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The Alteration Thesis: Forgiveness as a Normative Power

ABSTRACT

What goes on when one person forgives another? In this paper I argue for *The Alteration Thesis*: that forgiveness alters the normative situation created by wrongdoing. Furthermore, I argue that it does so by means of the exercise of a normative power. I also argue that there are two main forms of such forgiveness: rights-waiving and redemptive. While forgiveness may – but does not always – alter obligations by waiving them, I claim that it also alters the normative situation by creating a new obligation *to* the wrongdoer. Thinking of forgiveness along the lines suggested by the Alteration Thesis means going against the tide of much recent writing on forgiveness, which has seen forgiveness as consisting essentially in a *change of heart* towards the wrongdoer. But I argue that the Alteration Thesis has a number of explanatory advantages over the Change of Heart approach.

What goes on when one person forgives another? In this paper I argue for the *Alteration Thesis*. According to the Alteration Thesis, forgiveness alters the normative situation created by wrongdoing.

The Alteration Thesis is compatible with various views about *how* forgiveness alters the normative situation. I argue that the insight captured by the Alteration Thesis should be articulated in terms of three further theses. Firstly, the *Normative Power Thesis*: that forgiveness is primarily a normative rather than a psychological phenomenon, and involves the exercise of a power to create, waive or alter secondary obligations related to the wrongdoing.¹ Secondly, the *Pluralism Thesis*: that because the obligations distinctive of situations of

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¹ The Alteration Thesis is therefore closely related to what Brandon Warmke has called the Post-Forgiveness Fact: 'Paradigmatic cases of forgiving alter the norms of interaction for both the victim and the wrongdoer in certain characteristic ways.' See B. Warmke, 'The Normative Significance of Forgiveness,' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 94 (2016), pp. 687-703.

wrongdoing are of varying types, and because the kinds of things we can do with these obligations vary according to the type of obligation, there are different types of forgiveness. (Some obligations we can waive at will, and the waiving is what forgiveness consists in; others must be discharged by the wrongdoer before forgiveness is possible; some are directed to the victim; others are non-directed). Thirdly, the *Commitment Thesis*: that the normative power of forgiveness, whether it deals with obligations that have been waived or discharged, also involves undertaking an obligation no longer to treat the wrongdoer as standing under those obligations.

More formally, we can express the schema of forgiveness to be defended in this paper as follows: forgiveness as a normative power involves 1) either cancelling some of the wrongdoer's secondary obligations (through the exercise of a normative power), or acknowledging that secondary obligations have been discharged (where acknowledgement does not in itself require any exercise of normative power), and 2) exercising a normative power to undertake an obligation to treat the wrongdoer (in action, but also perhaps in feeling and perception), as one who no longer stands under those cancelled or discharged obligations (or at least to work towards such attitudes and perceptions).

On this account, any form of forgiveness falling under the Alteration Thesis involves 2), that is, it involves an exercise of normative power through which one undertakes an obligation to the wrongdoer not to treat them as one who stands under certain secondary obligations in relation to their wrongdoing. In some cases of forgiveness, for instance, when one does not have the special standing of being a victim of the offense, one can undertake this obligation towards the wrongdoer on the basis of an acknowledgement that they have now discharged their obligations and no longer merit blame. Thus, forgiveness can be what I have previously called *redemptive forgiveness*, since it recognizes that a form of redemption has been achieved by the fulfilment of the secondary obligations.² Or

² C. Bennett, 'Personal and Redemptive Forgiveness,' *European Journal of Philosophy* 11 (2003), pp. 127-144. The account of forgiveness given in the present paper diverges from the position put forward in my earlier paper in the crucial respect that the latter was what I now characterize

it can be pre-emptive victim's forgiveness, which is a *rights-waiving forgiveness*, where a victim can take away the obligation of a wrongdoer to apologize and give compensation for the wrong done to the victim. But in either case, for it to be the kind of forgiveness captured by the Alteration Thesis, it must involve an undertaking made, explicitly or not, *to* the wrongdoer. It may, but does not always, alter the normative situation created by wrongdoing by removing obligations; but it also alters that situation by elaborating it, by adding new obligations directed to the wrongdoer. This helps us to account for the fact that forgiving is thought of as something one should only do when ready – a feature for which theories that view forgiveness as the voluntary exercise of a power are sometimes thought unable to account. Or so, at any rate, I will argue in what follows.

In Section 1, I set the scene by considering some of the things a theory of forgiveness should explain. Section 2 introduces the Alteration Thesis, using David Owens's recent work as a foil. Sections 3, 4 and 5 then explain, defend and illustrate the Alteration Thesis and its three component theses. Section 6 rejects some initial objections; and Section 7 shows that the Alteration Thesis has greater explanatory power than its most promising rival. Section 8 considers some further objections and implications of the view; and Section 9 concludes.

1.

Let's start by considering some of the things a theory of forgiveness will need to explain. First of all, forgiveness is not simply a religious matter, and forgivingness not simply a virtue of the religious. It might not be an exaggeration to say that all societies need processes by which those who violate value-norms can be re-accepted into social life on good terms without the authority of those norms being placed in question.³ Secondly, forgiveness is an interpersonal interaction in the sense that it is *given* and sometimes (though not always) explicitly *granted* by one person to another. This is compatible with the party

as a Change of Heart view, and had no place for the Alteration, Normative Power and Commitment Theses.

³ A. Oldenquist, 'The Explanation of Retribution,' *Journal of Philosophy* 85 (1988).

who is forgiven being dead, or being unaware that forgiveness has taken place; and, if self-forgiveness is possible, with the giver and the recipient being one. Thirdly, the need for forgiveness comes about when the party to be forgiven has committed some wrong: either something that is wrong all things considered, or something that wrongs a particular person in such a way as to give that person a corresponding right to demand an apology or compensation for the infraction. Fourthly, forgiveness is often an emotional and intimate matter, but it need not be. There are cases where the question of whether to forgive is one about which a person deliberates for years, and which dominates their emotional life. One question that a person might be wondering about in such cases is whether they are ready to forgive. However, there are many cases of slights that are not negligible but that are forgiven easily, without much thought, as an unremarkable part of ongoing social life.

A fully developed philosophical theory of forgiveness, as well as explaining what goes on when one person forgives another, should shed light on a number of other questions, such as: who is in a position to forgive; what kinds of acts, mental or otherwise (or attitudes – or what combination of the two) are necessary and sufficient for one person to have forgiven another; what kinds of obligation the wrongdoer has in virtue of their wrongdoing; and how forgiveness is involved in these obligations coming to an end.

