

Forgiving as a Performative Utterance

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When a person says 'I forgive' him/her that may sometimes constitute a report of a mental state; the person reports that he no longer resents someone's wrong actions. But more often, I believe, it is a performative utterance in the sense that necessarily it makes something (other than itself) the case, does not merely report something. In this paper I shall be concerned mainly with forgiving as a performative utterance, which I believe to be the primary and morally more important kind of forgiveness. In section II analyse the nature of such forgiveness; in section III I argue that the utterances of Jesus, as reported in the Gospels, about inter-human forgiveness, fit this analysis; and in section IV I argue that the account in the New Testament *Letter to the Hebrews* and in one later Christian theory of how the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus made God's forgiveness available to humans also fits this analysis.

But I begin with a brief assessment of the nature and appropriateness of forgiving as the mental state of no longer resenting the wrong action of someone who has wronged you. This sense is the only one recognized by Joseph Butler and some modern authors, and by Buddhists. For Holmgren (2012, 39) to forgive someone is to adopt an attitude of not resenting the wrong which someone has done, but instead maintaining towards them an attitude of 'respect, compassion, and real goodwill' which it is good to hold towards all humans. Garrard and McNaughton (2003, 44) likewise think of the desirable good of unconditional forgiveness as overcoming not only resentment, but any other hostile feelings such as anger and hatred. For Griswold (2007, 42) one forgives someone if one is less resentful than one was, and is trying to abolish resentment altogether. For Stump (2016, 156 n.16) forgiveness is what real love of someone who has wronged you amounts to. While all these authors consider that forgiveness in their sense is always a good, Butler (1902, 467) considers that a moderate amount of resentment at the wrongdoer is proper ('resentment is not inconsistent with good will'), but we have a duty to curb it and not to take revenge, and fulfilling this duty is what forgiveness consists in. Other writers also - for example Murphy (2003, ch.2) - have urged that a certain amount of resentment is proper since our moral judgments (e.g. that A did wrong) should be backed by emotion, as such emotion involves respect for the moral order.

Garrard and McNaughton(2003, 53-59) ground the goodness of forgiveness (in their sense) in our solidarity with other humans in our weakness and proneness to wrongdoing. Here I share Holmgren's (2012,96) objection that 'shared dreadful propensities are not and cannot be a basis for respect. Respect is an attitude that recognises and responds to something of value'. Butler sees the obligation to forgive humans as arising simply from a human 'being a sensible creature; that is, capable of happiness or misery'(1902, 467); but surely an attitude will only count as an attitude of 'forgiveness' if it is an attitude towards a wrongdoer, and being a wrongdoer involves having moral beliefs and the capacity to act on them. One cannot (in a literal sense) 'forgive' an animal. Hence Holmgren (2012,137-40) grounds the value of forgiveness in her sense on the equal moral worth of all humans in such features as their ability to experience happiness or misery, to make moral choices, and to live meaningful lives. I am happy to endorse her view that we should maintain the attitude of respect to all humans which she commends, while allowing the propriety of some resentment at them for their wrongdoing. While Holmgren and Garrard-and-McNaughton regard this kind of unconditional forgiveness as supererogatory, Stump (2016, 157) regards it 'on traditional Christian ethical views' (which she holds) as always obligatory (since 'the absence of love is morally blameworthy'), and Griswold (2007, 67) regards it as 'blameworthy' not to forgive 'under certain circumstances', constituted by the wrongdoer making himself worthy of forgiveness . But, for reasons which I shall develop below with respect to forgiveness in what I regard as its primary sense, it seems implausible to think that by hurting the victim and even making what I will call full 'atonement', the wrongdoer imposes on him an obligation - to forgive. Also, as Griswold recognises, since emotions are not fully or sometimes at all under our control, any obligation must be at most an obligation to try to forgive. For Holmgren (2012, 43-5) (and, I suspect for most of the other writers discussed above) the main point of saying to the wrongdoer 'I forgive you' is to convey the information that the speaker does not resent the wrongdoer, that is to assure the wrongdoer that that forgiving attitude is her attitude.

