FORGIVING THE DEAD*

By Macalester Bell

Abstract: *Resentment and other hard feelings may outlive their targets, and people often express a desire to overcome these feelings through forgiveness. While some see forgiving the dead as an important moral accomplishment, others deny that genuine forgiveness of the dead is coherent, let alone desirable or valuable. According to one line of thought, forgiveness is something we do for certain reasons, such as the offender's expressed contrition. Given that the dead cannot express remorse, forgiveness of the dead is impossible. Others see the apparent coherence and moral importance of forgiving the dead as a reason to give up on the idea that forgiveness is conditional upon the offender's remorse. According to these philosophers, forgiveness of the dead poses no special problems; forgiveness of the dead, like forgiveness of the living, is not contingent upon the offender's contrition. I steer a path between these two positions in such a way as to bring out an important aspect of forgiveness that is not adequately addressed in the literature: I argue that forgiving the dead may be perfectly coherent and morally valuable even though the dead cannot ask for forgiveness or engage in reparative activities. A full appreciation of the relational character of forgiveness allows us to make sense of forgiving the dead.*

KEY WORDS: forgiveness, resentment, death, relationships, interpretations

We often respond to those who have wronged us with resentment and other hard feelings, and it is widely acknowledged that these attitudes, when apt, may have a positive role to play in confronting wrongdoing. Yet hostile emotions endure, and they may even outlive their targets. Harboring hard feelings for the dead can be burdensome, and some seek to overcome these emotions through forgiveness. Consider, for example, Julian Lennon's description of his anger towards, and eventual forgiveness of, his father, John Lennon:

> With Dad running off and divorcing Mum . . . I had a lot of bitterness and anger I was living with. In the past, I had said I had forgiven Dad, but it was only words. It wasn't until the passing of my friend Lucy and the writing of this song that really helped me forgive my father. I realized if I continued to feel that anger and bitterness towards my dad, I would have a constant cloud hanging over my head my whole

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> life. After recording the song "Lucy," almost by nature, it felt right to fulfill the circle, forgive dad, put the pain, anger and bitterness in the past, and focus and appreciate the good things.'[1]

Julian's grief over Lucy's premature death led him to write a song for her, and, as he describes it, this process of mourning the loss of his childhood friend prompted him to finally forgive his dead father. In this case and others like it, the subject claims to have genuinely forgiven the dead offender, and this kind of forgiveness seems like a perfectly apt—and even admirable—way of responding to wrongdoing. Forgiveness offers a way of breaking free from the past and an offender who, after death, is incapable of expressing remorse or righting old wrongs.

But while some strive to forgive dead offenders and many see this kind of forgiveness as an important moral accomplishment, others are skeptical of the very idea of forgiving the dead. There is something puzzling about forgiveness under these circumstances, and there is disagreement about whether forgiveness of the dead is even coherent, let alone apt, desirable, or morally valuable.

The coherence and value of forgiveness of the dead is directly connected to a long-standing debate in philosophical discussions of forgiveness. Some philosophers maintain that we forgive *for certain reasons*; the paradigmatic reason being the wrongdoer's remorse or contrition.[2] Overcoming hostile emotions in the absence of such reasons may be good for one's mental health and worth striving for in therapy, but it is not properly characterized as morally praiseworthy forgiveness.[3] In fact, overcoming one's resentment in the absence of the offender's contrition may betray a lack of respect for the wrongdoer, oneself as a victim, and morality itself. I'll call this the "Conditional View." For these philosophers, forgiveness is

[1] CBSNEWS 2009 "Julian Lennon: I Finally Forgive Dad," December 15 http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-500187_162-5981807.html. Lucy was Julian's childhood friend and inspired the song, "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds." The comments posted in response to the story highlight the disagreement in this culture regarding forgiveness of the dead. One poster scoffs, "Little late Julian, hate to tell you, your father is dead, so forgiving him means nothing now." Another responds, "Actually, forgiving someone who's dead is MUCH more significant than forgiving someone who's alive—the living still have an opportunity to balance the scales. A dead person's lost that opportunity forever. In any case, the function of forgiveness isn't to absolve the person who wronged you. Some wrongs you can't make right. Forgiveness is about letting go, making peace with the situation as it stands." Yet another declares: "Oh give me a break!!! Julian finally forgives his dad . . . AFTER HE'S DEAD!!!! Sorry, but he had plenty of time to forgive him while he was alive! Julian Lennon is only talking to himself . . . ."

[2] To simplify what is already a complex topic, I will focus on cases of overcoming *resentment* through forgiveness; of course, forgiveness also involves overcoming emotions like disappointment, sadness, bitterness, and so on.

[3] Some defenders of the Conditional View will argue that such a response is not forgiveness at all, while others will argue that it isn't a praiseworthy form of forgiveness. I will not take a stand on this debate. I seek to show that forgiveness of the dead can be a full, meritorious form of forgiveness, even if we accept the Conditional View.

conditional upon the reparative activities of wrongdoers. Since the dead cannot apologize or express contrition, and since these activities are what give victims good reasons to forgive, defenders of the Conditional View conclude that overcoming hard feelings for the dead is not really forgiveness at all or is, at best, a highly imperfect form of forgiveness.[4]

For others, the seeming coherence, desirability, and moral value of forgiveness of the dead make salient grounds for rejecting the Conditional View altogether. The aptness and value of forgiveness of the dead points to a deep truth about forgiveness in all its forms: forgiveness is not conditional upon the reparative activities of the wrongdoer. Forgiveness is characterized as either a kind of "interpretive generosity" through which we focus on the positive aspects of an offender and let his less admirable characteristics fade into the background, or as a secular *leap of faith*, or as a shift in affective attitude that is not unjustified even when it occurs in the absence of the offender's contrition.[5] I'll call this family of views the "Unconditional View." The fact that the dead cannot engage in reparative activities does not, according to this position, raise any special problems; forgiveness of the dead, like forgiveness of the living, is not conditional upon the reparative activities of offenders. The debate between defenders of the Conditional View and the Unconditional View has been one of the

[4] Charles Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) distinguishes between *perfect* and *imperfect* forgiveness: perfect forgiveness is the ideal form of forgiveness and it is conditional upon the wrongdoer's experience and expression of regret, whereas imperfect forgiveness is unconditional. Perfect forgiveness is, in all circumstances, preferable to imperfect forgiveness, and it is always rational to wish that the conditions for perfect forgiveness were satisfied. Forgiveness of the dead is imperfect and therefore is a kind of second-best alternative to perfect forgiveness. Moreover, Griswold maintains that imperfect forgiveness is only possible if the victim gains knowledge of grounds that support forgiveness' characteristic reinterpretation of the offender. If, for example, the would-be forgiver discovers a never-delivered letter that reveals the wrongdoer's remorse, this would provide grounds for imperfect forgiveness. Only under circumstances of this kind is genuine—though still imperfect—forgiveness of the dead possible (see p. 115). I will argue that forgiveness of the dead is not always imperfect in Griswold's sense; that is, forgiveness of the dead is not always a second-best alternative to perfect forgiveness. I hope to show that forgiveness of the dead is coherent and apt even in the absence of the special circumstances that Griswold describes.