A theory of forgiveness should also be able to explain the ways in which it matters to us to forgive and be forgiven. One way in which it matters to us to be forgiven is shown by the familiarity of the fact that repentant wrongdoers will sometimes seek out their victims and look for their forgiveness, often going to great lengths to do so. An illustration is found in the following scenario from Simon Wiesenthal's memoir, *The Sunflower*.⁴ An SS officer, Karl, who participated in an atrocity in which Jewish men, women and children were massacred is seriously injured and approaching death. He is now an inmate in a field hospital

⁴ S. Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness* (New York: Schocken, 1976). For another discussion of this case, see T. Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

in which Simon, the narrator, is working. Karl is apparently overcome with remorse when he thinks about what he did, and, as death grows near, he feels impelled to look for a Jewish victim of the Nazi *Endlösung* in which he took part, and ask for forgiveness.

This scenario is complex in part because Simon is not a direct victim of Karl's actions; nevertheless, it seems as though Karl's asking for a Jewish victim of the Nazi project is not accidental – there is a connection to Simon that makes it morally intelligible to ask him for a kind of forgiveness that could not come from e.g. a German civilian. I take it, therefore, that the scenario illustrates one key point: the comprehensibility of a person feeling an urgent need, before he dies, to be forgiven by a person who can intelligibly be thought of as a victim of his wrongdoing. One skeptical character later in Wiesenthal's narrative suggests that the SS officer would have been better to approach a priest if what he wanted was to gain absolution. Nevertheless, it seems that for many of us, perhaps including Karl himself, such absolution is not enough, and that the relation to the victim is central. What we want is not simply an authoritative verdict on our wrongs, but a particular relation to the people we have wronged. The Alteration Thesis explains this is to say that we want forgiveness because we want the normative situation to be altered in ways that only the victim can alter it.

We also need to explain why it matters to forgive. Simon refuses Karl's request, and then cannot decide whether he did the right thing. Forgiving can be something that we deliberate over, agree or refuse to do, affirm or regret once we have done it. Some of Simon's concerns have to do with whether it was his place to forgive for the deaths of others. But underpinning his reflections is also a sense that forgiving is not merely like granting a favor. The Alteration Thesis says that, in forgiving, Simon would alter the normative situation existing between him and Karl. However, his reflections are not simply about whether to alter that situation in ways beneficial to a dying person. His confusion is not simply about whether to do something kind to someone who might be said hardly to deserve such kindness. Karl's request weighs on him like a heavy

responsibility that cannot be explained if we think of forgiveness merely as a kind of benevolence; it is rather as though in forgiving he will now be responsible for something, and he is wondering whether to commit himself to that. An account of forgiveness should explain in what way forgiving can appear to a potential forgiver not as a simple favor, and not simply as putting an end to the matter, but rather as commitment in its own right.

In this paper I argue that these features can best be explained by the Alteration Thesis. But we should enter a caveat. As Miranda Fricker has argued in unpublished work, human cultures are creative entities, and are forever taking the basic conceptual ingredients of practices and extending or blending them.⁵ It would be surprising, in fact, if something as venerable and as indispensable as the practice of forgiveness were to fit neatly and univocally into a set of necessary and sufficient conditions. As we will see, even the forgiveness captured by the Alteration Thesis has to be seen as taking more than one form. But it is not necessary to my argument that the Alteration Thesis captures everything that can sensibly be called forgiveness. The Alteration Thesis should not be taken as implying that it is wrong in ordinary speech to refer to anything as forgiveness *unless* it has this role in altering the normative situation created by wrongdoing. Nevertheless, I hope that with the Alteration Thesis I capture a central, perhaps paradigmatic form of forgiveness.

2.

The claim that forgiveness alters the normative situation has recently been defended by David Owens.⁶ According to Owens, forgiveness requires a certain standing or authority that one acquires only by being a victim of some wrongdoing. In contrast to what he calls ‘mere wrongs’ – that is acts of wrongdoing that wrong no one – the fact of having been subjected to a wrong gives one a right to forgive over the exercise of which one has some discretion. As he puts it: ‘The wronged party has a right to forgive a wrong committed

⁵ M. Fricker, ‘Explaining Forgiveness’ MS; see also M. Fricker, ‘What’s the Point of Blame? A Paradigm-Based Explanation,’ *Noûs* 50 (2016), pp. 165-183; Warmke, ‘Normative Significance of Forgiveness.’

⁶ D. Owens, *Shaping the Normative Landscape* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

against them that bystanders lack and which no one has with respect to mere wrongs.⁷ Furthermore, he identifies the act of forgiving with the ability to alter the normative situation. Through forgiveness the victim alters the normative situation of the wrongdoer, but also that of any third parties who had been previously disposed to blame the wrongdoer. In Owens's view, the change that forgiveness brings about is to make it no longer fitting to experience blame and guilt in regard to this wronging.

'Once the wrongdoer has been forgiven in the relevant sense, it is no longer apt for them to feel guilty and it is positively inapt for others to blame them; both resentment and indignation are now out of place.'⁸

For Owens, therefore, the victim has the central power of forgiveness – though he recognizes the possibility that one might not be able to forgive at will, and that one might say one has forgiven without actually having forgiven – and forgiveness alters the normative situation by altering the fittingness of guilt and blame.

However, Owens's understanding of how forgiveness alters the normative situation is problematic. It leaves him committed to the claim that it would be unfitting for a wrongdoer who has never experienced guilt prior to having been forgiven to feel it once they have been forgiven. This is implausible, since the wrongdoer has a continuing obligation to reform of which the victim's forgiveness cannot relieve him; and if we take the view that emotions such as guilt are not mere feelings but have a cognitive component, we might well think that guilt is essential to moral understanding and redemption. For instance, we might be skeptical of one who claimed to have fully understood and to care about their having done wrong, but who did not in any way feel bad about it. Guilt is the feeling of self-disapproval or self-blame, of the repudiation of the wrongful action and the part of oneself that endorsed it, and it is hard to see how someone could experience their situation as one in which they merited blame without

⁷ D. Owens, *Shaping the Normative Landscape*, p. 51.

⁸ Owens, *Shaping the Normative Landscape*, p. 51.

feeling guilty about it. But if this is correct, and if seeing themselves as the proper object of blame is an advance in their understanding of their situation, it is hard to see how they can make that advance without feeling guilty about it. In which case we should conclude that feeling guilty is an essential part of understanding their situation properly, and that the wrongdoer's obligation to feel guilty, or to cultivate such feelings, is one of which the victim's discretionary forgiveness cannot relieve them. This is an obligation that can be removed only by discharging it; not by having it waived by the victim.

