

# FORGIVENESS AND THE LIMITS OF DUTY

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## ABSTRACT

Can there be a duty to forgive those who have wronged us? According to a popular view amongst philosophers working on forgiveness the answer is no. Forgiveness, it is claimed, is always elective. This view is rejected by Gamlund (2010a; 2010b) who argues that duties to forgive do exist and then provides conditions that are relevant to determining whether forgiveness is obligatory or supererogatory. In this paper I will argue that the conditions that Gamlund provides do not provide a plausible account of the connection between forgiveness and duty. The problems I will raise against Gamlund's view is a problem that faces any moral view that makes room for supererogation. I will then investigate whether the existing solutions to this problem provide a more plausible account of the connection between forgiveness and obligation. I will argue that the two most prominent solutions, The Favouring Reasons View and The Sacrifice View, produce implausible results when applied to the case of forgiveness. However, an alternative view, The Freedom View, can provide plausible results when applied to the case of forgiveness. This gives us defeasible reason to favour this as a general solution to The Problem of the Good Ought Tie-Up.

## KEYWORDS

Moral philosophy, limits of duty, forgiveness, supererogation, moral demandingness, moral obligation

## INTRODUCTION

The trial of, 'Auschwitz Accountant', Oskar Gröning was the scene for an incredible scene of forgiveness. Former Nazi SS guard Gröning was charged with being an accessory to murder in the deaths of at least three hundred thousand people. Gröning's role was to count the money of newly arrived Auschwitz detainees and send the money to SS headquarters in Berlin. During the trial, Auschwitz survivor Eva Mozes Kor, whose parents and two elder sisters died in the camp, publicly embraced Gröning. While this act was remark-

able in itself, equally remarkable was the justification she gave for her act in an interview with The British Broadcasting Corporation the following day:

*Interviewer:* You have talked of forgiving the Nazis and many people have found that very hard and criticized you for that.

*Kor:* Not only hard and criticized – they called me a traitor! And when I talked to survivors and say “why on earth does my forgiveness hurt you?” And they have no answers. I guess victims like to have more victims. The bigger the crowd the better, I don’t understand it. I found forgiveness has zero to do with the perpetrator. If they benefit from me so be it. But ... the victims ... Seventy years after liberation I was in Auschwitz with three hundred other survivors and they were all talking about their experiments and falling apart. ‘Poor me what have they done to me?’ Well, I don’t forget what was done to me but I am not a poor person, I am a victorious human being, who has been able to rise above the pain, forgive the Nazis, not because they deserve it but because I deserve it. As long we understand my forgiveness that the victim has the right to be free, you cannot be free from what was done to you, unless you remove it from your shoulder as a daily burden of pain and anger.<sup>1</sup>

While this interview raises several interesting issues about the ethic of forgiveness, this paper will focus on just one. This is the issue of whether there can ever be a duty to forgive those who have wronged us. According to many philosophers working on the issue, the answer is no. Forgiveness is seen as always being morally optional or supererogatory. Cheshire Calhoun, for example, claims that forgiveness, “is an elective response to culpable wrongdoing.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Christopher Cowley claims that, “Because of its supererogatory status, genuine, forgiveness cannot be expected or assumed.”<sup>3</sup> This view has a great deal of intuitive appeal. When we consider Eva Kor’s extraordinary acts of forgiveness it certainly seems plausible to think that this behaviour could not be morally demanded from anyone. It would also be inappropriate to blame Kor’s fellow victims who have decided not to forgive those who imposed the horrors of Auschwitz upon them. If we accept that it is always appropriate to demand that people perform their obligations and blame those who fail to (in the absence of an excuse) then we have good reason to think that Kor’s act of forgiveness was not morally required.<sup>4</sup>

As well as appearing plausible in this example, this view also has some conceptual appeal. Forgiveness, we might think, can only count as genuine for-

<sup>1</sup> BBC (2015).

<sup>2</sup> Calhoun (1992 p.81).

<sup>3</sup> Cowley (2014 p.82).

<sup>4</sup> Supporters of this view of the connection between obligations and the legitimacy of demands and blame include Darwall (2013 p.21), Gibbard (1990 p.42) and Skorupski (1999 p.29).

giveness if the forgiver has freely chosen to forgive. Someone who forgives because they are forced to do so does not seem like someone who has performed a genuine act of forgiveness.<sup>5</sup> This casts doubt on the coherence of thinking that we could ever demand that someone forgives and so provides support for the view that forgiving could never be obligatory.