[5] I take the phrase "interpretive generosity" from Andrea Westlund, "Anger, Faith, and Forgiveness," *The Monist* 92, no. 4 (2009): 507–536. Westlund does not consider the issue of forgiveness of the dead, but she defends a version of what I call the Unconditional View. As she sees it, in forgiving we express a kind of *moral faith* in the grounds for goodwill toward wrongdoers (p. 509). On Cheshire Calhoun's version of the Unconditional View ("Changing One's Heart," *Ethics* 103, no. 1 [1992]: 76–96), we should understand forgiveness as a process of interpreting the wrongdoer as someone who did what made the best sense to him, given his particular history, when he did wrong. Lucy Allais, "Wiping the Slate Clean: The Heart of Forgiveness," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2008): 33–68, characterizes forgiveness as giving up retributive reactive attitudes while simultaneously maintaining one's belief that the offender did wrong. She argues that because our affective attitudes aren't epistemically mandated, we can forgive—even in the absence of any evidence that the offender has changed his ways—without opening ourselves up to the charge of irrationality.

main debates—perhaps *the* central debate—within philosophical discussions of forgiveness.[6]

While I endorse the Conditional View, in this essay I aim to steer a path between the way defenders of these rival positions treat forgiveness of the dead to bring out an important aspect of forgiveness that has not received adequate attention from partisans of either camp: I will argue that forgiveness of the dead is genuine and coherent, and it may be morally admirable, but recognizing this does not require us to reject the Conditional View in favor of the Unconditional View. Persons on both sides of the debate go wrong insofar as they fail to fully appreciate the deeply *relational character* of wrongdoing and forgiveness. Once we acknowledge the relational aspects of forgiveness, we will see that full, meritorious forgiveness of the dead is possible. I will conclude by showing how recognition of the relational character of forgiveness gives us some reason to prefer the Conditional View to the Unconditional View.

I. Reasons to Forgive and Relational Damage

Most believe that forgiveness involves, at minimum, overcoming negative emotions that were originally justified by the offender's culpable wrongdoing.[7] Few think this is *sufficient* for forgiveness, and there are

[6] Defenders of the Conditional View include Macalester Bell, "Forgiveness, Inspiration, and the Powers of Reparation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (2012): 205–221; Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*; Jeffrie Murphy and Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Norvin Richards, "Forgiveness," *Ethics* 99, no. 1 (1988): 77–97; and John Wilson, "Why Forgiveness Requires Repentance," *Philosophy* 63, no. 246 (1988); 534–35. Those who defend the Unconditional View include Allais, "Wiping the Slate Clean: The Heart of Forgiveness," Calhoun, "Changing One's Heart," Eve Garrard and David McNaughton, "In Defense of Unconditional Forgiveness," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 103 (2003): 39–60; Margaret R. Holmgren, "Forgiveness and the Intrinsic Value of Persons," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (1993): 341–52; Glen Pettigrove, "Unapologetic Forgiveness" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (2004): 187–204; and Westlund, "Anger, Faith, and Forgivenes." Michele Moody-Adams ("Reply to Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*," *Philosophia* 38, no. 3 [2010], 429–37) criticizes Griswold's version of the Conditional View (in part, because it doesn't allow for perfect forgiveness of the dead), but she stops short of defending an Unconditional View. Pamela Hieronymi ("Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52, no. 3 [2001]: 529–55) wishes to remain neutral on the question of whether the offender's remorse is a necessary condition of genuine forgiveness, but insofar as she insists that forgiveness is always "articulate," her view is incompatible with versions of the Unconditional View that characterize forgiveness as a leap of faith, rather than a response to reasons.

[7] Even this seemingly innocuous claim may be controversial: first, there is debate about whether forgiveness involves the complete *elimination* of the hard feelings that were justified by the offense or only their *moderation*. For an endorsement of the former view, see Hieronymi, "Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness"; for a defense of the latter view, see Westlund, "Anger, Faith, and Forgiveness." Second, there is a debate about whether we always forgive for some wrong done or if we may also coherently forgive someone for who he or she is as a person. For more on this issue, see Macalester Bell, "Forgiving Someone for

competing accounts of what additional conditions must be satisfied in order for overcoming justified hard feelings to count as forgiveness. Some think that one must overcome one's negative emotions for "moral reasons," others argue that forgiveness involves overcoming one's hard feelings while coming to see the offender as fundamentally decent.[8] I'll propose my own sufficiency condition shortly, but it may be useful to first outline some general adequacy conditions that any philosophical account of the nature of forgiveness ought to meet.

I propose that an adequate philosophical account of forgiveness will satisfy the following conditions:

1. It will allow us to explain why forgiveness is, in at least some cases, an especially meritorious response to wrongdoing.
2. It will provide some basis for distinguishing between forgiveness and other ways of going on after wrongdoing, such as writing the offender off or forgetting the wrongdoing.
3. It will provide a basis for distinguishing between meritorious forgiveness and objectionable condonation.
4. It will provide the resources to explain why many find forgiveness difficult.

In offering these conditions I aim to remain neutral between the Unconditional View and the Conditional View. Defenders of these rival camps will disagree about whether some purported instance of forgiveness is admirable or praiseworthy, but all should agree that an adequate account of the nature of forgiveness will satisfy these conditions. These desiderata are meant to describe an activity that should be familiar to members of this society and often goes by the name of "forgiveness," but I do not seek to offer an account of forgiveness that can explain every way the term is used in this culture.

Who They Are (and Not Just What They've Done)," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 77, no. 3 (2008): 625–58. Finally, there is some debate about whether the distinction between "negative" and "positive" emotions is coherent. See, for example, Kristjáan Kristjánsson, "On the Very Idea of 'Negative Emotions,'" *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 33, no. 4, (2003): 351–64. For the purposes of this essay, I will remain neutral on these issues. When I refer to "overcoming" hard feelings in what follows, this should be read as "overcoming or moderating" these emotions. Although I believe we may coherently forgive persons for their character as well as for their actions, in this essay I will primarily focus on cases of forgiving persons for their past acts. Finally, "negative emotions" refers to emotions that are negatively valenced.

[8] For example, Murphy, in Murphy and Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* argues that forgiveness is always done for moral reasons; Hampton, in Murphy and Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, argues that forgiveness involves coming to see the wrongdoer as a fundamentally decent person; Calhoun, "Changing One's Heart," claims that forgiveness involves seeing the wrongdoing as making biographical sense to the wrongdoer. In what follows, I will offer my own account of what makes overcoming a justified hard feeling forgiveness: I will argue that forgiveness is overcoming justified hard feelings for the sake of one's relationship with the offender.

With these desiderata in place, I would like to outline what I see as the most plausible interpretation of the Conditional View and show how this view can accommodate forgiveness of the dead. My aim in this section is reconciliatory: I hope to show that the Conditional View is compatible with acknowledging that full, genuine forgiveness of the dead is possible.

Why do defenders of the Conditional View insist that forgiveness is a response to reasons given by the offender's contrition? A variety of answers have been proposed.[9] Most generally, defenders of the Conditional View think that only this kind of attitude revision can fully satisfy the desiderata given above. Many suggest that if we were to accept the Unconditional View, we would be unable to distinguish between forgiveness and other ways of giving up our hard feelings or show how forgiveness is distinct from condonation. In addition, some hold that the Conditional View is superior to the Unconditional View because only the former allows us to maintain that the shift in attitudes at the heart of forgiveness is *rational*. I think there is a further reason for preferring the Conditional View to the Unconditional View, a reason that has received little attention in the literature:[10] the badness of wrongdoing is primarily a function of how it *impairs our relationships*, and forgiveness is fundamentally a process of *relational repair*.

Wrongdoing, it is often pointed out, is not constituted solely by rights violations or material losses; it also expresses hostile and degrading attitudes toward victims and other members of the moral community.[11] These expressions of ill will and lack of regard help to distinguish wrongdoing from accidental harm, and these attitudes impair relationships between victims and offenders.[12] Hard feelings, when apt, *answer* the insulting and

[9] For Murphy (Murphy and Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy*), reparative activities justify us in seeing the wrong act as separable from the offender, and only under those conditions can we forgive without condoning the wrong done. Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*, argues that contrition shows that the offender is not "simply the 'same person' who did the wrong" (p. 50). Such a person cannot be characterized as a moral monster (p. 53) or reduced to the person who did wrong (p. 54); under these conditions, we can rationally revise our judgments and change our sentiments toward the offender.

