the participant, the chosen picture was exchanged for the neglected one and the participant was asked why they chose this picture. Remarkably, Johansson et al. found that (a.) most people don't realize that the pictures were swapped, and (b.) people do provide reasons for why they chose the presented picture (which is the one they had decided *against*). This study provides

[33] This view is defended by Carruthers and Schwitzgebel (see Carruthers, Peter. *The opacity of mind: An integrative theory of self-knowledge*. OUP Oxford, 2011.; Schwitzgebel, Eric. "The unreliability of naive introspection." *Philosophical Review* 117.2 (2008): 245–273.)

[34] A paradigm example is Nichols, Shaun, and Stephen P. Stich. *Mindreading: an integrated account of pretence, self-awareness, and understanding other minds*. Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press, 2003. who argue that although agents are in a privileged position to *detect* their current mental states, the causes of one's mental states cannot be detected and must be recovered by arrow prone "reasoning". Goldman, Alvin I. *Simulating minds: The philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience of mindreading*. Oxford University Press, 2006. 233. nicely sums up the consensus asserting that "[n]o careful privileged-access theorist should claim that people have introspective access to the causes of their behavior, in fact, it seems adequate to call it philosophical orthodoxy."

[35] Nisbett, Richard E., and Timothy D. Wilson. "Telling more than we can know: Verbal reports on mental processes." *Psychological review* 84.3 (1977): 231.

[36] Carruthers. Op. cit. 342.

[37] Wegner, op. cit.

[38] Carruthers, op. cit. 342.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Johansson, Petter, et al. "Failure to detect mismatches between intention and outcome in a simple decision task." *Science* 310.5745 (2005): 116–119.

further evidence that people are often mistaken about the reasons that cause their attitudes or preferences. This phenomenon, called choice-blindness, has been replicated by Hall et al..[41]

Findings from cognitive science are often hard to generalize and are subject to revision. However, the problem presented in this section also has intuitive grip. Forgiving often takes a long time; during this time, we don't always monitor why our emotions are the way they are. Quite often we simply find ourselves having certain emotions and, as resilience research shows, agents are often misguided about why and how they come to have the emotional attitudes they happen to have. The confabulation data presented in this section merely lends further evidence to these thoughts; thoughts that have independent appeal. For this reason, I conclude that agents are often in the position to forgive although they don't know the causes of their lack of resentment.

Let's take stock. The endorsement view was said to offer an alternative path to forgiveness, one that does not require a causal connection between one's recognition of an apology and one's forgoing resentment. It may, thus, seem as if the process view is still intact, although not as the only game in town. In a way this is right. Forgiveness is, in principle, compatible with undergoing the right causal history. But in a way this is also misleading. First, we've seen cases of forgiveness in which there was no such causal connection; but we haven't seen cases in which forgiveness did not require the appropriate form of endorsement. My conjecture is that the alleged causal connection is a mere accidental feature of forgiveness, while endorsement is essential. Second, the process view introduces an unreasonably demanding epistemic requirement, because, as argued above, the causes for one's mental states are often unknowable. The notion of forgiveness favored by the process view may, thus, not be of much use in our moral lives. The endorsement view on the contrary presents a route to forgiveness that's easily accessible to agents, and presents, thus, the more "natural"[42] way for individuals to forgive.

6 Forgiveness vs. Pseudo Forgiveness

Let me address a possible challenge to my view. On the account presented here, a critic may worry, forgiving is too easy. Once the process view is rejected, simple forgetting or taking an anti-resentment medication could implausibly seem sufficient for forgiveness. I think this objection is misguided. On my view, forgiving is incompatible with forgetting; furthermore, although forgiveness is, in principle, compatible with taking an anti-resentment drug, this will be a non-lethal bullet to bite once we've made suitable qualifications. Let's address both issues in turn.

A person who forgot about an offense simply doesn't know what took place, which is why she cannot forgive an offender for her offense. I think the present

[41] Hall, Lars, Petter Johansson, and Thomas Strandberg. "Lifting the veil of morality: Choice blindness and attitude reversals on a self-transforming survey." *PloS one* 7.9 (2012).