Despite the initial plausibility of the view that forgiveness is always elective, it has been challenged. Espen Gamlund (2010a; 2010b) argues that duties to forgive do exist and then provides conditions that are relevant to determining whether forgiveness is obligatory or supererogatory. In this paper I will argue, in Section 1, that the conditions that Gamlund provides do not provide a plausible account of the connection between forgiveness and duty. One of the problems I will raise against Gamlund's view is a problem that faces any moral view that makes room for the supererogation, The Problem of the Good Ought Tie-Up. I will then investigate whether the existing solutions to this problem provide a more plausible account of the connection between forgiveness and obligation. I will argue, in Sections 2 and 3 that the two most prominent solutions, The Favouring Reasons View and The Sacrifice View, produce implausible results when applied to the case of forgiveness. However, I will then argue in Section 4 that The Freedom View can provide plausible results when applied to the case of forgiveness. This gives us defeasible reason to favour this as a general solution to The Problem of the Good Ought Tie-Up.

## 1. GAMLUND'S ACCOUNT

Gamlund argues that the claim that forgiveness is always elective fails to account for the proper normative force of the reasons that people have to forgive.<sup>6</sup> Gamlund's point is a plausible one. At least on some occasions, forgiveness seems to be something that we expect and even demand from people. We sometimes think that someone is blameworthy for failing to forgive. For example, suppose a young man has promised his mother that he and his wife will spend Christmas with his parents but at the last minute they change their mind and decide not to visit because they would rather spend Christmas by themselves. This hurts the mother who has been looking forward to spending Christmas with her son. It seems reasonable to think that the son's act may have been wrong in this case, though it is unlikely to be considered by many to be a grave case of wrongdoing. Suppose that after Christmas the son speaks with his mother and realizes the hurt he has caused. He accepts that he has

<sup>5</sup> A similar point is discussed in Gamlund (2010a: 544).

<sup>6</sup> Gamlund (2010a: 544).

wronged her and offers to take both his parents on a holiday as an apology. However, his mother refuses to accept the apology and vows never to forgive her son. True to her vow, she never speaks to her son again. It seems reasonable in this case to think that the mother may have a duty to forgive her son. We might reasonably think it appropriate for a third party, the boy's father perhaps, to demand that she forgives her son and blame her for refusing to do so. If we accept this then there seems good reason to think that Gamlund is right to say that the claim that forgiveness is never obligatory is mistaken.

Under what conditions then would forgiveness be required? Gamlund points to two considerations that should have an important influence on our decision making when we are deciding whether or not to forgive.<sup>7</sup> First, the consequences of our forgiveness. If, for example, our forgiveness would have valuable consequences then this provides an important reason to forgive. This helps explain the thought that the mother in the previous example has a duty to forgive, as it would help restore her relationship with her son. Second, the attitude of the wrongdoer is also important. If the wrongdoer repents and apologizes for her actions then this also gives us reason to forgive. Again, this fits well with the intuition that the mother has a duty to forgive her repentant and apologetic son. In both cases, Gamlund says that while these reasons have normative force, this force is only *pro tanto*. These reasons are capable of being overridden by countervailing reasons. Three kinds of reasons are particularly relevant for determining whether these *pro tanto* reasons are overridden.<sup>8</sup> First, the gravity of the harm. The more seriously the victim has been harmed then the more the victim is justified in deciding not to forgive. Second, the level of blameworthiness of the wrongdoers. The more the perpetrators are blameworthy for the wrongdoing (the less their actions are excusable) the stronger the reasons against forgiving will be. Finally, Gamlund argues that compensation is also relevant. An absence or insufficient amount of compensation will make the reasons against forgiving stronger. If the wrongdoer is unable or unwilling to compensate the victim then this counts against forgiving her.

I have explained the considerations that Gamlund takes to be relevant for determining whether or not a victim has a duty to forgive her wrongdoer. I do not wish to cast doubt on the relevance or importance of any of the considerations that Gamlund points to. However, I do think that Gamlund's account fails to explain why an act of forgiveness would be supererogatory. I will start my argument by noting that in order to show that an act is supererogatory it

<sup>7</sup> Gamlund (2010a: 544).

<sup>8</sup> Gamlund (2010b: 660-663).

must be shown that an act is both morally optional (neither obligatory nor forbidden) and morally better than the minimum that morality demands in that situation. Now let's look at again at the conditions under which Gamlund claims an act of forgiveness would be supererogatory. Gamlund claims that when a wrongdoer apologizes for their wrongdoing and forgiving has good consequences, then this creates moral reason to forgive the wrongdoing. These reasons though, can be outweighed by "certain ethical reasons or considerations that serve to explain why it is unreasonable to require [forgiveness]".<sup>9</sup>

The problem with this explanation is that it fails to adequately explain why the act is supererogatory. The core of the problem can be found in Gamlund's claim that the reasons or considerations that may count against forgiving are "ethical". Moreover, Gamlund claims that the process by which these reasons may make an act supererogatory rather than obligatory is by *outweighing* the countervailing reasons.<sup>10</sup> The problem with this claim is that if these moral reasons that count against forgiving outweigh the moral reasons that count in favour of forgiving then the stronger moral reasons support not forgiving. In this case it seems strange to think that forgiving would be supererogatory. While we may accept that both forgiving and not forgiving are permissible in such a case, it would seem bizarre to say in this case that forgiving would be supererogatory and not forgiving merely permissible. After all, in this case not forgiving is the act that is better supported by moral reasons. Given that it is the morally better act, if any act is supererogatory in this case then it should be this one.