[10] Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*, defends something approaching the view I sketch below insofar as he insists that forgiveness is dyadic. But despite his emphasis on the relational aspect of forgiveness, he does not draw what I see as the right conclusions about forgiving the dead. For Griswold assumes that forgiveness is always an *interpersonal* process, and this assumption is precisely what I seek to challenge.

[11] See Hieronymi, "Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness"; Murphy and Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy*; Heather J. Gert, Linda Radzik, and Michael Hand, "Hampton on the Expressive Power of Punishment," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 35, no. 1 (2004) 79–90; and Adrienne M. Martin, "Owning Up and Lowering Down: The Power of Apology," *Journal of Philosophy* 107, no. 10 (2010): 534–53 are skeptical of this claim.

[12] Anne C. Minas, "God and Forgiveness," *Philosophical Quarterly* 25, no. 99 (1975), 138–50; Linda Radzik, *Making Amends: Atonement in Morality, Law, and Politics* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); T. M. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008); and Eleonore Stump, "Personal Relations and Moral Residue," *History of the Human Sciences* 17, nos. 2/3 (2004): 33–56, all argue that wrongdoing impairs our relationships with other persons. However, the view I defend here is unique insofar as it shows the connection between reciprocal relations, hard feelings, and the Conditional View.

degrading messages sent by wrongdoing. Through their resentment, victims protest the wrong done and hold offenders accountable for the hostile attitudes expressed by their offenses.

The central way in which wrongdoing impairs our relationships with other persons is by undermining their characteristic reciprocity. Our relationships with adult persons are fundamentally distinct from our other relationships (for example, our relationships with nonhuman animals, young children, or artifacts) insofar as the former are characterized, or ought to be characterized, by reciprocity. This reciprocity grounds many of the attitudes and actions within person-to-person relationships. In a world without reciprocal relations it would be impossible to engage in activities like conversing, planning, bargaining, promising, or quarreling.[13] These familiar activities presume a kind of basic equality and responsiveness between both parties. While not all relationships between persons are reciprocal, reciprocity remains a normative ideal in this domain. The attitudes expressed through wrongdoing damage the foundation of this reciprocity. If you've wronged me and you remain unremorseful, you show that you don't value me as an equal and are unwilling to be responsive to my needs. This ill will makes it difficult or impossible for us to engage in reciprocal activities. The attitude expressed through your wrongdoing gives me reason to question your reliability, doubt your promises, and attribute to you selfish motives. As a result, we may be unable to do things like plan a conference together or, in extreme cases, even converse. The extent to which reciprocal relationships are undermined by wrongdoing depends upon the seriousness of the wrong done and facts about the history of the relationship. When it is serious, wrongdoing undermines the basic *normative expectations* that underwrite our reciprocal activities.[14]

According to an influential account outlined by P. F. Strawson, our fundamental normative expectation is minimal goodwill; this is the foundation of

[13] Christine Korsgaard, "Creating the Kingdom of Ends: Reciprocity and Responsibility in Personal Relations," in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) characterizes holding persons responsible in terms of taking a chance on reciprocal relationships, and she notes that many of the activities emblematic of our lives are predicated on reciprocity: "When you hold someone responsible, you are prepared to accept promises, offer confidences, exchange vows, cooperate on a project, enter a social contract, have a conversation, make love, be friends, or get married. You are willing to deal with her on the basis of the expectation that each of you will act from a certain view of the other: that you each have your reasons which are to be respected, and your ends which are to be valued" (p. 189).

[14] My position here is similar to Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame*, but I place greater emphasis on the role hard feelings play in relational impairment. Some might object that there are examples of serious wrongdoing that do not seem to undermine reciprocal relations between persons, for example, polluting the environment. In response, I would point out that many cases of pollution could be understood as damaging relations between persons. Moreover, I'm not attempting to provide an exhaustive account of wrongdoing here; instead, I aim to sketch an account of the damage wrought by *wronging another person*, for these cases of wrongdoing are the ones that may be forgiven.

the reciprocity characteristic of person-to-person relations.[15] He points out that we expect others to show a basic level of goodwill—or at least an absence of ill will—in their interactions with us. At its most fundamental, this minimal goodwill involves seeing other persons as agents with interests who have reasons that ought to be respected. Yet these expectations of minimal goodwill are challenged by wrongdoing's expressed ill will or indifference.

Our particular relationships are contoured by their own idiosyncratic normative expectations, but we also can specify more general norms that partially constitute relationship types, and we may judge particular relationships as impaired or unimpaired relative to these norms.[16] Even in the absence of a robust, pre-existing relationship, we expect a basic level of goodwill from strangers, or at least an absence of ill will or indifference. Like robust relationships, such as friendship, the relationship between two members of the moral community (qua members of the moral community) is partially constituted by norms concerning how each participant in the relationship should treat one another and what sorts of attitudes they should adopt.[17] These relationships may also be damaged by wrongdoing. A stranger's wrongdoing may alter one's basic normative expectations with regard to that person; under these conditions, one may be unable to engage in basic reciprocal activities with that person.

As should be clear, this sketch of the badness of wrongdoing emphasizes the role of the offender's attitudes in relational impairment. The badness of wrongdoing cannot be fully explained merely in terms of harm inflicted; the offender's attitudes shape the meaning of these harms. Of course, in some cases it is not the offender's malice that rankles but his indifference. But again, it is the offender's attitudes that give wrongdoing its characteristic sting, not simply the harm done.[18]

Resentment and other hard feelings offer ways of *answering* the relational impairment created by wrongdoing. In responding with resentment, the victim withdraws whatever minimal goodwill she had for the offender, making it clear to herself and others in the community that she stands against the wrongdoing. Resentment focuses the subject's attention on the wrong done and motivates her to demand that the wrongdoer

[15] P. F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," in *Freedom and Resentment* (London: Methuen, 1974), 1–25.

[16] Cf. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame*.

[17] Some express skepticism about the coherence of these thin or formal kinds of relationships. See, for example, Samuel Scheffler, "Morality and Reasonable Partiality" in *Equality and Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Richards, "Forgiveness."

[18] Are there cases of justifiable wrongdoing that don't involve the expression of malice or indifference? Perhaps. But a full discussion of this issue would take us too far away from the present topic. No matter what we want to say about the possibility of justifiable wrongdoing, it seems *worse* to have someone set back your interests out of malice or indifference; this will do greater damage to your relationship with the other person.

either explain away or take responsibility for his wrongdoing. Its protest helps protect the subject from a loss of self-respect, respect for the wrongdoer, and respect for morality itself.[19] Insofar as a victim actively stands against the wrong done and withdraws her goodwill, she has a defense against the charge of condonation.[20]

But while resentment can answer and help mitigate the damage wrought by wrongdoing, it cannot, by itself, repair the relationship between the victim and wrongdoer. This is where forgiveness comes in. According to defenders of the Conditional View, overcoming one's resentment and other hard feelings for reasons given by the offender's contrition can help repair relationships impaired by wrongdoing. To understand this, we need to bear in mind the role that mutual recognition of persons' *normative powers* plays in relations of reciprocity.

Persons have normative powers, that is, powers to give and provide reasons, and the exercise and mutual recognition of these powers is a precondition for reciprocal relations. Consider some of the activities characteristic of reciprocal relations mentioned earlier: promising, confiding, vowing, conversing, contracting, and so on. These activities presuppose that each party has normative powers, and for these activities to be successful, each person must recognize the other's powers. Take, for example, the activity of promising: suppose I say, "I promise to meet you at the café tonight at 8:00." In making the promise, I must see myself as having the power to give myself (and you) reasons to be at the café at 8:00. If you give my utterance uptake as a promise, you must see me as someone who is capable of giving you reasons. If I didn't see myself as having the power to give you reasons and if you didn't see me as having this power, then my attempt to make a promise could not come off; successful promising requires the exercise and mutual recognition of normative powers. The point generalizes: our reciprocal activities, and reciprocity more fundamentally, require the exercise and mutual recognition of persons' normative powers.