Furthermore, Owens does not do justice to the thought that forgiveness might be a commitment in its own right. The closest he comes to this is in arguing that a person might say they have forgiven but then realize later that they had not, a phenomenon he takes to count against thinking of forgiveness as a normative power.⁹ In making this point he recognizes that there is more to forgiveness than granting a simple favor. The conclusion he draws from this is that forgiveness must involve changing one's heart rather than exercising a voluntary normative power. However, Simon's sense of the responsibilities of forgiving is not well explained by the claim that he is considering changing his heart. The explanation we need, I will claim, is that forgiveness is indeed a normative power that involves undertaking a commitment to the wrongdoer. So while the Alteration Thesis captures an important truth in Owens's account, seeing what this truth amounts to will mean being more careful than Owens about the kinds of normative changes that forgiveness can bring about.

3.

To begin with we need to say some more about 'the normative situation created by wrongdoing;' once we have an idea of what is meant by that we can look at the way in which that situation may be altered. To avoid confusion, I will use the terminology of *primary* and *secondary* obligations.¹⁰ We can think of the initial

⁹ 'One may sincerely intend to forgive, communicate this intention to the wrongdoer, and still fail to forgive because the requisite psychological changes have not occurred; one continues to blame just as before.' Owens, *Shaping the Normative Landscape*, p. 53.

¹⁰ This terminology seems to go back to Blackstone and Austin. For some discussion, see P. Birks, 'Rights, Wrongs and Remedies,' *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 20 (2000), pp. 1-37.

act of wrongdoing as a violation of certain primary obligations, as a result of which new secondary obligations arise.¹¹ Some of these secondary obligations belong to the wrongdoer. The wrongdoer's secondary obligations can be directed: for instance, the obligation to apologize to the victim, or to make restitution for harm or damage caused. But they can also be non-directed, such as the obligation to cultivate proportionate feelings of guilt or remorse about the offense, to take steps not to (be tempted to) do it again, and to redeem oneself through penitential actions of atonement. Indeed, in the case of wrongdoing that wrongs no one, the only such obligations incurred by the wrongdoer would be non-directed. However, it is not only the wrongdoer who incurs secondary obligations as a result of the wrongdoing: any party relevantly connected to the circumstances of the offense – whether third party, victim or offender – can acquire obligations to condemn or denounce it or 'call it out,' to support its victim, or at the very least not to condone it or acquiesce in it by treating the wrongdoer as if everything were, morally speaking, business as usual (indeed it is the offender's obligation not to treat herself as if everything was business as usual that can be thought of as the source of whatever penitential obligations there are). For the purposes of this paper, we don't have to further specify what exactly it means to be 'relevantly connected,' but the thought is that, although not every moral agent has a secondary obligation to take action in response to wrongdoing, a failure to take action can sometimes amount to complicity in that wrong.

These secondary obligations, it should be noted, are pro tanto or defeasible. Thus, a person may be under a pro tanto obligation to call out the wrongdoer, and to distance themselves from the wrongdoer's behavior; but it may be that, in the circumstances, complying with that obligation would be too costly to other

¹¹ If retributivism is the theory of backward-looking responses to wrongdoing – that is, responses that are justified in terms other than the consequences that will contingently come from those responses – then what I provide in the rest of this section of the text can be thought of as a theory of retribution, that is, a theory of the non-instrumentally justified obligations that arise by virtue of wrongdoing. It is important to note, however, that while this theory may be termed retributive, it does not necessarily specify that the wrongdoer needs to be made to suffer: the claim that wrongdoers should be made to suffer would be a specific theory of retribution, or a specific theory of the relevant secondary obligations.

social goods that they have a duty to protect. However, although they are in this way defeasible and hence exhibit some context-sensitivity, these obligations are not normally merely instrumentally justified. Although their justifying grounds may be various, I take it that these secondary obligations have a basically backward-looking role in addressing or doing justice to the violation that does not reduce to the tendency of our behaving in that way to promote other social goods. They can be thought of as a form of ‘appropriate response’ to the wrongdoing. Wrongdoers in varying situations gain non-instrumental secondary obligations simply in virtue of their offense, to do things by way of making up for their initial transgression; and those ‘relevantly connected’ to the offense gain obligations not to treat the wrongdoer as if everything were normal until there is evidence that the wrongdoer is making significant efforts to discharge their secondary obligations.

4.

The Alteration Thesis says that forgiveness alters this normative situation: that is, it alters something about these secondary obligations. However, forgiveness is a distinctive way of altering these secondary obligations: through the exercise of a normative power. To see what is distinctive about this, consider the fact that one way to alter one’s secondary obligations is to discharge them. Once discharged – assuming that they can be discharged – the obligations no longer apply to one, and hence one has altered the secondary obligations one is under. However, the act of discharging one’s secondary obligations is not the same as an act of forgiveness. Furthermore, one can quite coherently – and often properly – recognize that a person has discharged their obligations and yet refuse to forgive them. Therefore, forgiveness is a *distinctive* way of altering secondary obligations. In forgiving we *grant* something to the offender that alters these secondary obligations: in the act of granting one brings about a change in the normative situation. The Normative Power Thesis holds that forgiveness is a distinctive way of altering secondary obligations because it involves a power to alter obligations by means of one’s voluntary acts, exercised by one who is in possession of that power (i.e. has standing to exercise it).

This language of ‘powers’ is often traced back to Hohfeld in his analysis of the range of things that might be meant by ‘having a (legal) right’.¹² Powers are often tied to standing and roles. For instance, it is part of the way that the legal role of Prime Minister is constructed in the United Kingdom that whoever occupies the role has the power to appoint other persons to become ministers in the Cabinet, thus conferring or bestow legal rights (and legal responsibilities) on particular persons. A number of authors have argued that it is also illuminating to talk about non-legal *normative* powers ranging in a similar way over non-legal rights and obligations.¹³ Not all powers are associated with specific roles or situations, however. Promising, for instance, seems to be a power that is generally possessed, given the right kind of competence, voluntarily to give a person right to one’s performance through freely choosing to do so. According to the Normative Power Thesis, forgiveness is also a power voluntarily to alter certain obligations: specifically, a power to alter secondary obligations that arise from the violation of primary obligations.

If forgiveness is a normative power, does it require standing that only the victim can possess? Yes and no. Victims have a distinctive normative power because they are victims; but they also have a different but related power to forgive that any party relevantly connected to the offence has. As my Pluralism Thesis holds, there are different types of forgiveness, one belonging only to the victim, and one held by any relevantly connected party. To see why this is so, recall that there are various types of secondary obligations in play, and our ability to alter these obligations varies across these types. We saw that some of these obligations are directed obligations owed to the victim (for instance, to apologise and repair harm caused). The victim has authority over these directed obligations, and can waive them if they choose to do so; this is the kernel of truth in the idea that the

¹² W. N. Hohfeld, ‘Fundamental Legal Conceptions as Applied in Judicial Reasoning,’ *Yale Law Journal* 26 (1917), pp. 710-770. As Hart points out, Bentham also attempts a systematic analysis: H. L. A. Hart, ‘Bentham on Legal Powers,’ in *Essays on Bentham: Jurisprudence and Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 194-219.