II

In supposing that forgiveness of this kind is the only important kind of forgiveness, these authors seem to me to ignore the significance of what I consider to be certain important metaethical truths. The first of these is that there is a distinction between actions which

are obligatory and actions which are supererogatorily good. The second truth is that doing what is wrong, that is what is obligatory not to do, or not doing what is obligatory to do, is always to wrong some other person(s) (or other sentient beings). The third truth is that doing wrong makes the agent guilty and so – if the agent believed that he was doing wrong – blameworthy. Only given these truths does it begin to become plausible that – as I am going to claim – (necessarily) the wrongdoer's guilt can be removed by the joint actions of the wrongdoer in making (what I will call) atonement, and of the victim in forgiving. Forgiving consists in saying 'I forgive you' or some less solemn words, such as 'that's alright', or perhaps even by a non-verbal action, such as a smile, which in the context means 'I forgive you'. When saying 'I forgive you' (or uttering some less solemn words) necessarily (together with the wrongdoer's action) has an effect on the wrongdoer's moral condition, it must constitute a performative utterance.

I do not see the need these days to argue for the distinction between the supererogatory and the obligatory; and most of the authors mentioned above would accept it. But it is important to note how obligations arise. Positive obligations arise from commitments by one's actions, or from benefits received. The commitments may be explicit, as when we make a promise; or implicit, as, when we beget children, we become obliged to nurture and educate them. The benefits received include the benefits of life, nurture and education which we receive from parents and others, and the benefits of friendship and company. There are also positive obligations to other humans (and maybe animals) who are close to us and in great need to help to satisfy their needs; but it is very unclear where the border lies between those close to us in great need whom we are obliged to help and those not close to us or those whose need is not great, whom it would be merely supererogatory to help. Negative obligations are simply obligations not to deprive anyone of anything which belongs to them – their life, their faculties, their property, their reputation or respect. The second truth follows from these being the ways in which obligations arise. We have obligations to those to whom we have made commitments, those from whom we have received benefits, and to those close to us in great need, to do certain things, and to all beings not to deprive them of anything that belongs to them; and a failure to fulfil those obligations wrongs those people. The third truth seems intuitively correct to many people, and I am going to assume it in my subsequent discussion. It is Holmgren's² denial (in connection with her views about punishment) that the worth of a person is damaged by his/her doing wrong actions, and so her denial of my third truth which leads to her failure to recognise the performative sense of 'forgive'. For if there is no guilt to be removed, forgiveness cannot make a difference to the moral status of

the wrongdoer.

The third truth does however depend on certain metaphysical claims: that persons continue to exist over periods of time and that personal identity is not a matter of degree (any future person is either totally the same as, or totally different from any past person), and that persons have free will of a certain important kind. Those philosophers who do not accept one or other of these metaphysical claims are unlikely to recognize my third truth. Holmgren holds (2012, 147) – surely correctly – that her ‘paradigm of forgiveness’ is compatible with a reductionist theory of personal identity and with Christine Korsgaard’s Kantian compatibilist theory of moral responsibility. Yet a reductionist conception which (2012, 146) ‘holds that the self is not some metaphysical entity that exists beyond the body, brain and series of mental and physical events’ does naturally lead to a view that personal identity is a matter of degree; and so that a later person can only be partly the same as an earlier person, and so less responsible for the wrongdoing of the earlier person who had the ‘same body’. And a compatibilist theory of moral responsibility having the consequence that guilt can belong to a person in virtue of his actions caused ultimately by forces beyond his control, does naturally lead to the view that his actions do not make the serious difference to his moral worth that a libertarian theory can suppose³. It is I assume, because Buddhism rejects the notion of a continuing self, and also holds the doctrine of karma that our destiny depends solely on the choices of those earlier persons, our ‘earlier selves’, who – through not identical with us – are causally connected to us – that it does not recognize forgiveness of the performative utterance kind. For, since your guilt could only be possessed by a continuing identical you, neither your repentance nor forgiveness by your victim could help to remove guilt for a past action which – to speak strictly – would not be your the past action. The present ‘you’ has no guilt to be removed. And anyway, given the doctrine of karma, the actions of anyone apart from your ‘earlier self’, including the action of forgiving you, can make no difference to the state of your ‘later self’. Since there is no guilt to be removed, forgiveness could not remove it.⁴

So on the assumption that my three metaethical ‘truths’ are indeed truths, how can guilt be removed, in particular by forgiveness? Many recent writers have given accounts of forgiveness which have been derived from reflection on different human situations described in detail, leading to moral intuitions about whether forgiveness can be given in these situations and by whom, and when it would be effective in removing guilt. There is no doubt that many of these intuitions are those which many morally sensitive persons have. But these intuitions are often in conflict with each other; and if we are to make progress, we need to check whether our moral intuitions about forgiveness fit with our moral intuitions about obligation,

blame, guilt, punishment, merit, reparation, justice, mercy, repentance, praise, and reward. That I try to do in my own account of the performative sense of 'forgive', which I will now re-present⁵.