[42] I owe this formulation to an anonymous reviewer.

analysis of forgiveness can easily accommodate this idea. After all, a person who doesn't know what has happened doesn't seem to be in a position to endorse her current attitude. She can't judge that her attitude is fitting in light of what had happened, because she doesn't know what had happened.

Let's turn to the second, perhaps more pressing, challenge. Charles Griswold[43] writes:

> Imagine an offender who has taken all the required steps from her side, requests forgiveness, and is greeted by her victim with "sure, whatever, you're hereby forgiven, have a nice day. thanks to *Lethe* (a powerful new medication developed by Eternal Sunshine Inc.). I can scarcely remember what you did to me anyhow." The offender would have been dismissed rather than forgiven.

The friend of the process view may argue that the reason why *Lethe* cannot deliver forgiveness is that it introduces the wrong causal history in one's overcoming resentment. A person who took such the medicine lost her resentment because of the way the medicine works and not because the recognition of an apology has rightly caused her loss of resentment.

I think this objection is misguided. Although Griswold's example is incompatible with forgiving, this is not because the victim lost her resentment due to a drug she took. "Sure", she says, "whatever, you're hereby forgiven, have a nice day […] I can scarcely remember what you did to me anyhow." This sentiment is indeed incompatible with forgiveness; however, at this point this has little to do with the fact that a pill has helped alleviating resentment, but, rather, with the victim's utter aloofness and indifference. The claim presented in this paper is that we should loosen some of the causal constraints previously thought important for forgiveness; the claim was not that forgiveness is compatible with complete indifference on the victim's part. To see all this more clearly, consider the following re-description of Griswold's case:

> Imagine an offender who has taken all the required steps from her side, requests forgiveness, and is greeted by her victim with "Without *Lethe* (a powerful new medication developed by Eternal Sunshine Inc.) I could have never overcome my anger and deep-seated resentment towards you. I'm simply not strong enough. I know how much you have changed, and how deeply sorry you are. Considering all this, you truly deserve forgiveness and I'm glad I can finally forgive you."

The case so-described seems much less problematic, even though the victim still lost her resentment through a powerful medication.

Next, reconsidering the findings from resilience research, natural resilience has a striking resemblance to Griswold's medication. Both, the pill and natural resilience, are powerful, fast, and work without much effort; but we've already seen that

[43] Griswold, op. cit. p. 53.

natural resilience should not render forgiveness impossible. Hence, we should likewise accept this conclusion in the present context.

Lastly, the idea that forgiveness requires a specific causal history may arise from the sentiment that forgiving must involve the exercise of moral virtue.[44] Forgiving, so construed, consists in an inner struggle virtuous agents undergo in an attempt to repair an otherwise broken moral relationship. Of course, if a victim loses resentment due to her natural resilience, or a powerful medication, she hasn't exercised her capacity for virtue. Although I agree that forgiving can be virtuous when "at its best"[45], we should be cautious to *require* forgiveness to involve virtue. Forgiving, at its core, is not about a *single* moral agent's moral excellence; rather, it is about repairing an impaired *relationship*. Sometimes repairing this relationship requires virtue; but sometimes it simply doesn't. The critic might dig in her heels and insist that forgiveness is still not a possibility. However, after all that's been said, I think we should simply bite this bullet.

7 Conclusion

It is the perceived view that forgiving must be hard; and because this is so, forgiving requires an act of virtue. Part of what makes it hard is that a perceived change of heart has to work through the victim and appropriately *cause* her to lose her resentment. This is the view criticized in this paper. Forgiving does not require (but is, of course, compatible with) such a causal history. Rather, we should think of forgiveness as the *endorsement* of one's lack of resentment in light of the recognition that the offender has undergone a change of heart. Hence, since such endorsement can be easy, forgiving can be easy too.

[44] Warmke, op. cit. 503; Murphy, op. cit. 15; Griswold, op. cit. xv.

[45] See Griswold, op. cit.