¹³ J. Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 98-104; G. Watson, ‘Promises, Reasons and Normative Powers,’ in D. Sobel and S. Wall (eds), *Reasons for Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 155-178; D. Owens, *Shaping the Normative Landscape*, pp. 4-5.

victim has a special standing to forgive that other parties do not have. However, as well as directed obligations to the victim, wrongdoing also incurs non-directed obligations such as the obligation to repent and make penitential amends. Furthermore, third parties gain non-directed obligations not to treat the wrongdoer as if relations were normal – at least not until they have made some reparative efforts. As we argued against Owens, the victim has no authority to waive these non-directed obligations. The victim does not have the power to make the wrongdoer's guilt inapt, or to relieve them of penitential obligations, or to change others' obligations to distance themselves from the wrongdoer by making it inapt for them to blame. Nevertheless, the wrongdoer can discharge those obligations, and the discharging of these obligations will also have the effect of bringing third parties' obligations to an end. Furthermore, bringing these obligations to an end seems to have something to do with forgiveness. After all, this is why writers on forgiveness often mention the possibility of *earning* forgiveness. It also explains why forgiveness can be intelligible even in the case of wrongdoing that does not wrong anyone in particular.

To accommodate this, we need some form of pluralism. Forgiveness, we should say, can be of two types. It can be *rights-waiving* forgiveness, exercising a power held by the victim; or it can be *redemptive* forgiveness, which acknowledges that the offender has redeemed themselves by discharging their obligations. Nevertheless, we are not quite there yet, since acknowledging that these obligations have been discharged does not yet seem to be a form of forgiveness. Consider the case of someone who accepts an apology from a person who wrongs them, and indicates that they are prepared to consider the matter closed for all practical purposes, but who nevertheless insists that they have not thereby forgiven. This seems quite intelligible – but what is it that the forgiver is refusing to do, and why would they refuse to do it? As the Alteration Thesis maintains, forgiveness alters the normative situation, and mere acknowledgement that the wrongdoer's secondary obligations have been discharged does not do this. But what kind of power can forgiveness be when it is not the power to waive obligations? One type of forgiveness involves the

power to waive obligations – but can there also be forgiveness when those obligations have been discharged and there is nothing left to waive?

These questions are answered by my Commitment Thesis: that there is a further power of forgiveness that pertains to cases where obligations have been discharged as well as cases in which they have been waived by the victim; and which further power can be held by the victim, but can also be held by relevantly connected parties who are not themselves victims. This is the power of the forgiver to put herself under an obligation to the offender.¹⁴ Secondary obligations created by forgiveness are not, however, restitutive or penitential obligations belonging to the wrongdoer. Rather, they are directed obligations owed to the wrongdoer by the party doing the forgiving.¹⁵ As we have seen, it is possible for the secondary obligations incurred by wrongdoing to be altered, either by waiving or discharging. In either case a new attitude to the wrongdoer becomes appropriate: rather than seeing him as one who stands under certain obligations that prevent normal relations to obtain between the parties, it now becomes appropriate to see him as one who is free of such obligations. A change of heart becomes appropriate. This change of heart does not by itself amount to forgiveness, however. One may have such a change of heart, and regard it as appropriate, but still refuse to forgive – because, as we have seen, forgiving involves entering into a new normative relationship with the offender. In forgiving, therefore, one does not simply waive secondary obligations or register their having been discharged; rather one enters into a commitment to the wrongdoer no longer to treat him as standing under those obligations.

¹⁴ The situation considered in the text might be thought of as analogous to a case Joseph Raz and David Owens draw attention to in respect of promising: where a person says, 'You can have every confidence that I will be there, and rely on me; but I am not promising you that I will be there.' The distinction between a promise and an invitation to reliance insisted upon in this example rests on the refusal to put oneself under a specific obligation to the addressee, and give them rights with respect to one's conduct (and, in the case of forgiveness, attitudes). See J. Raz, 'Promises and Obligations' in P. M. S. Hacker and J. Raz (eds), *Law Morality and Society: Essays in Honour of H. L. A. Hart* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 210-238, at p. 216; D. Owens, 'A Simple Theory of Promising,' *Philosophical Review* 115 (2006), pp. 51-77, at p. 60.

¹⁵ For this reason one might wish to call them 'tertiary obligations,' but for simplicity I will stick with 'secondary.'

The Commitment Thesis explains why Simon felt forgiving as a weighty responsibility, and why in general victims are sometimes wary of forgiving; why it can be rational – and contrary to Kolnai, not vindictive¹⁶ – to refuse to forgive even when the conditions that make forgiveness appropriate are acknowledged to be in place; and why one might feel that one can only forgive when one is ready (and why one might regret having forgiven after the event).¹⁷ Forgiveness involves undertaking to treat the wrongdoer differently and work towards changing one's heart towards them. This change of heart does not involve, as in Jean Hampton's view, no longer seeing the wrongdoer as 'rotten.'¹⁸ As Lucy Allais has observed, the problem with this is that it makes the object of forgiveness the victim's attitude to the offender as a whole and doesn't tie forgiveness specifically enough to the offense in question.¹⁹ Rather the change of stance is more plausibly thought of as 'bracketing' at least some of the normative effects of that particular wrongdoing as a basis for one's relationship with the wrongdoer, and making it the case that one will wrong him should one go back on one's undertaking and start to treat him as one who stands under those obligations of which he is now free.²⁰

Thus when I say that the Alteration Thesis is to be understood as the thesis that forgiveness alters the normative situation arising from wrongdoing, this should not be understood simply in terms of the offender's obligations, or the obligations of third parties to distance themselves from wrongdoing; the 'normative situation arising from wrongdoing' that can be altered by forgiveness should be understood as including obligations undertaken by the person forgiving to the wrongdoer. The reason that standing to forgive is not only held

¹⁶ A. Kolnai, 'Forgiveness,' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 74 (1973-4), pp. 91-106, at p. 98.

¹⁷ M. Holmgren, 'Forgiveness and the Intrinsic Value of Persons,' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30 (1993), pp. 341-352.

¹⁸ J. Hampton, 'Forgiveness, Resentment and Hatred,' in J. G. Murphy and J. Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). The other main problem with Hampton's view is (as with the Change of Heart view of which it is a variant) that it identifies forgiveness with the change in 'way of seeing' the offender rather than the normative process by which one undertakes a commitment to change one's way of seeing the offender.

¹⁹ L. Allais, 'Wiping the Slate Clean: the Heart of Forgiveness,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 36(2008), pp. 33-68.