A wrongs B by taking away from B what belongs to B (or what A believes to belong to B), or not giving to B what A owes (that is, has an obligation to give) (or believes that he owes) to B. What A takes away or does not give may be a piece of property, or it may be life, service, respect etc. If A wrongs B, A acquires guilt - objective guilt, if A takes away what does belong to B or does not give to B what A owes; subjective guilt if A takes away what A believes belongs to B (and so is wrong to take), or does not give what he believes that he owes to B. The guilt is greatest if it is both subjective and objective, less if it is merely subjective, and very much less if it is merely objective. Objective guilt is simply a bad condition; subjective guilt is a stain on the soul, caused by the agent intentionally doing wrong, making him blameworthy.

By his action of wronging B, A acquires an obligation to make the world as far as is possible a world in which A had not done that wrong. I will call this A's obligation to make atonement to B. A cannot of course bring it about that the past act did not occur. But he can now restore what he stole, or hand over what he ought to have handed over earlier. If he has stolen B's watch, he can return it; if he has damaged B's reputation by a false accusation he can tell others that the accusation was false, and thereby restore B's reputation. If it is not possible to restore a stolen item, A has an obligation to replace it by a similar item or an item chosen by B which B would reasonably consider to be of equivalent value to him- subject to a qualification to which I shall come shortly. But A will have caused damage, not merely by the immediate effects of his action, but by the fact that A caused those effects. All that A can do about that is to distance himself from the act, by expressing regret for having done it, resolving not to do similar actions in future, and showing the regret to be genuine by giving B more than the equivalent of what he took from B - what I will call a 'penance'. If A believed his action to be wrong, A's regret must take the form of repentance for the intention. In summary by his wrongdoing A acquires an obligation to make atonement, which has four parts - regret, apology, reparation, and penance - although in the case of less severe unintentional wrongdoing, no penance is needed. Sometimes when wrongdoers are not able to make adequate reparation (and penance), others can help them to do so. If your son breaks the neighbour's window and does not have the money for it to be repaired, you may give him the money; but it is he who must arrange for the repair, show repentance and make apology.

Forgiving in the performative sense consists in deeming the

wrongdoer's atonement sufficient, and thereby it involves a promise. One who promises creates an obligation to do or not do some future act; she does not merely report something which would be so whether or not the report was made. The promise which B makes by forgiving A is, I suggest, a promise to treat A insofar as is possible as someone who has not wronged B by his past action. In making atonement A is handing over something to B, something owed and so not a 'gift'. By forgiving A, B gives something back. B undertakes to treat A insofar as is possible as if he had not wronged B by his past act. B does not undertake to assume that the past act as described in non-moral terms did not happen. If, for example, A has broken B's vase, B in forgiving him, does not undertake to assume that B did not break the vase. Consequently, even if B has forgiven A for some act, it may still be permissible for B to take precautions against the possibility of A committing a similar act in future. If A has stolen money from B's wallet which he left in public view, B may in future keep his wallet hidden. What B does undertake is not to 'hold it against A' that he did this; and so B undertakes not to blame A for what has happened – for to blame someone is to describe them as subjectively guilty – and to try not to feel resentment at A. (Feelings not being fully under our immediate control, all that someone can do about their feelings is to try to control them.) When A has made some atonement, and B has forgiven A and thereby deemed the atonement sufficient, A no longer has any obligation arising from his wrongdoing. So together A and B have done all that can be done to make it a world in which A had not done that wrong; and that latter state, I suggest, constitutes the removal of A's guilt.

While only someone wronged by the wrongdoer has the status to forgive him, there are indirect victims (wronged to a lesser extent) as well as direct victims of wrongdoing. If A hurts B directly (e.g. by running him over when driving a car dangerously), and so wrongs B, A also wrongs (to a lesser degree) those who have helped to make B the kind of person he is – the parents, teachers and friends who have formed B and given her the capacity which (temporarily or permanently) she can no longer exercise. And A has also wronged those who formed A, by misusing the abilities which they have given him. Parents often need to forgive their own children for 'letting them down', as well as forgive those who hurt their children. A wrongs these close indirect victims, not only (or primarily) because he has caused them grief or anger, but because A has hurt B, and that is an indirect wrong to them, whether or not they feel it. Writers who have developed this point claim that in order for others to be indirect victims of wrongdoing, there must be a 'social context' (Pettigrove 2012, ch.2) in which this identification with the victim makes sense, and I suggest that it is the involvement of the others in the formation of victim or wrongdoer which provides that context.