When an offender sincerely expresses remorse for his past wrongdoing, he stands against it and makes it clear that he no longer harbors the ill will, indifference and lack of respect originally expressed through the offense.[21] What apologies change is the connection between the wrongdoer and the wrong done: once someone sincerely apologizes, we no longer have reason to believe that he currently endorses the messages sent by his past wrongdoing.[22] Under these circumstances, the victim may forgive

[19] Murphy and Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy*.

[20] To be clear, withdrawing one's goodwill from a person is not the same as responding with ill will. I don't think resentment should be identified with ill will, but it does involve a withdrawal of the goodwill at the heart of our normative expectations.

[21] Murphy and Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* and Hieronymi, "Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness."

[22] Murphy and Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy*.

without condoning the wrong done. Through his reparative activities, the offender's past ill will has been replaced with an expression of minimal goodwill, and this expressed goodwill gives the victim prima facie reason to respond in kind.

According to this line of argument, to overcome one's fitting and morally apt hard feelings without waiting for the offender's expression of remorse is to fail to treat the offender as someone with whom one may enter into reciprocal relations, that is, it is to fail to treat the offender as someone with normative powers. To respond to an offender in this way is to write the person off rather than forgive. Under some circumstances we may have reasons to write persons off in this way. But whatever conclusions we may draw concerning the ethics of this kind of peace seeking, it should be sharply distinguished from forgiveness; indeed, overcoming hard feelings in this way fails to satisfy the second desiderata on an adequate philosophical account of forgiveness offered earlier. When we forgive, we strive to *repair* a relationship that has been impaired by wrongdoing, and this relational repair cannot be achieved by writing the other person off.

Earlier I noted that few think overcoming justified hard feelings is sufficient for forgiveness, and we can now see what additional condition must be satisfied for an attitude revision to count as meritorious forgiveness, or perhaps even forgiveness at all: when we forgive, we overcome our hard feelings for the *sake of our relationship* with the offender. Since interpersonal relationships are characterized by reciprocity and this is the appropriate normative ideal that ought to regulate these relationships, in forgiving the living we overcome our negative emotions for the sake of our reciprocal relationship with the offender. In this respect forgiveness is distinct from simple affective peace seeking. In seeking peace, one strives to overcome one's hard feelings *for one's own sake* (or perhaps for the sake of one's relationships with one's family or friends) but *not* for the sake of one's reciprocal relationship with the offender. To be clear, I am not claiming that overcoming hard feelings for one's own sake is always or ever disvaluable; but no matter what its value, affective peace seeking should be distinguished from forgiveness, as the second condition on an adequate account of forgiveness states.

According to what I see as the best version of the Conditional View, when we attempt to forgive a person (that is, repair a relationship by giving up hard feelings for the sake of our relationship with the offender) without waiting for the wrongdoer to give us reasons to forgive, we run into moral trouble. We cannot repair a reciprocal relationship unless offenders give and provide reasons for forgiveness by engaging in reparative activity. In thinking that we can, we either fail to respect ourselves (that is, we give up seeing ourselves as wronged by the wrongdoer), fail to respect the wrongdoer (that is, we give up seeing the wrongdoer as a person who can be held responsible for his actions),

or fail to respect morality itself (that is, we give up on seeing the wrong done as wrong).[23]

To sum up: I've articulated one under-discussed line of reasoning for accepting the Conditional View. Wrongdoing is best understood in terms of relational damage, and forgiveness is best characterized in terms of relational repair. Since our relationships with other persons are, at least ideally, relationships of reciprocity in which each party mutually recognizes the other's normative powers, forgiveness is conditional upon the offender's reparative activities. Only when we overcome our hard feelings in response to an offender's remorse and for the sake of our relationship with the offender can we be said to be striving to repair the person-to-person relationship impaired by wrongdoing.

Moreover, it could be argued that only forgiveness so characterized satisfies the desiderata on an adequate philosophical account of forgiveness outlined earlier. Very quickly, on this account, forgiveness may be meritorious since it involves overcoming emotions that are justified by the wrongdoing. This type of attitude revision is distinct from other ways of going on in the face of wrongdoing, such as acceptance, since it is a response to the offender's contrition. Since it is a response to the offender's change of heart, we don't fall into objectionable condonation when we forgive. It is clear why many find this kind of attitude revision difficult; since the offender damaged his relationship with the victim through his wrongdoing, a victim may be hesitant to repair a relationship originally impaired by the offender. The apology does not annul the wrong done or rationally require forgiveness.

We might be tempted to characterize forgiveness of the dead as a special instance of forgiveness of the unrepentant. Since the dead cannot engage in reparative activities, it would seem to follow that, on the Conditional View, forgiveness of the dead is always unfitting and inapt for the same reason that forgiveness of the unrepentant is always unfitting and inapt. But this would be a mistake. Forgiveness of the dead, like forgiveness of the living, is fundamentally relational: in each case, the would-be forgiver aims to repair a damaged relationship. But a relationship between a living victim and her deceased wrongdoer is, clearly, completely different than a relationship between a living victim and her living, yet unrepentant, wrongdoer.[24]

[23] Ibid. Some defenders of the Conditional View might say that this attempt at relational repair isn't forgiveness at all, others will say it isn't a meritorious form of forgiveness, and I won't attempt to settle this dispute here. Of course, defenders of the Unconditional View will disagree with either interpretation, but I am not attempting to fully defend this claim against their objections here. Instead, in this section and the next I aim to outline what I see as the most compelling interpretation of the Conditional View and sketch how genuine forgiveness of the dead can be rendered coherent according to this position. I will return to the debate between partisans of the Conditional View and the Unconditional View in Section IV.

[24] This holds in the vast majority of cases. As I concede below, there may be cases in which our relationships with persons are similar to our relationships with the dead; death is not the only circumstance that robs one of normative powers.

Most obviously, relationships between the living and the dead are not relationships between persons, and reciprocity is not a normative ideal that ought to regulate these relationships. Given the different shape and unique characteristics of our relationships with the dead, the considerations that give us reasons to forgive living wrongdoers will be distinct from the considerations that give us reasons to forgive the dead. In both cases, genuine forgiveness involves overcoming one's hard feelings for the sake of one's relationship with the offender, but the conditions that must be satisfied to revise one's emotions for the sake of this relationship will vary depending upon the specific features of the relationship in question. Because of this, we should not think of forgiveness of the dead as morally on par with forgiveness of unrepentant, though living, wrongdoers.

Many will balk, and balk hard, at these claims. Talk of "relationships" with the dead may sound either spooky or naïve or both. Death, some will insist, brings an immediate end to our relationships, and appealing to the idea of our relationships with the deceased to explain the coherence and aptness of forgiveness of the dead may be thought to obscure far more than it clarifies. I think these worries are misplaced. While death fundamentally transforms our relationships, it does not always end them; acknowledging this is crucial to understanding what it means to forgive the dead, and recognition of this fact is important for an adequate account of the nature and ethics of forgiveness more generally.

II. Forgiveness and Our Relationships with the Dead

The living have relationships with the dead. Past wrongdoing impairs these relationships, and forgiveness aids in relational repair. Before explaining and defending these claims, let me do a bit of ground clearing: first, I'm assuming persons do not survive their death; the relationships I'm interested in are not relationships between living persons and spirits or ghosts. Instead, these are relationships between persons and those who were once persons but are no longer persons, that is, ex-persons.