Perhaps Gamlund could reply by slightly modifying his proposal. Rather than saying that forgiving is supererogatory when the reasons against forgiving *outweigh* the reasons in favour of doing so, he could instead claim that this is the case when the reasons are of *equal weight*. The advantage of this response is that Gamlund would no longer be committed to claiming that the stronger moral reasons favour not forgiving. This means he can avoid having to claim that the stronger moral reasons support the merely permissible act, while the weaker reasons support the act of supererogation.

There are, however, two problems with this response. First, it seems unlikely that there will be many occasions where the reasons are perfectly balanced in this way. This response requires that the reasons in favour of forgiving are exactly as strong as the reasons against doing so. It seems unlikely that the reasons would balance out exactly in this way very often. As a result, it looks like

<sup>9</sup> Gamlund (2010a: 549).

<sup>10</sup> Gamlund (2010a: 544).

adopting this response will commit Gamlund to claiming that acts of supererogatory forgiveness are very rare.

The second, and more important, problem is that even when the reasons are perfectly balanced in this way this will not support the view that forgiving is supererogatory. When the moral reasons are exactly tied in this way then it seems plausible to think that the agent would have the option of either forgiving or not forgiving. After all, both acts are equally supported by moral reasons, so it seems reasonable to think that neither act will be forbidden. However, given that both acts are equally supported by moral reasons we cannot say that one act is morally better than the other. This means that this account fails to explain how forgiving could be both moral optional and morally better than not forgiving. This means that while this account is able to make room for morally optional acts of forgiveness, it fails to make room for the possibility of supererogatory acts of forgiveness.

This issue I have raised against Gamlund's account arises from the general problem of accounting for acts of supererogation. The problem with trying to account for such acts is that it seems plausible to think that moral requirements should be closely connected to moral reasons. This is known as The Problem of The Good Ought Tie-up.<sup>11</sup> On the most obvious way of spelling out this connection the act that is most strongly supported by moral reasons will be the act that is morally required. This account leaves no room for acts of supererogation, as there is no space for an act that is permissible sub-optimal and so no room for acts that are morally better than other permissible options. The challenge raised by this problem is to find an alternative connection that is capable of make space for supererogation.

Given that Gamlund's aim is to spell out the conditions under which an act of forgiveness may be supererogatory, it may seem unfair to criticize his account for failing to do so in a way that also provides a solution to The Problem of The Good Ought Tie-up. Nevertheless, I think that there is reason to look for an account of duties of forgiveness that is not committed to implausible positions about the connection between moral reasons and obligation. This gives us good reason to investigate this issue in light of the existing work on how to respond to The Problem of The Good Ought Tie-up.

<sup>11</sup> This name is given by Heyd (1982: 4). For a statement of the problem see Archer (2016a:180).

## 2. FORGIVENESS AND THE FAVOURING REASONS VIEW

The first solution to The Problem of The Good Ought Tie-Up that I will consider is one that holds that not all moral reasons are capable of generating moral requirements. According to, Terence Horgan and Mark Timmons, moral reasons are capable of playing both a requiring role and a merit-conferring role.<sup>12</sup> There are some reasons that count in favour of performing an act from the moral point of view without generating a moral requirement to perform the act. This view, which I will call The Favouring Reasons view, solves The Problem of the Good Ought Tie-up by providing an explanation for the lack of a close connection between moral reasons and moral obligations. The reason that it is possible for the act that is best supported by moral reasons to fail to be morally obligatory is that not all moral reasons are requirement generating.<sup>13</sup>

Applying this view to the question of forgiveness would allow us to explain the popular view that forgiveness is always optional. If we think that the reasons that count in favour of forgiving are reasons that play a favouring role without playing a requiring role then we could say that it is always at the victim's discretion whether or not to forgive. The Favouring Reasons View has the advantage of allowing the victim the discretion of whether or not to forgive. Since the reasons that support forgiveness favour without requiring, forgiveness is left to the victim's discretion.

However, this implication of the justifying reasons view may also be viewed as a problem rather than an advantage. If we take The Favouring Reasons View to apply to all reasons to forgive then it seems that this view will fail to account for the normative force of forgiveness. As The Favouring Reasons View seems committed to saying that forgiveness is never morally required it is vulnerable to Gamlund's objection that the view that forgiveness is always supererogatory fails to account for the normative force of forgiveness. Consider again the case of the mother who refuses to forgive the son who broke his promise to visit. In this case it seems reasonable to think that the mother has a duty to forgive her son. However, this cannot be the case if the reasons in favour of forgiving are never requiring reasons.