²⁰ For the language of 'bracketing,' see E. Garrard and D. MacNaughton, 'In Defence of Unconditional Forgiveness,' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 103 (2003), pp. 39-60.

by the victim is therefore that any agent relevantly connected to the offence has the power to undertake such obligations. Anyone in the relevant position can undertake not to treat the wrongdoer as though they are still under the secondary obligations. They are free to exercise this power or not to exercise it. However, it is only *appropriate* to exercise it when the offender has discharged their own secondary obligations, or at least is making decisive efforts to do so: otherwise the forgiver would be open to the criticism that they are not taking the secondary obligations – and hence the wrongdoing – seriously, and that they have condoned the wrongdoing by normalising relations and failing to dissociate themselves from what was done.²¹

As the Pluralism Thesis maintains, then, forgiveness can be of two types. It can be rights-waiving forgiveness, exercising a power held by the victim; or it can be redemptive forgiveness, acknowledging that the offender has redeemed themselves by discharging their obligations. But as the Commitment Thesis holds, in either form the forgiver undertakes a commitment not to treat the offender as standing under the secondary obligations. Thus, when a victim forgives, and in doing so waives rights to compensation and apology, she should be understood as undertaking a commitment to the offender to bracket the matter and leave it in the past. The victim could waive these rights without forgiving – could say, ‘I do not want an apology from you, but I do not forgive you.’ But forgiveness is more than just waiving rights; it involves undertaking something in regard to the offender. While this commitment can be made by the victim, it can also be undertaken a person who is not the victim but is relevantly connected to the offence. In one sense, therefore, the victim has a special standing to forgive that is not held by anyone else; but in another sense, the victim is not the only person to possess standing to forgive. In either case, however, as the Normative Power Thesis claims, forgiveness operates to alter obligations by means of power-holders’ normative capacities for intentionally changing those obligations.

²¹ This is how we should understand the claims about condonation in Kolnai, ‘Forgiveness.’

5.

We can deploy the understanding of forgiveness developed here to interpret and evaluate Karl's request to Simon. Part of Karl's becoming remorseful, we can say, involved his coming to see himself as under powerful undischarged obligations to his victims. He had come to a point at which the idea of dying without having discharged those obligations was intolerable to him. Yet he could not expect to be able to make up for his wrongs in the short time he had left. Redemptive forgiveness was beyond his reach. He therefore sought the only way in which he could be rid of these obligations, which was by having them forgiven by someone who has the power to do so.

One problem, however, is that Simon is not a direct victim of what Karl did – at best he is a member of the community being attacked by the collective enterprise of which Karl was part. Simon could only forgive Karl, therefore, if there can be forgiveness by someone acting as proxy for the victim, and if Simon qualifies as such a proxy. Now we can imagine two cases in which forgiveness by proxy *might* be possible: one in which the victim has explicitly authorised the proxy (and where the proxy might therefore be seen as testifying that forgiveness had already been granted rather than granting it themselves); and the other where the proxy forgives in the certain belief that the victim would have forgiven had they been able to. There is no explicit authorisation in Simon's case. But what of the latter possibility: could hypothetical-forgiveness-by-proxy ever alter the normative situation in the ways we are imagining? Consider an analogy. It seems likely that there can be cases of valid hypothetical consent (if a friend arrives at my house when I am out to borrow a hammer, my daughter could validly consent on my behalf to their borrowing it). These seem to work where the stakes are low, where what is consented to is relatively unimportant, and where the proxy has some pre-existing tie to the principal. Perhaps the same may go for forgiveness, since there can be forgiveness of all sorts of very minor wrongs – though here it would be worth thinking more about who can act as a proxy (does it have to be someone who has some sort of standing as a victim of the offense,

even as a relation of the victim, or part of the targeted group?).²² However, if this analogy is apt then it seems unlikely that Simon could forgive as a proxy: while Simon may possibly qualify as having the capacity to act as a proxy, the decision to forgive in these cases cannot be said to be a low stakes one. Therefore, on the basis of the account developed here, we should conclude that Simon was right not to forgive.

Could it be said that the contingent fact that Karl will imminently die should not be allowed to dictate whether he can earn redemptive forgiveness? One thought here might be that, whatever proportionality between the seriousness of the offence and the demandingness of secondary obligations consists in, it must be relativized to the wrongdoer's expected length of remaining life. If this were correct then one might say that, because Karl is about to die, his secondary obligations have to be thought of as something he is at least in principle capable of discharging. However, while I think something like this relativization may operate in assessing the proportionality of penitential (though not restitutive) secondary obligations, I doubt that there is a general constraint that those secondary obligations should be dischargeable within one's lifetime, or even that they should be dischargeable *in principle*. Whether we should accept such a constraint is a matter for first-order normative debate; but I suspect that what Karl has done should be thought of as *unforgivable*, that is, as something so wrong that however long he were to live he would not be able to make up for what he did.

6.

We have now presented the central argument for the Alteration Thesis and its three component theses. Let us now consider how it deals with potential objections. Some might claim that the Alteration Thesis is the wrong starting point for a theory of forgiveness because it inappropriately models forgiveness on economic relations. For instance, on the picture put forward by P. Twambley,

²² And it raises tricky questions if we accept that forgiveness involves undertaking a commitment to the wrongdoer: who undertakes it, the proxy or – perhaps impossibly, if they are dead – the victim?

and recently defended by Brandon Warmke, a person's moral self is a ledger-like record of credit and debt, and forgiveness is like waiving a debt.²³ This picture might be criticized as an example of economic thinking encroaching into spheres in which it is not at home, thereby impoverishing and hollowing out our moral ideas. However, while this may well be a valid criticism of Twambley and Warmke, the Alteration Thesis need not be grounded in the economic model. In fact, the grounding relation is the reverse: the case of forgiving a monetary debt is a subset of the wider realm of normative powers, and can only make sense against that background. If we seek to capture what is correct in the 'credit and debt' model of forgiveness, we would do better to see forgiveness as a normative power, albeit a quite different power from that involved in economic transactions. There is no reason to think of the economic model as anything other than an imaginative illustration of the way forgiveness works.

Another criticism might be that the Alteration Thesis conflates forgiving with pardoning. However, while pardoning is a power to alter the normative situation created by wrongdoing, there are clear differences: one acquires standing to pardon through an authoritative institutional role, whereas no institutional role is necessary for the standing to forgive; pardon waives the authority's right to carry out (formal) punishment, whereas forgiveness alters obligations between wrongdoer and forgiver. Forgiveness may also differ from pardon by virtue of what it takes to exercise the power in question. The common understanding of a normative power is as a declarative, where communicating the intention to alter the normative situation through some specified type of action is sufficient – given that other felicity conditions, including competence and knowledge of what one is doing, are met – so to alter the normative situation.²⁴ This seems true of pardoning; but it is less clear that saying that one has forgiven is always

²³ P. Twambley, 'Mercy and Forgiveness,' *Analysis* 36 (1976), pp. 84-90; B. Warmke, 'The Economic Model of Forgiveness,' *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 97 (2016), pp. 570-589. See also M. J. Zimmerman, *An Essay on Moral Responsibility* (Lanham MA: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998).