Second, the relationships that I'll be concerned with are relationships that began when both the victim and the wrongdoer were alive. Arguably, persons may also have relationships with the long dead; in some cultures, for example, living persons engage in complex rituals to maintain relationships with distant ancestors. And we can imagine cases where one person wrongs another who is not yet born, thereby impairing their relationship. But here I will be focusing on cases in which a living victim was wronged by a living wrongdoer, such as the case of John and Julian Lennon. As a result, the relationship between the victim and wrongdoer was impaired, and this relational damage was not repaired before the offender's death. The victim is left with an impaired relationship with an ex-person.

Third, to say that the living have relationships with the dead means, in part, that the living stand in certain relations to the dead, but the

relationships I have in mind go beyond this minimal sense of a relationship. Not only can we stand in certain relations to the dead, we may also *have* robust relationships with them. A robust relationship involves a liability to a host of affective attitudes, intentions, obligations, normative expectations, and interpretive activities. Unlike extremely thin or trivial relationships (such as the relationship between all persons who wear white athletic socks on the weekend), robust relationships often shape who we are, what we do, and how we think of ourselves. In short, robust relationships have a large role to play in shaping our practical identities.[25]

A. Relationships with the dead

When a close relation dies, we usually do not immediately cease experiencing the attitudes that we harbored for the living person, nor do we take ourselves to have reason to immediately revise our attitudes; if we loved the living person, we will likely love, and take ourselves to have good reasons to love, the dead person; if we despised the living person, we will likely despise the dead person and take ourselves to have good reasons to despise her, and so on. In addition, we often see ourselves connected to the deceased through a web of various duties, intentions, obligations, and patterns of interpretation. According to a growing body of research in bereavement studies, many persons report having ongoing relationships with the dead. When unimpaired, these relationships provide a host of relational goods, such as a comforting sense of presence and more general feelings of reassurance and guidance. [26]

While many take themselves to have relationships with the dead, we might question whether people are right to think in these terms; perhaps the very idea of enjoying relationships with the dead is incoherent. The dead obviously lack the qualities that may have initially justified the attitudes characteristic of robust relationships between the living and the dead.

[25] For more on standing in an interpersonal relation and having an interpersonal relationship, see Niko Kolodney, "Love as Valuing a Relationship," *Philosophical Review* 112, no. 2 (2003): 135–89.

[26] When Dewi Rees, "The Hallucinations of Widowhood," *British Medical Journal* 4 (1971): 37–41 first wrote about the experiences of the bereaved in the early 1970s, he noted that almost half of his widowed subjects reported perceptions of their dead spouse. Although he refers to the experiences of the bereaved as "hallucinations," he stresses that they are adaptive and are not a sign of an underlying psychological disorder. Rees' results have been subsequently reproduced in cross-cultural studies (see Dennis Klass, Phylis R. Silverman, Steven Nickman, *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1996). According to this literature, persons' ongoing relationships with the dead are characterized by three main features: a sense of the deceased person's presence, a disposition to talk to or communicate in some other way with the deceased, and a tendency for subjects to *interpret* themselves through their dead relations. These interpretations take a variety of forms: the living may see the dead as role models, ask the dead for guidance, use the dead to help clarify their values and form a coherent narrative about the past, and so on. This interpretive activity is, I think, a crucial aspect of our relationships with the dead and a central component of their normative significance. I will say more about this in what follows.

The dead lack intentions, wills, judgments, warm smiles, or yellow hair; given these deficits, some might insist that we should dismiss all talk of relationships with the dead as deeply confused. I think this rejection would be a mistake. We may coherently harbor emotions for the dead when these emotions are focused primarily on qualities they had in the past.[27]

Admittedly, many of the attitudes we harbor for the dead are *person-directed* attitudes,[28] that is, these attitudes take persons as their intentional objects, and this might be thought to call into question their fittingness when directed toward the dead who completely lack the qualities of persons.[29] To respond to a malfunctioning radio with a person-directed attitude, such as resentment, would be an unfitting response, and we might be tempted to think that resenting a dead wrongdoer opens one up to a similar objection. But this would be too quick. The dead, unlike artifacts such as radios, were *once* persons, and this is sufficient for backward-looking, person-directed attitudes to be fitting responses to the dead. Death does not render these emotions always unfitting because death does not obliterate the past actions or character traits that are the focus of these person-directed emotions. These attitudes need not present their intentional objects as currently existing, and because of this, they are not always unfitting when directed toward those who were once, but are no longer, persons.

Some may insist that a full understanding and assessment of my claims regarding our relationships with the dead requires that we first settle a range of metaphysical issues concerning death and existence.[30] I disagree. No matter what answers we end up giving to these metaphysical questions, it doesn't change the fact that many persons see themselves as having relationships with the dead and that these relationships play a

[27] Compare to Niall Connolly, "How the Dead Live," *Philosophia* 39, no. 1 (2011): 83–103: "We love Socrates for what he was rather than for what he is. Is it possible to love a bare particular? It is true that, as Socrates is now, he doesn't have the qualities that made him loveable; and he cannot be affected by our love. But that in no way contradicts the truth that he is loved. The world is full of instances of individuals loving individuals that no longer have the qualities that sparked this emotion, and who are now oblivious to the feelings of their lovers" (p. 102).

[28] I borrow the term "person-directed attitudes" from Michelle Mason, "Contempt as a Moral Attitude," *Ethics* 113, no. 1 (2003): 234–72.

[29] For an influential discussion of fittingness, see Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson, "The Moralistic Fallacy: On the 'Appropriateness' of Emotions," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 61, no. 1 (2000): 65–90.

[30] These metaphysical issues include the ontological status of dead persons, whether the dead exist or are non-existent objects, whether we should accept Presentism or Eternalism, and so on. For a discussion of these issues see Palle Yourgrau, "The Dead," *Journal of Philosophy* 84, no. 2 (1987): 84–101 and Connolly, "How the Dead Live." Eternalism is the metaphysical position that is most friendly to my characterization of these relationships as contemporaneous relations between a living person and a dead person. But if Presentism is the correct view, I think my claims could be recast as an intertemporal relation between a living person and a person who lived at another time. I am grateful to Carolina Sartorio and Don Hubin for pressing me on this point.

constitutive role in their practical identities. Questions about how these relationships are impaired by wrongdoing and whether they may be repaired by forgiveness are fundamentally practical questions.

Our relationships with the dead are not characterized by reciprocity, and there are many things we cannot do with dead people: we cannot converse, cooperate, or quarrel with them; nor can we exchange vows, plan, or conspire.[31] But while our relationships with the dead lack most of the characteristic features of friendship and other relationships typical of adult persons, this does not give us reason to deny the existence of these relationships. As I see it, we can coherently claim to enjoy robust relationships with the dead insofar as we *interpret* ourselves (and others) through them in ways that affect our practical identities.[32] This interpretive activity is what makes it that case that Julian Lennon has a robust relationship with his dead father, John. The interpretive activity I have in mind is diverse: Julian may see his father as morally flawed and may strive to be a comparatively better person, or he may admire his father's musical accomplishments and aim to be the kind of musician his father would have liked to work with, and so on. As these examples suggest, the interpretive activity in question shapes how subjects see themselves in rather profound ways, and it may motivate people to change how they live their lives.

The interpretations central to our robust relationships with the dead are characteristic of robust relationships more generally. For example, some have suggested that this interpretive activity is at the heart of friendships between adult persons.[33] In many of our relationships with the living, this interpretive activity is reciprocal; not only do I interpret myself though my friend, but I allow her to interpret me, and I interpret myself through her interpretation of me, and so on. In our relationships with the dead, however, this interpretive activity is unidirectional and mediated by imaginative projections. Julian cannot be responsive to his father's interpretations of him since his dead father is obviously incapable of forming any impressions of Julian. Instead, Julian may imagine how his living father would have responded to some event and then interpret himself through this imaginatively constructed perspective. In considering his next career move, for example, he might imagine what John's opinions of his various options would have been and then take that to heart in deciding what to do.