There is a quick response available to the supporter of The Favouring Reasons View. This view need not be committed to claiming that the reasons in favour of forgiving are always favouring but not requiring. Instead, it could be

<sup>12</sup> Horgan and Timmons (2010 p.47-50).

<sup>13</sup> For a defence of the view that reasons in general can play a justifying role without playing a requiring role see Gert (2004).

claimed that the reasons that support forgiveness sometimes have requiring force and sometimes do not. This amendment allows the favouring reasons view to avoid the objection. The Favouring Reasons View can explain why some acts of forgiveness are supererogatory (they are supported by non-requiring reasons) while others are obligatory (they are supported by requiring reasons).

This response though is only partially successful. While it allows The Favouring Reasons View to avoid the objection that it cannot allow room for obligatory acts of forgiveness, it is unable to provide a satisfactory explanation as to what would make an act of forgiveness obligatory or supererogatory. To see why it is worth recalling the three plausible considerations that Gamlund claimed count in favour of an act of forgiveness being classed as supererogatory rather than morally required. Those considerations are the gravity of the harm, the level of blameworthiness of the perpetrator and the absence of compensation. When the harm is grave, the perpetrator highly blameworthy and compensation is lacking then this is likely to make forgiveness supererogatory rather than required. It is worth noting though that all of these considerations are reasons that count *against* forgiving. This is important because it means that all three considerations are to be weighed against the reasons that count in favour of forgiving (the good consequences this may have, the benefits to personal relationships etc). However, The Favouring Reasons View cannot appeal to this explanation. According to The Favouring Reasons View, if an act of forgiveness is supererogatory it is because it is supported by reasons that favour but that do not require. If this were the case then even if considerations that count against performing the act were to be removed the act would still not be morally required. The problem with this is that it leaves us unable to say that it is the countervailing reasons that would prevent forgiveness from being obligatory. This means that we cannot say that the three conditions Gamlund mentions (the gravity of the harm, the blameworthiness of the victim and the lack of compensation) prevent an act of forgiveness from being supererogatory.

In response to this objection it might be responded that the considerations Gamlund proposes should not be seen as reasons that count against forgiving. Rather we can look at them from the opposite direction, as considerations that count in favour of forgiving. The less the gravity of the harm, the less blameworthy the perpetrator and the more the perpetrator compensates the victim then the more reason the victim has to forgive the perpetrator. This has the advantage of not having to view these considerations as reasons counting against forgiving. Instead, when reversed in this way, they can be seen as con-



siderations that count in favour of forgiving. This allows us to say then that these considerations influence whether the reasons in favour of forgiving are requiring reasons or only reasons that favour but that do not require.

However, this view is also problematic, as there seems no plausible explanation as to why the degree to which these conditions are met would change the *kind* of reason that supports forgiving. It seems entirely reasonable to think that the gravity of the harm would affect the *strength* of the reason that would support forgiving the perpetrator. It seems odd indeed however, to suggest that as the gravity of the harm becomes less then the reasons that count in favour of forgiving transform from reason that favour but do not require into requiring reasons. Given that the gravity of the harm is a matter of degree it seems odd to think that there would be a level of harm below which the reasons in favour of forgiving would be transformed in this way. It seems then that The Favouring Reasons View cannot offer a satisfying account of the relationship between forgiveness and obligation.

### 3. FORGIVENESS AND THE SACRIFICE VIEW

The second solution to The Problem of The Good Ought Tie-Up that I will consider holds that moral reasons can fail to generate moral requirements when the act that they favour would involve too great a sacrifice. According to this view, costs to the agent's self-interest can play a constraining role on what we are morally required to do. As Samuel Scheffler puts the point:

The answer to the question of whether an agent was required to promote the best overall outcome in a given situation would depend on the amount of good he could thereby produce (or evil he could thereby avert), and on the size of the sacrifice he would have to make in order to achieve the optimal outcome.<sup>14</sup>

This view, which I will call The Sacrifice View is the most popular view of the connection between moral reasons and supererogation in the literature.<sup>15</sup>

If we apply The Sacrifice View to the question of forgiveness then we can say that forgiving will be supererogatory when it meets the following two conditions. First, in this case forgiving will be morally better than not forgiving. Second, in this case forgiving involves a high enough cost to the agent's well-being to prevent it from being obligatory. On the other hand, forgiveness will be required whenever it is the morally best act available and it involves no cost

<sup>14</sup> Scheffler (1994 p.20).

<sup>15</sup> Others who make this claim include Dancy (1993 p. 138), Feinberg (1961 p.281), Fishkin (1982 pp.14-15) and Mellema (1991 p.179).

to the agent or a cost that is not significant enough to prevent these reasons from generating an obligation.