²⁴ According to Owens, the exercise of a normative power is where 'I change what someone is obliged to do by intentionally communicating the intention of hereby so doing.' Owens, *Shaping the Normative Landscape*, p. 4.

sufficient to have forgiven.²⁵ As Owens notes, it is reasonable to say, 'I thought I had forgiven him, but now I realize that I had not' in a way that it is not reasonable to say 'I thought I had promised/given permission, but now I realize I had not,' where the reason for doubt is that one realizes one has not had a settled change of heart. Against this, it might be pointed out that saying one has forgiven does sometimes make a normative difference without such a change of heart, and that, however, one might wish one had not forgiven, and even resent the offender whom one let off the hook, one sometimes cannot without unfairness go back to treating the offender as though they had not been forgiven. However, there can also be cases where we may doubt that forgiveness has really been given even though the victim says that it has. To explain this, we might note that forgiveness, at the same time as being the exercise of normative power, can also be an *expressive* act, that is, a vehicle for the expression of the forgiver's feelings towards the events in question. If this seems correct, it may be that (perhaps as with apology, which has its normative effect of dissociating the offender from their offence only when it is a sincere expression of remorse), having that expressive character may in some circumstances be necessary for the exercise of the normative power.²⁶

A third criticism might be that seeing forgiveness as a normative power cannot explain why forgiving can be an extraordinary achievement. Forgiveness can be admirable, for instance, because it can be an expression of a loving character, but also a character that is courageous and capable of doing some very difficult things. The Normative Power Thesis might be said to make forgiveness too easy. One of the things that we admire about those who forgive can be some sense in which they sacrifice themselves or place themselves under a burden – a sense that is not well-captured, the criticism goes, by saying that they exercise a voluntary power. However, while this may be an apt criticism of some versions

²⁵ See the arguments against the claim that forgiveness is declarative in G. Pettigrove, *Forgiveness and Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), Ch. 1.

²⁶ If this were the case it would need to be explained why – in virtue of what it is in the role forgiveness plays in the ethical life – forgiveness sometimes can be exercised at will and sometimes only expressively. But just as we understandably require consent to be fully explicit when the stakes are high, so it might make sense to require forgiveness to engage the emotions when the wrongdoing is a serious one.

of the Alteration Thesis, it is not a good criticism of a version that includes the Commitment Thesis. On the view defended here, forgiveness can be – though it need not be – a difficult and an admirable achievement, something about which a victim may deliberate and only be prepared to do when they are ‘ready,’ because it involves committing oneself to the hard work of changing one’s heart towards the offender.

7.

Thinking of forgiveness along the lines suggested by the Alteration Thesis means going against the tide of much recent writing on forgiveness, which has seen forgiveness as consisting essentially in a *change of heart* towards the wrongdoer.²⁷ One feature that might favor the Change of Heart view is the possibility already noted, that one might think one had forgiven but in fact realize that one had not – this might be explained by the realization that one had not changed one’s heart in the way one would had one forgiven. However, as we have seen, this supposed advantage might be accommodated by the possibility that forgiveness in some situations needs to be exercised expressively. Furthermore, as we will now see, the Alteration Thesis has a number of explanatory advantages over the Change of Heart approach.

For instance, on the Change of Heart approach, it is hard to see why one would need some special standing – for instance, being a victim – in order to forgive. It is clearly not true that only those who are victims of the offense should have negative attitudes towards the offender, so why would only the victim’s change of heart count as forgiveness? By contrast the Alteration Thesis explains that, while other parties can and should change their hearts towards the offender when the normative situation of the offender changes, only those who have specific normative powers can engage in the act of forgiveness, and some of the powers of forgiveness are only possessed by the victim.

²⁷ Many examples could be cited, such as the Allais and Hampton pieces already mentioned. See also C. Calhoun, ‘Changing One’s Heart,’ *Ethics* 103 (1992), pp. 76-96; P. Hieronymi, ‘Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness,’ *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62 (2001), pp. 529-555.

Furthermore, while forgiveness is often said to ‘restore relationships’, the Change of Heart view prompts us to think that the obstacles that wrongdoing poses to the relationship are psychological – such as hurt feelings – and that it is a psychological change that removes the obstacle. According to the Alteration Thesis, by contrast, the metaphor of restoring relationships is really a way of talking about the normative situation arising from wrongdoing: this normative situation is the barrier to normal interaction; forgiveness can take this barrier away in the sense that it can alter the obligations that stand in the way of normal interaction. While forgiveness may often involve a change of heart, what *enables* the forgiver to change their emotions towards the wrongdoer is that there is a new situation, a new normative relationship, for those emotions to be about. The forgiver can therefore have a different attitude towards the wrongdoer on the assumption that those attitudes are complex enough to take as their object the relationship to the wrongdoer and the way it is conditioned by those obligations.²⁸ Forgiveness can enable a change of heart, even in the absence of repentance, if it is possible for the act of forgiveness to alter the normative situation in the absence of repentance.

While the Alteration Thesis approach can explain the change of heart, however, it is hard to see how the Change of Heart approach can explain the normative effects of forgiveness. Although of course a change of heart may *motivate* a person to exercise their normative power to forgive, it does not bring about such normative effects absent this background of powers.

7.

Glen Pettigrove recognizes the role of commitment to the wrongdoer in his account of ‘commissive forgiving.’²⁹ According to Pettigrove, however, the commitment of forgiveness does not amount to undertaking an obligation or granting a right to the offender. Now I agree that it sounds wrong to talk about rights in this context; but I do think that forgiveness creates a directed obligation

²⁸ This need not be read in such a way as to imply a particular temporal ordering: perhaps in real life the elements we have analyzed as logically separate are often psychologically inextricably bound up with one another.

²⁹ Pettigrove, *Forgiveness and Love*, pp. 12-17

for the forgiver, owed to the wrongdoer. Pettigrove's reluctance to talk in terms of obligation may have to do with his more ambitious view about the content of such an obligation: he thinks to forgive is to forswear retaliation and hostile attitudes, and to take up a positive orientation towards the offender's good, rather than my more minimal account of committing no longer to treat the offender as standing under obligations of which they are now free. Without such an obligation, however, it is not clear what the act of forgiveness adds to a situation in which it is acknowledged on all sides that the wrongdoer has done all that can reasonably be expected to make up for the wrong. If one lashes out at such a person by reminding them of the wrong they committed then, in the case where one has not forgiven them, one may have acted wrongly, and wronged that person by treating them unjustly; however, if in addition one has forgiven then there is an extra element to one's wrong, since one has acted contrary to the relational structure put in place by one's undertaking of a commitment. One has a further thing to reproach oneself for.