[31] However, we can imaginatively engage in versions of these activities; this type of imaginative engagement is characteristic of the interpretive activities I discuss below.

[32] While I think the interpretive activity I describe is necessary and sufficient for having a robust relationship with a dead person, I do not deny that our relationships with the dead have other features as well. For example, we often take ourselves to *owe* things to dead relations (for instance, a well-maintained grave) with whom we have robust relations.

[33] Dean Cocking and Jeannette Kennett, "Friendship and the Self," *Ethics* 106, no. 3 (1998): 502–27. According to their analysis, friendship is best understood as a relationship in which persons reciprocally attempt to influence one another and open themselves up to the influence of the other: friendship is, in their words, is an exercise in direction and interpretation.

But while interpretive activity plays an important role in robust relationships more generally, it has special importance in our robust relationships with the dead because it is what makes these relationships robust. Moreover, when these relationships are impaired, it is the primary site of impairment.

B. Impaired relationships with the dead

Earlier, I argued that wrongdoing damages our relationships with other persons by undermining their reciprocity. In addition, wrongdoing has a tendency to lead victims to form interpretations of themselves and others, most often the offender, that they have reason to reject.[34] For example, a rape victim may come to see herself as someone who was "asking for it" or she may perceive all men as potential rapists. In the opening example, Julian Lennon describes his unresolved anger at his father as a "constant cloud" hanging over his head, and he makes it clear that his anger had made it difficult to appreciate the good things about his relationship with his father. The precise ways in which wrongdoing affects victims' interpretations of themselves and others has garnered surprisingly little attention. When our relationships with the dead are impaired, the impairment does not undermine our normative expectations or threaten the reciprocity of these relationships. Instead, the impairment is best characterized as interpretive: victims come to interpret themselves and others in ways that they have reason to reject.

These interpretations may be objectionable for different reasons. First, they may make it difficult to appreciate the good qualities (or, at the very least, the non-objectionable qualities) of the interpreted. In other words, they may be grossly inaccurate. In cases where the victim and wrongdoer had a robust personal relationship before the offender's death, such as in the case of John and Julian Lennon, this kind of relational impairment may rob the victim of important relational goods, including the comfort and solace that many get from their relationships with the dead as described in the empirical literature on grieving. This is the second way in which these interpretations may be objectionable: they may keep victims from enjoying the relational goods that these relationships commonly provide.

If the victim and offender did not enjoy a close, personal relationship before the wrongdoing, then the wrong done cannot rob the victim of the kind of relational goods described above. Nevertheless, these relationships may still be characterized by objectionable interpretations. Under these conditions, the relational impairment is relative to the fundamental moral relationship that existed between the victim and wrongdoer qua members of the moral community. In these cases, victims may come to interpret themselves, through their relationship with the dead offender,

[34] Wrongdoing may also lead *offenders* to interpret themselves in ways that they have reason to reject, but my focus here will be on victims' impaired self-interpretations.

in ways that they have reason to reject. They may, for example, continue to see themselves as powerless or vulnerable, or they may become quick to anger, or find themselves so wracked with a desire for retribution that they have little time for other activities or enjoyments. These interpretations are objectionable neither because they are inaccurate nor because they necessarily rob victims of relational goods but because they negatively affect victims' well-being.

III. Forgiving the Dead

As we have seen, wrongdoing often gives rise to objectionable interpretations. These interpretations usually manifest themselves as hostile emotions directed toward the offender or others in the moral community. To forgive is to overcome these objectionable interpretations and negative emotions for the sake of one's relationship with the offender.

What characterizes repairing the relationship between a living victim and her dead offender depends upon the specific features of the relationship in question. When the offender was an intimate and the relationship before the wrongdoing was largely positive, relational repair involves revising one's interpretations of the offender in order to put one in a position to appreciate their admirable qualities and the positive aspects of the relationship. If this happens, the victim may eventually come to enjoy the relational goods often afforded by our relationships with the dead. When the offender was originally a stranger, forgiveness involves the eradication of negative interpretations so that the victim no longer interprets herself and others through her relationship with the offender. In these cases, victims can acknowledge the wrong that was done, but they do not take their relationship with the wrongdoer as shaping, or giving them reason to shape, how they interpret themselves and others.

As we have seen, defenders of the Conditional View are usually dismissive of forgiveness of the dead, but I think we can accept the Conditional View while acknowledging that genuine forgiveness of the dead is possible. Our reasons for forgiving the dead are very different from our reasons for forgiving the living. In forgiving the living, we care about wrongdoers *providing* reasons to forgive or *inspiring* forgiveness.[35] That is, we expect wrongdoers to experience and enact their remorse in such a way that it may reasonably be expected to be given uptake as a reason to forgive. This makes sense in light of the reciprocity that is, ideally, characteristic of our unimpaired relationships with other persons. The dead cannot inspire our forgiveness or provide reasons to forgive since they lack the requisite normative powers.

[35] For more on what is involved in providing reasons to forgive, see Bell, "Forgiveness, Inspiration, and the Powers of Reparation."

In forgiving a living person we should, according to the Conditional View, wait for the person to engage in some form of reparative activity. This is necessary because relationships between persons ought to be governed by norms of reciprocity. But our relationships with the dead, even at their best, are not reciprocal relations. Because of this, we may fully and genuinely forgive the dead even in the absence of reparative activity. But one may accept this point while still insisting on the central tenets of the Conditional View. Overcoming one's hard feelings for a dead relation only counts as forgiveness if one overcomes one's hard feelings for the sake of one's (nonreciprocal) relationship with the dead offender. So understood, forgiveness of the dead is distinct from other forms of attitude management such as overcoming one's hard feelings for a dead relation through therapy. [36] Typically, when you overcome an emotion in therapy you do it for the sake of *yourself*. Perhaps you decide that you have spent too much of your time and energy protesting some wrong long done and you yearn to free yourself from the yoke of the past. But when you genuinely forgive the living or the dead, you do it for the sake of the *relationship* between you and the wrongdoer. In this way, forgiveness is distinct from other forms of affect regulation.

The distinction between overcoming a negative emotion for the sake of oneself and for the sake of one's relationship is, admittedly, a subtle one, and when it comes to relationships with the dead, the distinction may seem subtle to the point of non-existence. Our relationships with the dead are, as we have seen, asymmetrical and characterized by imaginative projections, and these features may lead us to conclude that there is no distinction between overcoming an emotion for the sake of oneself and overcoming an emotion for the sake of one's relationship with a dead offender.

There are a couple of ways of responding to this worry: first, it is worth noting that this sort of objection may be raised more generally against the distinction between doing something for the sake of oneself and doing something for the sake of one's relationship. Insofar as our relationships change who we are and are part of our good, it is difficult to see how we can draw a sharp distinction between the two cases. Second, and more to the point, I think the distinction becomes easier to appreciate once we recognize that to overcome one's hard feelings for the sake of one's relationship involves taking up a particular attitude to the relationship. If Julian Lennon overcomes his hostile emotions for the sake of his relationship with his father, then he is acknowledging that he values this relationship and sees it as having some role to play in his life. In maintaining this

[36] Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*, insists that we ought to distinguish forgiveness on the one hand, and overcoming hard feelings through therapy on the other. Of course, one may be prompted to forgive a dead relation in therapy; my point is that forgiveness (wherever it occurs) is distinct from other forms of affect management, such as the kind of affective regulation one typically undertakes in therapy.

relationship, he will likely take himself as bound by certain obligations such as maintaining his memory of his father, telling his own children about his dad, maintaining relationships with his father's family members, stopping by Strawberry Fields when he visits Central Park, and so on.[37] While there is a sense in which he does these things for himself, they are not purely self-regarding activities. If he fails to do these things, he may feel as though he has let himself down, but he also has reason to feel that he has failed to abide by the norms created by the relationship.