The Sacrifice View has an important advantage over Gamlund's account. Unlike Gamlund's account, it is able to make room not only for optional acts of forgiveness but also for supererogatory acts of forgiveness. As this account does not hold the reasons that count against performing a supererogatory act to be *moral* reasons, it can explain why the morally best act may not be morally obligatory. The non-moral, prudential reasons that count against forgiving may make it permissible not to forgive and, as a result, make forgiving beyond the call of duty.

However, this view faces two important problems. The first problem for this account is that the way in which it takes into account the perspective of the agent generates implausible results. Remember, according to this account, what prevents a morally optimal act from being obligatory are the costs to the agent that would result from performing it. Suppose we have a case where the best thing to do from the moral point of view is to forgive (some might think that this is the case with the Eva Kor example). Now imagine that we also find out that the victim would benefit forgiving. According to this account, these two facts are enough to guarantee that the victim has an obligation to forgive the perpetrator. It is worth noting that this problem does not refer to some mere theoretical possibility. If we take Eva Kor's testimony seriously then forgiving her captors and torturers has been incredibly beneficial for her well-being. If we also think that forgiving is the morally best thing to do in this situation then according to this account, Kor's forgiveness was morally required.

There are several problems with this. The first problem is that this is simply the wrong result. While many admire Kor's forgiveness, few would think that such forgiveness was morally required. If Kor had decided not to forgive those who had wronged her we would be unlikely to blame her for this or to demand forgiveness from her. We certainly do not seem inclined to blame Kor's fellow survivors who do not forgive the Nazis. This would seem grossly inappropriate. As I have already discussed, when an act is morally required we can demand that people perform that act and blame those who fail to do so (in the absence of an excuse). Given that blame and demands would be completely inappropriate in this case, there seems little reason to accept the claim that Kor's forgiveness is morally required.

Not only does The Sacrifice View provide the wrong verdict in this case but it also reaches that verdict in the wrong way. According to this account, once we have found out that forgiving would be the morally best act and that it is also in Kor's best interests no further deliberation is necessary in order to reach

the verdict that forgiveness is morally required. This is too simplistic. Even if we could somehow be persuaded that Kor's forgiveness is obligatory we should not accept the ease with which this account generates this verdict. The issue of when, if ever, forgiveness is morally required is a complex and difficult one. We should be suspicious then, of any account that provides a simplistic account of how to settle this issue.

The Sacrifice View faces an additional problem. According to The Sacrifice View, in order for an act to be supererogatory it must involve greater costs to the agent than some other available option. An implication of this view is that there must have been some alternative way of acting available to the agent. This is problematic however, as it seems reasonable to think that at least for some cases of forgiveness, such options will not be available. As Christopher Cowley points out, often when a victim is deciding whether or not to forgive someone, they discover a certain course of action as the only available option for them. Cowley describes this process as, "something akin to victims discovering that they 'must' or that they 'cannot' forgive."<sup>16</sup> According to Cowley, such discoveries should be understood as a form of what Bernard Williams calls a practical necessity.<sup>17</sup> This is a form of incapacity to engage in certain forms of behaviour. Of particular relevance for our purposes are what Williams calls 'moral incapacities'.<sup>18</sup> These are incapacities that are an expression of the moral life of the agent. A paradigmatic example of such an incapacity is Martin Luther's statement at The Diet of Worms: "Here I stand I can do no other." As Cowley argues, it seems plausible to think that many cases of forgiveness may also be cases of moral incapacity.<sup>19</sup> Someone may find herself unable to do anything other than forgive and this may be an expression of her most deeply held values and commitments.

Cowley's claim that deliberating about whether or not to forgive will often involve discovering one way of action to be the only possible way of acting for the agent seems entirely plausible. The problem for The Sacrifice View is that it would be unable to class any case of forgiveness that stems from a moral incapacity as supererogatory. The absence of an alternative option available to those forgiving in this way means that these acts cannot be said to involve sacrifice and so cannot be supererogatory. This is strange, as it seems like many of these cases are ones that we would describe as supererogatory. In previous work, I have raised objections similar to these two as general objec-

<sup>16</sup> Cowley (2010 p. 573).

<sup>17</sup> Williams (1981).

<sup>18</sup> Williams (1993).