It might seem odd to think that forgiveness should involve giving normative authority to the person who wronged you. However, it is hard to explain why one might be wary of forgiving before one is ready, and how it can happen that one forgives on impulse and then regrets it, without appeal to the role of forgiveness in creating new normative bonds. Nevertheless, although these bonds must be robust enough to account for the phenomenon of regret over having forgiven, forgiveness should not be thought of as a once-and-for-all signing away of one's right. On the one hand, then, the normative change wrought by forgiveness must be more robust than changes wrought by the kind of consent that can be revoked whenever one changes one's mind – such as sexual consent. Forgiveness does involve binding oneself. However, it is also the case that the wrongdoer can, by a failure in their own redemptive commitments, forfeit their new normative position. The secondary obligations that we undertook to treat as no longer salient can come back into play as not in fact having been discharged, and in those circumstances the forgiver is within their rights (though not necessarily obligated) to revoke their forgiveness. The victim

who had waived their right to apology and compensation may in these circumstances even have a power to reinstate that right.

Furthermore, even in the case in which we violate the terms of our own forgiveness, and thereby wrong the initial wrongdoer, it may be odd to think that this gives the wrongdoer a right in turn to demand an apology. I should reproach myself, but that is not necessarily to say that I can be reproached by him. Why should this be? It is worth bearing in mind the overall metaphor of forgiveness as a gift in this context. Although I have argued that forgiveness is not simply like granting a favor, the gift metaphor is appropriate because giving sets up a new normative structure. Giving transfers rights, and makes wrongs of some of the things the giver might go on to do (taking the gift back without permission, say, without exceptional justifying circumstances). Therefore, in giving the giver places herself under an obligation to the recipient. However, the context of being the beneficiary of the giver's generosity (and in this sense being in their debt) affects the recipient's standing to make demands and ask for apologies when those obligations have been violated. While some violations will be sufficiently egregious to give the recipient grounds to insist on their right, and even to demand an apology, the threshold that makes this appropriate is higher given the context of the gift. It can be appropriate for the recipient of a gift to overlook violations of the rights they have been granted, and not to insist on their right or demand the apology that would have been appropriate had the context not involved a gift. Indeed, in insisting on their rights and demanding an apology the recipient may end up forfeiting those rights, and making it permissible, or even appropriate, for the giver to withdraw the gift. Something similar may happen in forgiveness: even if it is not appropriate to talk about the forgiven offender having rights over the victim, insisting on those rights or forfeiting them, the analogous phenomenon is that some of the wrongdoer's behavior post-forgiveness (such as insisting excessively on the forgiver's obligation to them) can have the effect of weakening or cancelling the forgiver's obligation to the offender.

Suppose, however, that I forgive you, and waive your obligations to apologize and compensate me, but then resent the fact that you didn't apologize or compensate me voluntarily. Does my resentment wrong you? This can be the case – that is, if my resentment involves the claim that one continues to stand under an obligation to have done these things voluntarily, when in fact I have released you from that obligation – but need not. It would not be correct to say that the forgiver's attitude to the wrongdoer should have no reference whatsoever to the wrong. The commitment of forgiveness is compatible, for instance, with feeling disappointed, perhaps even resentful, at the nature of the wrongdoer's response to their wrongdoing (their not having responded voluntarily). The situation would then be that the forgiver no longer sees the wrongdoer as owing them apology and compensation, but nevertheless feels disappointed that the wrongdoer had to be released from these obligations rather than complying with them because they felt their force (and might feel resentful if resentment can similarly be directed towards failings that do not necessarily imply the continuing existence of the now-waived secondary obligations). Another such situation might be where the forgiver forgives in part with the intention of provoking a reaction in the wrongdoer – as in the famous Valjean case in *Les Misérables*. Here again the forgiver has released the wrongdoer from certain obligations, but may feel disappointed if their overture (i.e. their offering forgiveness as a kind of extension of the hand of friendship) is not responded to in good faith. They may even feel that in forgiving they have placed the wrongdoer under a new obligation to reciprocate, and may feel that the wrongdoer has violated that new obligation if he does not reciprocate. All of this is compatible with seeing the wrongdoer as free of the secondary obligations that have now been waived. Furthermore, as noted earlier, if the wrongdoer's response is sufficiently inappropriate (and the victim may have wide authority to determine whether this is so) this might have the effect of cancelling the forgiver's secondary obligation.

I have offered a pluralistic account of forgiveness, and it might be asked *why* forgiveness should consist in this bundle of features: what provides its unity. Is my view simply an ad hoc bundling together of intuitively attractive things that

we want to say about forgiveness, or does it have some internal logic? On the view put forward here, forgiveness involves entering into the normative realm, binding oneself and affecting the way others are bound, in regard to a situation that has been created by an act of wrongdoing. The thing that provides internal coherence to this is the overall function that forgiveness has in social life, which is to allow for wrongdoers to be re-accepted, once and for all, as it were, without the authority of the norms that they violated being placed in question.

Forgiveness must therefore have an element that acknowledges the wrongs as wrongs; but it must also have an element that waives the obligations that stand in the way of normalizing relations, or acknowledges that they have been discharged; and an element that binds the parties not to keep on re-opening the matter but rather to bracket it, leave it in the past, and move on. Those are the elements that are captured in the account that has been given in this paper.³⁰

The above gives an explanation of the social function of forgiveness – but does it explain why being forgiven matters to us as individuals? Say someone has paid their moral debts, and is aware that they have done so. Furthermore, they are

³⁰ As I mentioned in n. 27, these elements should also guide our thinking in what actions and attitudes are necessary and sufficient for the exercise of forgiveness. In discussing promising, Searle argues that one who declares to others that she has promised really has done so, even if she has no intention of making good on the promise (J. Searle, *Speech Acts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). But we might think that the same does not hold for forgiveness. If a person appears to grant forgiveness, yet has no intention of attempting to fulfil the obligations undertaken to the wrongdoer, it would seem that she has not forgiven at all. This would suggest that at least having the intention is necessary for forgiveness – and the fact that there is a difference from promising might be explained by the role that forgiveness plays in allowing a social group to draw a line, once and for all, as it were, and move on from wrongdoing without constantly re-opening the issue. Just as a firm decision precludes re-opening the matter (at least up to a certain threshold of urgency) and allows a person to settle their mind on a question, so forgiveness allows social relations to be settled. If we consider another problem case, answers again usefully emerge from thinking about the overall role of forgiveness. In Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*, for instance, it turns out from a conversation with the victim that the main character, who had been worrying away about the wrong he had done her, had been 'forgiven long ago' but never knew. This example raises the question whether the Alteration Thesis requires that forgiveness the granting of forgiveness be by means of a communicative act (as with promise or consent, which require communicative acts for the normative power to have been exercised) or whether it can be done privately. If the role of forgiveness is to allow relations with the wrongdoer to be settled once and for all then, although we would *often* expect it to be important to communicate this to the wrongdoer, it does not seem strictly necessary that it should be. Just as with a decision, a person might undertake the commitment privately in order to settle things with the wrongdoer and move on. If forgiveness is given privately, the forgiver would nevertheless be bound to the wrongdoer to treat them otherwise than as standing under the now-waived-or-discharged obligations.