Of course, in cases where the victim and offender were strangers before the wrongdoing, what it means to value the relationship will be very different; under these circumstances, one will simply give up the hard feelings originally directed toward the offender and no longer focus one's attention on the offender's faults.

In giving up one's hard feelings in the absence of the offender's reparation, one may be thought to risk *condoning* the wrong done, and, as we have seen, one reason to prefer the Conditional View over the Unconditional View is that the former is thought to allow us to preserve the distinction between forgiveness and condonation, thereby satisfying the third desideratum on an adequate account of forgiveness.

I concede that in forgiving the dead we risk condonation. However, I don't think the risks here are as worrisome as the risks associated with forgiving a living, unrepentant offender.

There are two main problems with condonation: it expresses attitudes we have reason to reject, and it can lead to negative consequences. Let's consider each in turn. To condone wrongdoing, it is often pointed out, is to show an attitude of disrespect for oneself, the offender, and morality itself; one must either see oneself as unworthy of decent treatment or the offender as someone who is not accountable for his actions or morality as not worth caring about.[38] When a person forgives an unrepentant wrongdoer, she ignores the fact that the offender has normative powers that he fails to exercise. Overcoming one's hard feelings without waiting for the offender to exercise his normative powers is to fail to treat him as a person. Forgiveness under these conditions is not a respectful response, according to defenders of the Conditional View.[39]

Since the dead lack normative powers, one does not demonstrate a failure of respect if one forgives in the absence of reparative activity. The dead are not *un*repentant they are *non*repentant, and the meaning of forgiving

[37] I'm not suggesting that he will or should necessarily take himself to be obligated to do precisely these things. Instead, I simply mean to stress that insofar as one is willing to do things for the sake of one's relationship one must value the relationship to some degree. Part of what it is to value a relationship is to see it as a source of reasons to do certain things or take up certain attitudes.

[38] Ibid.

[39] I am not aiming to defend this claim here; rather, I'm simply stating a common claim made by defenders of the Conditional View.

a nonrepentant dead-person is very different from the meaning of forgiving an unrepentant, but still living, offender. In forgiving the dead, one does not evince a lack of respect because one is not so much looking the other way as one is looking at the situation head-on: the wrongdoer is dead and cannot engage in any reparative activity.

The second problem with condonation is that it has a tendency to bring about negative consequences; it may, for example, serve to encourage others in the moral community to do wrong. While forgiving living, unrepentant wrongdoers may encourage others to do wrong, it is unclear why forgiving nonrepentant, dead offenders would be likely to have this consequence. When we condone, we aim to offer the unrepentant offender the goods associated with relationships of reciprocity in the absence of an attempt to repair the wrong done; offenders are, we might say, rewarded for doing wrong. This sort of reward has the potential to encourage future transgressions from both the offender and others in the moral community. But when a victim forgives a dead, nonrepentant offender, she doesn't reward the offender for his inaction. There is, after all, nothing that a dead offender could do to right the wrong done. Given this, there is little reason to worry that forgiveness will encourage future wrongdoing.

Some may object that forgiveness of the dead is always morally objectionable because the dead are not able to give an account of what they did or respond to victims' resentment. For this reason, it might be thought to be disrespectful to forgive the dead.[40]

Sartre famously proclaimed, "to be dead is to be prey for the living."[41] While I don't accept all that motivates Sartre to make that claim, there is something right about it. Death strips one of one's normative powers, and because of this, there is nothing disrespectful about forgiving in the absence of these powers.

Finally, some may object that it is left obscure what, exactly, is the reason to forgive dead offenders on this account. What makes forgiveness inappropriate at time T1 and appropriate at time T2?[42] When it comes to forgiving the living, partisans of the Conditional View will often insist that victims wait for the offender's change of heart, but obviously no change of heart will be forthcoming from the dead, and there is nothing to wait on them for. The reason to forgive the dead is for the sake of one's relationship with them. This reason does not emerge through some change in the dead at time T2, although a victim's awareness of it might. In the case of Julian Lennon, it was the death of his friend Lucy that made salient his reason to forgive; her death, in itself, did not constitute a reason to forgive, but it helped Julian to appreciate his reason to forgive.

[40] I am grateful to Kay Mathiesen for pressing this point.

[41] Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956).

[42] I am grateful to an anonymous referee for asking this question.

IV. The Conditional View and the Unconditional View Revisited

So far, my project has been one of reconciling two apparently conflicting positions: the Conditional View and the position that full, genuine forgiveness of the dead is possible. I've argued that a defender of the Conditional View may cogently and consistently maintain that we can forgive the dead. This is an important result: critics can no longer appeal to the coherence and aptness of forgiveness of the dead as a point in favor of the Unconditional View over the Conditional View.

But defenders of the Unconditional View may insist that my arguments establish more than I intend: some might object that I've actually shown that we should reject the Conditional View altogether. If I'm right and reparative activity is not necessary for full and genuine forgiveness of the dead, perhaps it is not necessary in cases of forgiving persons either. Maybe forgiveness of the dead, as I've characterized it, provides an excellent model for forgiving the living, at least in some cases. If the wrongdoing occurred long in the past, and if the wrongdoer is fundamentally transformed, then, contra the Conditional View, waiting for an apology before forgiving may not be a necessary condition for apt and genuine forgiveness after all. I do not think this is the lesson to be drawn from my arguments. Those who would use the arguments offered in this essay to defend the Unconditional View don't fully appreciate what it means to treat a living person as a relation; to put the point more forcefully, those who attempt to defend the Unconditional View on these grounds encourage us to treat the living like the dead.

Let's begin by filling out the lesson a defender of the Unconditional View may hope to draw from my arguments. Cases like this are common: we are angry with a wrongdoer at time T. The person does not attempt to right the wrong and we stay angry. At time T+1 the wrongdoer has changed—perhaps he was once selfish and has become much more compassionate—and he no longer evinces objectionable attitudes. We cease to have reason to criticize the attitude he evinces at T+1. Nevertheless, we are still angry with the person for what he did at time T. The radio show *This American Life* aired a story that provides a poignant example of this familiar phenomenon: Aric Knuth describes how, as a young boy, he regularly sent recorded messages to his father who was away serving as a merchant marine. We hear the tapes in which the young Aric tells his father about the weather, offers clarinet recitals, and pleads for his father to record a response on the other side of the tape. For years, Aric sends his father tapes, and each time he leaves one side of the tape blank and asks his father to record a message of his own. His father never reciprocates. Years later, Aric, now a grown man, confronts his father asking why he never recorded a message of his own. Listening to the cassettes reduces the father to tears, but he is unable to explain why he acted as he did; instead, he mumbles that it was a difficult time and he has changed. The older father would have

reached out to Aric and answered his messages; the middle-aged father is now a very different person in comparison to the young man who for years ignored his son's entreaties. Aric acknowledges the changes in his father and claims that he bears no ill will toward the man his father now is. He does, however, report that he is still very angry with his *young* father, the one who callously ignored the hopeful messages of a little boy.[43]

In this case, as in cases of forgiving the dead, there is a sense in which the wrongdoer no longer exists and cannot express his remorse. The middle-aged father is not the same person as the young father; he cannot give a coherent account of why he behaved the way he did, and the young father cannot now apologize for his behavior. If, as I've argued, one may fully forgive the unrepentant dead without opening oneself up to criticism, a defender of the Unconditional View may insist that one may also fully forgive unrepentant living persons even in the absence of the offender's contrition. In this example, and in many others like it, the wrongdoer has fundamentally changed and no longer harbors the ill will or indifference he evinced through his wrongdoing. If forgiveness of the unrepentant dead may be genuine and non-objectionable, then so should forgiveness of the unrepentant, but transformed, living offender.