<sup>19</sup> Cowley (2016).

tions to The Sacrifice View as a view of the limits of moral obligation.<sup>20</sup> If these general objections hold against this view then we might wonder about the worth of pointing out problems for the view based specifically on the case of forgiveness. However, focussing on the case of forgiveness makes the extent of the first problem facing The Sacrifice View more apparent. The reason for this is that forgiveness is claimed by many to be prudentially valuable. According to Geoffrey Scarre, forgiveness is important because of its power to reunite people in mutually beneficial relationships.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Stephen Ingram has argued that forgiveness is prudentially valuable because it helps to restore moral and epistemic relationships.<sup>22</sup>

These accounts of the prudential value of forgiveness are interesting but they do not seem to capture the reasons why Kor took it to be in her interests to forgive. The reason that Kor claims that forgiveness is good for her is that it allowed her to be free. This can only be achieved through forgiveness, claims Kor, because, “you cannot be free from what was done to you, unless you remove it from your shoulder as a daily burden of pain and anger.” The point Kor is making is that it is good for victims to forgive because it allows them to give up negative emotional attitudes that can be harmful to the possessor. The thought that forgiveness involves the letting go of emotions like anger and resentment has long been recognized in the philosophical literature.<sup>23</sup> Avishai Margalit, for example, claims that, “Forgiveness means overcoming anger and vengefulness.”<sup>24</sup> The thought that underlies this view is that forgiveness is the renouncing of the retributive emotions that one is justified in holding towards a wrongdoer.<sup>25</sup> The reason this is important is that there is good reason to think that overcoming these emotions can be beneficial for the well-being of victims. Forgiveness helps to reduce negative emotions such as anger and fear

<sup>20</sup> See Archer (2015 and 2016c).

<sup>21</sup> Scarre (2004 p.25).

<sup>22</sup> Ingram (2013).

<sup>23</sup> Some philosophers take this to be Bishop Butler’s (1846) view (Eg Horsbrugh (1974)). Others (eg. Garcia (2011)) reject this interpretation of Butler.

<sup>24</sup> Margalit (2002 p.192)

<sup>25</sup> It is worth noting that not everyone endorses this focus on retributive emotions. Margaret Walker, for example, points out that not all angry emotions are retributive (2006 p.93). Nevertheless, Walker accepts that forgiveness involves the overcoming of some negative emotions felt towards the wrongdoer. For my purposes then it is enough to claim that forgiveness involves the overcoming of some, though not necessarily all, of the negative emotions victims feel towards the wrongdoer as a result of being wronged.

and the reduction of these is emotions has been linked to positive health outcomes such as a reduced risk of depression, heart disease and cancer.<sup>26</sup>

It is easy to be skeptical about these findings. This skepticism might come from one of two sources. First we might question the conclusions that are drawn from the data. The psychologist James McNulty, for example, has conducted a series of studies on forgiveness within couples that he claims point to a more complicated relationship between forgiveness and physical and psychological health. While forgiving a partner seemed to have a positive effect for the self-respect of those in good relationships it appeared to have a negative effect for those in dysfunctional relationships.<sup>27</sup> As a result, we might that conclude, as McNulty does, that forgiveness will have positive effects for the forger in some circumstances and negative effects in other circumstances.<sup>28</sup>

There are a number of responses that might be made to this worry.<sup>29</sup> For my purposes, though, the weaker conclusion that many cases of forgiveness are of benefit to the forger, is enough. This view is unscathed by McNulty's studies. In fact they support it. This view is also supported by the reported experience of some of those who forgive. For example, Freedman and Chang conducted a study in which 43 per cent of respondents claimed that the personal benefits of forgiving provided an adequate reason to forgive.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Kathryn Norlock cites several women who said they forgave because they found the experience of being angry to be unpleasant and emotionally draining.<sup>31</sup> Finally, of course, there is Kor who claimed that thorough forgiveness she was able to remove the, "daily burden of pain and anger." There does, then, appear to be good reason to think that forgiveness is often prudentially valuable.

Another form of scepticism that has been taken towards these empirical findings is to question their relevance. Anthony Bash, for example, claims that, "Forgiveness is a moral issue with psychological implications; it is not a psychological issue with moral implications."<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Gerrard and McNaughton claim that focusing on the psychological benefits of forgiveness, "Misses

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Witvliet et al (2001), Worthington and Scherer (2004), Worthington et al (2007) and Toussaint et al (2012). For an overview of this literature see Gerrard and McNaughton (2010 pp.77 – 82) and Pettigrove (2012 p.104 fn.63).

<sup>27</sup> McNulty (2008) Cf. McNulty 2011).

<sup>28</sup> (2002 p.192). This view is also held by Griswold (2007 p.41) and Murphy (2008 p.13).

<sup>29</sup> Gerrard and McNaughton suggest that the results might show that forgiveness is only beneficial when it is done for the right reasons (2010 p.81).

<sup>30</sup> Freedman and Chang (2010 p.23).

<sup>31</sup> Norlock (2009 pp. 85-87).

<sup>32</sup> Bash (2007 p.46).

the moral context of the decision to forgive.”<sup>33</sup> The concern is well-placed. If we focus only on what the forgiver may gain from forgiving means that we are ignoring the fact that this is primarily a moral decision.