aware that a potential forgiver is aware that they have done so. They really want forgiveness from that person, yet that potential forgiver has not forgiven them. Is my account able to explain why forgiveness can reasonably seem so important? On my view, what the repentant wrongdoer wants is a commitment from the forgiver to put the wrong in the past that is more formal than simply a *shared sense* that the wrong is in the past. A virtue of my account is that it can acknowledge the multitude of reasons for which this can be important. It is worth noting that we would not expect such a wrongdoer to want forgiveness from *everyone* who has the standing to blame them; such an attitude would appear disproportionate, even self-indulgent. Nevertheless, it seems realistic to think that it might quite rightly matter to them to be forgiven by one or more particular people. One key context would be the realm of personal relationships, in which the demands of mutual commitment and mutual certainty, as well as the heightened dangers of slights and misunderstandings with emotionally costly consequences, can easily be seen to lend themselves to wanting clarity about the normative relations in which we stand to one another. This is not to say that every relationship need give a role to something like forgiveness as I have outlined it: it may be that either highly easy-going, highly mutually attuned, or highly unself-conscious creatures could get along without it. But I suspect for most of us there is a role for forgiveness from time to time.

A further strength of the pluralistic account of forgiveness put forward here is that it can account for cases in which conditions for one sort of forgiveness have been met, but not another, and where we might therefore feel confused, if we are operating with a monistic account, about whether we should say that forgiveness has been given or not. For instance, as I have already noted, Karl's case should be thought of as one in which all that he can properly ask for is rights-waiving forgiveness; given his fatal injuries, he is not in a position to make amends and earn redemptive forgiveness (even were such a thing possible in principle for wrongs of such gravity). This is not to say that Karl himself is clear about this distinction, and that he realizes he cannot redeem himself, or die with a clear conscience. It might be part of his moral failure that he is blind to the need to earn redemptive forgiveness, and that he thinks that a word from a victim (or at

least one related to the victims) would be enough. A more charitable interpretation of Karl would have to ask why it can sometimes be important to gain rights-waiving forgiveness in a case in which there is no hope of gaining redemptive forgiveness. And part of the answer to that might be that Karl is driven by the hope of showing that he is not simply a monster: that in addressing one who was victimized by the deadly project of which he was part, recounting the awfulness of what he did, expressing his hope to be forgiven, and putting himself under the (normative) power of the one whose weakness he and his compatriots had attempted ruthlessly to exploit (to the point of extermination) – that in this exercise of humility he might achieve something that shows he is more than what he did to his victims. Whether this is admirable on Karl's part, and a plausible explanation of what he did, we cannot decide here. But structurally similar cases exist, and the point is that there can be an intelligible and even admirable point to asking for rights-waiving forgiveness even when redemptive forgiveness is impossible.

There can also be cases in which a wrongdoer has done everything that can be expected of them to make amends, but has not yet been forgiven by the victim, and desperately wants to be. On my account, we should understand this situation as one in which the wrongdoer either wants rights-waiving forgiveness, or they yet want the victim to undertake an obligation to treat and see them as no longer standing under the obligations they have now discharged. The second of these certainly seems psychologically plausible, if not always reasonable: in an intimate relationship with a person, one might have the reasonable belief that one has made proportionate amends (and apologized proportionately, etc.), but might also wish for a forgiving commitment to put the matter in the past, even if one feels unable to ask for such a thing, and even if one rejects the idea that the victim could be under any duty to undertake such a commitment. But is the first also plausible: that the wrongdoer feels they continue to stand under certain obligations to the victim, and wishes to have these waived, despite having made all proportionate amends? One possible case is that the victim has made it impossible for the wrongdoer to apologize and make compensation as they wish to, for instance by cutting all contact. In this case the wrongdoer may have 'done

enough,' all things considered, to make up for their wrong, but their desire for forgiveness could reflect the pull of unmet directed obligations. Nevertheless, I doubt that the victim should always be said in such cases to have a right to the apology that could be waived by forgiveness. Say the victim relents some years down the line, and renews contact with the offender – does the offender then still have an obligation, correlative to a right of the victim, to offer an apology? In cases of serious wrongdoing, the answer may be yes, but if we extend that to all cases we would be granting victims an extraordinary level of normative control over offenders; perhaps, then, in many cases the stringency of the obligation to apologize simply fades with time. Another possible case is where the offender has offered apology and compensation, and has therefore made the remedial efforts that the directed obligations demand, but that offer has been refused – so neither apology nor compensation has been accepted (or perhaps the compensation has but the apology has not). If the wrongdoer continues to want to be forgiven, could it be based on the perception that the victim still has an outstanding right – e.g. that the offender continues to attempt to apologize? This seems implausible, after a certain point in which 'reasonable' efforts have been made: an obligation to apologize is not an obligation to have that apology accepted. Perhaps we should say in that case that the offender's desire is for the commitment of forgiveness, as above, rather than rights-waiving forgiveness. The victim, that is to say, does not have exclusive control over rights to apology and compensation, since the correlative duties can be discharged even if the victim refuses to waive them (or to accept that they have been discharged). Once again, although the victim has a central place in forgiveness, it is important not to over-state their powers.

8.

In this paper, I have argued that, in order to explain why forgiveness motivates actions such as Karl's (and many more mundane versions of such quests to seek out the victim's forgiveness), forgiveness has to be thought of as more than a simple change of heart, and rather as involving an alteration of the normative situation. The Alteration Thesis can explain Karl's motivation, since only the victim can waive the right to apology and compensation. Nevertheless, the

Alteration Thesis as I have understood it here does not fall into the trap of taking victim's forgiveness to be the only form of forgiveness, or attributing too wide a scope of forgiveness to the victim. I have argued that certain expiatory obligations of the wrongdoer cannot be taken away by the victim, but must rather be discharged by the wrongdoer herself. However, forgiveness still adds something distinctive to the normative situation even in these redemptive cases, because forgiveness involves binding oneself to the wrongdoer by undertaking an obligation to them not to treat them as still under the secondary obligations arising from their wrongdoing. In this sense forgiveness involves undertaking (unless the wrongdoer should forfeit their new normative position) to keep the slate wiped clean. This explains why forgiveness might be a struggle that a victim of wrongdoing might be unprepared to take up, or which it is wise to take up only when ready, or which, indeed, one might come to regret.