But it is a mistake to suggest that a dead offender is in the same position vis-à-vis the wrong done as a transformed, living, offender. Part of what it is to be a person is that persons are able to *take responsibility* for our past actions, and in so doing, change their meaning. Even after undergoing a dramatic change of heart, the living are connected to their past selves in a way that the dead are not. The middle-aged father is now more compassionate and less selfish than when he was young, but there is a story that can be told about how the values he now has are connected to the values he once espoused, and it is implausible to suggest that he is literally a new person. To show kindness and compassion in the present, he should denounce his former indifference. He can, and should, take responsibly for who he once was to fully evince and communicate his present attitudes and values.

The middle-aged father who, as a young man, ignored his son's pleas still has the power to shape the meaning of his past failures and inaction. It is true that the passage of time has somewhat weakened his powers to alter the significance of his past: the unanswered tapes now have a meaning of their own quite independent of anything he could say about them; they testify to his earlier weakness and indefensible priorities. Nevertheless, he can, in some small ways, change their import by taking responsibility for his past actions. This is not something that the dead are able to do since they lack the normative powers of the living. Thus, in forgiving transformed wrongdoers it is still important to wait for them to exercise their normative powers. In this respect, forgiving transformed, but still living, wrongdoers is importantly different from forgiving the dead.

[43] This American Life, "Go Ask Your Father," episode 289, May 13, 2005.

Admittedly, death may not be the only means through which a person is stripped of his normative powers. Falling into a permanent vegetative state will have the same effect. In addition, we can imagine fanciful cases where a person may maintain his normative powers but is utterly unable to give anyone else reasons through his contrition. If, for example, a person is sent off into space with no means to communicate or return, he will be unable to fully exercise his normative powers. Much of what I've said about forgiveness of the dead would apply to these cases as well: the relationships we may have with the permanently comatose or those exiled and forever unable to communicate will be very much like the relationships we have with the dead. But the important point for my purposes is that these relationships are unlike most relationships we have with living persons—even those persons who have fundamentally changed their ways.

Throughout this essay, I've stressed that forgiveness is deeply relational; it is, at bottom, a process of relational repair. Defenders of the Unconditional View do not fully appreciate the relational character of forgiveness. Consider, for example, how Cheshire Calhoun describes her version of the Unconditional view (which she calls "aspirational forgiveness"):

> What does aspirational forgiveness mean if it does not mean wiping the slate clean, reapproving the other as someone basically good, wanting to go on with this person who has, contrary to appearances, turned out to be the sort of person one might really want to go on with? I think it means simply this: that one stops demanding that the person be different from what she is. Having come to the point of understanding that an indecent flaw . . . is the person's way of holding her life together, one also sees the cruelty and disrespect for sense-making choices involved in demanding change. One may still put the person on moral trial and find her wanting. But aspirational forgiveness is the choice not to demand that she improve. It is the choice to place respecting another's way of making sense of her life before resentfully enforcing moral standards.[44]

According to this position, forgiveness is a kind of deep acceptance of the wrongdoer, warts and all. But this kind of acceptance does not necessarily have anything to do with repairing damaged relationships; forgiveness as characterized by Calhoun, is compatible with writing off the wrongdoer forever:

> [Forgiveness] forces upon us a second choice—one that we might prefer never to have to make. Either we go on with her, accepting that she cannot be who we want her to be, and knowing what going on will cost. Or we disengage, removing ourselves from harm's way.[45]

[44] Calhoun, "Changing One's Heart."
[45] Ibid., 96.

As we have seen, an adequate account of forgiveness will allow us to distinguish between forgiving and writing a person off. But Calhoun's version of the Unconditional View does not seem to provide the resources for making this distinction.[46] For one could, according to this account, overcome one's hard feelings, drop one's demand that the wrongdoer change his ways, adopt what Strawson calls the objective attitude[47] toward the offender, and this would count as forgiveness. The acceptance which is central to Calhoun's version of the Unconditional view comes in many forms: we can accept someone while simultaneously writing him off or we can accept someone while seeing him as a candidate for reciprocal relations. What is missing is the recognition that forgiveness is fundamentally a matter of relational repair. Acceptance does play a role in interpersonal forgiveness: one accepts the wrongdoer as a potential relation in a relationship of reciprocity. But this is not the sort of acceptance that Calhoun alludes to. For in accepting a wrongdoer as a potential candidate for reciprocal relations, one's acceptance comes as a response to the target's reparative activities and is not independent of them.

If we acknowledge that wrongdoing impairs our relationships with others and forgiveness is, at bottom, a process of relational repair, then we have a reason to reject the Unconditional View. For defenders of the Unconditional View advocate treating our living relations like the dead. A distinctive aspect of our relationships with other persons is their reciprocity. In overcoming our hard feelings without waiting for the offender to exercise his normative powers one is not treating him as a potential party to a reciprocal relationship. To be clear, I'm not claiming that my arguments in this section give us decisive reason to reject the Unconditional View; defenders may have resources to respond to this worry.[48] Nevertheless, this does give us at least prima facie reason to prefer the Conditional View to the Unconditional View.

V. Conclusion

I began this essay with Julian Lennon's story of forgiveness. As I interpret the example, Julian decided to overcome his hard feelings for the sake of his relationship with his dead father.[49] He says that he wants to "focus

[46] Admittedly, Calhoun does not explicitly say this, so perhaps she'd want to distinguish between disengagement and writing someone off. But, as I argue below, she does not seem to think forgiveness involves accepting the offender as a potential relation.

[47] See Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment."

[48] Defenders of the Unconditional View may also raise further objections to the Conditional View that I have not considered in this essay.

[49] I acknowledge that the case is open to other, competing, interpretations. Julian says that his forgiveness was prompted by the death of his childhood friend, Lucy. Perhaps he overcame his hard feelings for his father simply because Lucy's death served as a reminder that life is short and we should minimize the suffering we voluntarily take on. If this were his reason, then he wouldn't be overcoming his hard feelings for the sake of his relationship with his dead father, and this would not count as a case of full and genuine forgiveness as I have described it in this essay.

on the good things," and I read this as expressing a desire to attend to the good features of his father and the positive aspects of their shared history. As he describes it, the early years of their relationship were marked by affection and closeness. He has chosen to focus on his father's good qualities and treat what he sees as his father's abandonment of his family as less important to the relationship he now has with his dead father. Since this relationship is not a relationship of reciprocity, he makes no mistake and reveals no vice in forgiving in the absence of his father's expressed remorse. Nor is this necessarily a purely self-interested activity, insofar as he is revising his attitudes for the sake of his relationship with his dead father. In forgiving, he does not deny that his father did wrong, but he chooses not to focus on his father qua wrongdoer and himself qua victim. In focusing his attention on the good times they shared, he no longer interprets himself and his future through the lens of his father's wrongdoing.

Our reasons for forgiving the living foreground what is unique and especially important about these relationships: their reciprocity. Our reciprocal relations depend upon the exercise and recognition of each party's normative powers, and this explains why those who defend the Conditional View treat the wrongdoer's contrition as a paradigmatic reason to forgive. Our reasons for forgiving the dead, on the other hand, foreground what is distinctively important about these relationships: their power to shape our interpretations of ourselves and others. Given the unique characteristics of each kind of relationship, our reasons for forgiving the dead will be fundamentally different from our reasons for forgiving the living. Genuine forgiveness of the dead is perfectly coherent and it may be morally valuable, and we can acknowledge these points without giving up on the Conditional View.

Forgiveness of the dead is a rather melancholy business. Death makes it impossible to repair the original, reciprocal, relationship between the offender and the victim. Some victims, especially those who enjoyed an intimate relationship with the living wrongdoer, may yearn for a restoration of the relationship as it existed before the wrongdoing, but death precludes this. Nevertheless, there is, I have argued, hope for a different sort of repair: forgiveness may mend the relationships between the living and the dead.

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