However, what our investigation of The Sacrifice View shows is that these empirical claims do have philosophical implications.<sup>34</sup> If we accept both The Sacrifice View and the claim that in many cases, forgiveness is prudentially valuable then we will be committed to holding that many cases of forgiveness cannot be supererogatory. This is a counter-intuitive result. As we saw in Section 1, forgiveness is often held to be clearly supererogatory. These empirical claims then do have clear relevance for philosophical questions, as they cast doubt upon the most popular view of the connection between moral reason, obligations and supererogation.

#### 4. FORGIVENESS AND THE FREEDOM VIEW

So far I have investigated three ways in which the connection between forgiveness and moral obligation could be drawn. I argued that all three face problems. Gamlund’s account did not provide a satisfactory explanation for the supererogatory (as opposed to the simply optional) status of supererogatory acts of forgiveness. The Favouring reasons view failed to allow important considerations such as the extent of the harm, the blameworthiness of the perpetrator and compensation to play a plausible role in determining whether forgiving is obligatory. Finally, The Sacrifice View led to the implausible view that whenever a morally good act of forgiveness benefits the victim it is obligatory.<sup>35</sup> Given the problems facing all of these accounts we might question whether any plausible account of the connection between forgiveness and obligation can be given. In this final section I will argue that there is a view about the limits of duty that does provide a plausible account of the connection between forgiveness, duty and supererogation.

To start, let’s consider again the first objection raised against The Sacrifice View.

<sup>33</sup> Gerrard and McNaughton (2010 p.72).

<sup>34</sup> For more reasons to view these empirical findings as philosophically relevant see Ingram (2013) and Hallich (2013).

<sup>35</sup> Another possibility would be to combine The Favouring Reasons view with The Sacrifice View into a hybrid view. In previous work (2016b) I have argued that a hybrid view would avoid one important problem facing The Sacrifice View. However, this view would remain vulnerable to the objections I raise here (and elsewhere) to The Sacrifice View.

I argued that this view had the implication that whenever forgiveness is both morally preferable and better from the point of view of the victim is required. This is implausible, as in many cases it would not be appropriate to demand that a victim forgive in such a case. Nor, in many cases, would it seem appropriate to blame a victim who failed to forgive in such a case. What could be said in defence of this thought? What can be said to justify the thought that an agent may lack a moral requirement to forgive even when doing so is supported by both morality and self-interest?

A plausible justification of this thought can be found in the claim that an important part of a meaningful life is having the space and freedom to choose what to prioritize. This means having some freedom to choose which projects to pursue, who to spend time with, where to live and so on. This freedom will operate within important moral constraints. Certain projects, such as the project of becoming a serial killer, have to be ruled out as unacceptable. Out with these constraints though, people should have the freedom to make choices about how to live their lives. People should have the freedom to choose whether to dedicate their life to woodwork or to philosophy. Whether to aspire to be a great novelist or to focus on devoting oneself to caring for the elderly. A number of theorists defend this kind of view of the limit of obligations.<sup>36</sup> According to this view, which I will call *The Freedom View*, a supererogatory act is one that is morally preferable to alternative permissible acts but that is not morally required because this would involve a removal of the space to make important choices about one's life.

Applying *The Freedom View* to the question of forgiveness allows us to avoid the problematic implications of the alternative views. Unlike Gamlund's view, *The Freedom View* provides a clear explanation as to why the supererogatory acts of forgiveness are not simply optional. The Freedom to pursue other options allows room for an optional act that is not best supported by moral reasons. As a result, this view can explain why the morally best act available is not morally required.

However, unlike *The Favouring Reasons View*, *The Freedom View* can allow Gamlund's three conditions to play an important role in determining whether forgiveness is required or supererogatory. *The Freedom View* can hold that all of these conditions are relevant to determining the strength of the moral reasons in favour of forgiving. The less grave the harm, the less blameworthy the perpetrator is and the more the perpetrator has compensated the victim then the stronger the moral reasons in favour of forgiving will be. There

<sup>36</sup> This view is explicitly defended by Archer (2016c), Heyd (1982 pp.172-175) and Igeneski (2008). This view also seems to be implicitly appealed to by Wolf (1982).

will be times where these moral reasons are so strong that the victim has a duty to forgive. However, there will be other times when the moral reasons point in favour of forgiveness but The Freedom View will rule that it is still permissible for the victim to choose not to forgive, because of the importance of the people being able to make important choices about their lives.

The Freedom view can also incorporate the plausible thought motivating The Sacrifice View. Motivating this view was the thought that the interests of the victim should play an important role in determining whether forgiving is required or not. The Freedom View can support this intuition by holding that, at least for many cases of forgiveness, the victim should be given the space to choose how to respond. Unlike the Sacrifice View though, The Freedom View is not committed to the implausible claim that victims are always morally required to forgive when doing so is morally and prudentially optimal. The Freedom View can allow that even in such cases, victims should be given the space to decide how they will respond to the perpetrator without being subject to the demands and blame that are appropriate for moral obligations.

This point is particularly important in the case of forgiveness. There are many different ways in which one can respond to being the victim of wrongdoing. One way in which some people manage to rebuild their lives after being subject to horrendous and senseless acts of violence is to build life-defining commitments and projects on the basis of these experiences. A victim might decide to dedicate her life to helping other people recover from similar experiences. This seems to be part of Eva Kor's project, to help other people who have been the victims of horrendous acts of violence find a way to cast off what she sees as the oppressive burden of resentment. However, this is not the only way in which one might respond. Another victim might decide to dedicate her life to bringing to justice those who had wronged her. This was the path taken by Kor's fellow Auschwitz survivor Simon Wiesenthal, who dedicated his life to tracking down Nazi war criminals and bringing them to justice.<sup>37</sup> Both of these projects seem to be not only permissible but also praiseworthy and admirable responses to horrendous trauma. It also seems plausible to think that forgiveness fits more comfortably with the first of these projects than with the second. Perhaps Kor is right that forgiveness is an effective healer of trauma, at least for some people. It also seems reasonable to think that the project of bringing wrongdoers to justice may be aided by a certain amount of resentment. Forgiveness then may be an important pre-condition for the pursuit of one admirable way of responding to wrongdoing, whilst being a hindrance to the pursuit of another admirable way of responding. The problem for The

<sup>37</sup> See Wiesenthal (1987).



Sacrifice View is that is committed to saying that if one of these projects turned out to be even marginally morally better and marginally better for the victim's well-being, then the alternative option would be morally wrong. This means that it would be appropriate to demand the victim to perform this act and blame her if she performed the alternative. The Freedom View, on the other hand, can say that the victim should be given some space to decide how to respond. It can allow then that both projects may be admirable ways of responding to being the victim of wrongdoing.

It is worth mentioning one further advantage that The Freedom View holds over The Sacrifice View. In Section 1 I voiced my agreement for Gamlund's claim that it seems plausible to think that there are some cases where forgiveness is morally required. While I stand by this claim, I also realize that it is controversial. Indeed it is in direct opposition to the sizable number of theorists who claim that forgiveness is always elective. The Sacrifice View is committed to saying that if there are ever cases where forgiving is best supported by both the moral and prudential reasons then the claim that forgiveness is always elective is false. The Freedom View, on the other hand, leaves open the possibility that forgiveness could be the kind of act that simply can never be required from anyone. A supporter of The Freedom View could argue that this is one area of life where people should always be given the moral space to decide how they are going to act. Unlike The Sacrifice View, then, The Freedom View can allow this issue to be investigated independently. This is preferable, as the question of whether forgiveness can ever be morally required should be settled by a close examination of the nature of forgiveness. The answer to this question should not be given as a straightforward implication of our favourite view of the connection between moral reasons and moral obligations.

## CONCLUSION

I have been investigating the connection between forgiveness and duty. I have argued that Gamlund's attempt to articulate the conditions under which forgiveness may be obligatory faces problems in explaining why these supererogatory acts of forgiveness are morally better than not forgiving yet it is permissible to perform either act. This is a general problem facing any moral view that makes room for the supererogation for which a number of solutions have been offered. I then argued that the two most prominent solutions, The Favouring Reasons View and The Sacrifice View, produce implausible results when applied to the case of forgiveness. The Favouring Reasons View is unable to provide a plausible account of the role that the gravity of the harm, the

blameworthiness of the victim and the level of compensation may play in determining whether forgiving is obligatory or supererogatory. The Sacrifice View, on the other hand, generates two implausible results. First, that when forgiving is both morally and prudentially optimal it will be obligatory. Second, that forgiving can never be supererogatory for victims for whom forgiving is a practical necessity. I then suggested an alternative view, The Freedom View, that avoids the problematic implications facing the alternative accounts. Moreover, The Freedom View also has the advantage of leaving open the question of whether or not forgiveness can ever be morally required. For these reasons, The Freedom View offers the most plausible account of the connection between forgiveness and obligation.

This conclusion has important implications for wider debates in moral philosophy. First, this conclusion provides some reason to favour The Freedom View as a general solution to The Problem of the Good Ought Tie-Up. The fact that this view appears more plausible than the alternatives when applied to the question of forgiveness gives us defeasible reason to favour this as a general solution to the question of why some morally optimal acts are not obligatory. This, in turn, has implications for how we might seek to accommodate supererogation within existing normative ethical theories. If we accept that The Sacrifice View provides an implausible account of the connection between forgiveness and obligation then this puts pressure on any normative ethical view that appeals to The Sacrifice View in order to make room for the existence of acts of supererogation.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Eg. Portmore (2011).

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