What is not possible, despite frequent contemporary use of the phrase, is – in the sense in which I am using the word ‘forgive’ – to ‘forgive oneself’; and that is because wronging someone creates a debt which there is an obligation on the wrongdoer to pay, and one cannot have a debt to oneself. Griswold (2007, 61) criticizes the debt analogy on the grounds that ‘when X wrongs Y, she does not borrow and is not loaned something. She forcibly takes something from Y without her consent. By contrast, the taking on of a debt is consented to by the lender, who is (as she thinks) benefited thereby’. Now certainly not all cases of becoming indebted are cases of wronging someone and so becoming guilty; but what I am claiming is that all cases of becoming guilty are cases of acquiring a debt. It is like giving yourself an unauthorized bank loan, by ‘withdrawing’ money from your bank account which you don’t have in it, rather than receiving an authorized bank loan⁶. While allowing that forgiving is an appropriate response to repentant apology, Griswold (2007, 62) strangely claims that ‘the logic of forgiveness does not require compensation and reparation; but this is perfectly compatible with the view that *justice* requires them’; but compensation may be ‘offered for its symbolic or expressive value.’ But A could not possibly be repentant for having stolen B’s watch if he refused to return the watch. For A to repent is to recognize that he has done wrong and to distance himself insofar as this is possible from the wrong act; that must include removing its consequences, and so taking steps to return the watch. Of course B may then say that A can keep the watch, but that would be a new act. When it is not possible to remove the consequences – when the watch has been destroyed or the harm is of a kind that cannot be undone – A must do the nearest thing to removing the consequences – and that means offering to B reparation of equivalent value to B, subject to the qualification to which I will come shortly. Again, B may waive the need for that, but that would be a further act.

I argued earlier that obligations arise from commitments in one’s actions, from benefits received, or from great needs of those close to us. I now argue from that that there is as such no general obligation to forgive even those who do make full atonement.⁷ (I write ‘as such’ because, when A wrongs B, B may have an obligation to forgive A arising from another source – e.g. B may have promised C that he will forgive A if A makes atonement or even without requiring more than repentance and apology. This includes the case – see section III – where C is God, who gives us forgiveness on condition that we forgive others.) When A hurts B, B has not thereby made any commitments. When A makes due reparation, A has merely restored the status quo, and B has not received a net benefit. Maybe wrongdoers have a great need to have their guilt removed; but I shall be arguing shortly that there is another way, even though a

more demanding way, by which -if the victim does not forgive the wrongdoer -this can often be secured. Hence I find it implausible to suppose that by hurting B and then making atonement, A can put B under an obligation to do something - that is, to forgive A. It is however normally good to forgive, supererogatorily good, for the simple reason that forgiveness is giving a gift to someone in need (though not great need), and it is good for the wrongdoer if the victim is the agent of the removal of his guilt, and thereby promises to treat the wrongdoer as one who has not wronged the victim. Generosity is normally good. In some cases however it may be good to delay the forgiveness in order to ensure that the atonement is genuine - e.g. that A's apology was backed by genuine repentance, which could be shown by - among other ways - A not doing any similar wrongful acts for a while.

In a 'Wild West' situation, that is a situation before the existence of societies with laws, judges, and police forces, if A steals some item from B, and A does not voluntarily make atonement, B surely has the right to take it back without asking A's permission, and to take also some extra thing in compensation for the trouble involved in taking back the stolen item. If the item has been destroyed, or is not the sort of thing which can be returned, B surely has the right to take something of greater value, greater so as to include compensation both for the loss of the original item and for the trouble involved in getting compensation. 'Compensation' is thus the equivalent of the 'reparation' and 'penance' involved in the wrongdoer making atonement. Now suppose the harm done is physical damage to B, say A has put out B's eye, it might then seem to follow that B has the right to put out A's eye - 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth' - and to cause further harm to B. Or suppose A kills B, and thus deprives B's family of B. Then B's family would seem to have the right to kill A, and perhaps also injure some relative of A. These conclusions follow unless there is a superior conflicting obligation, such as that it is always wrong to kill or physically mutilate anyone, unless by doing so you can cause a similar good state. In my view the conflicting obligation is the one just stated; those who accept that there is some superior conflicting obligation may acknowledge only a more limited one, for example one forbidding bodily mutilation but allowing killing even when it causes no subsequent good. But given a superior obligation not to mutilate except when by doing so you can cause a similar good state, then even if A has put out B's eye, B does not have the right to put out A's eye - unless (for example) A's eye can be transplanted and put into B's eye socket and made to function there. And given a superior obligation not to kill unless by doing so you can cause a similar good state, then even if A has killed B, B's family do not have the right to kill A unless (for example) by doing so they can prevent A killing others. In these cases clearly B or B's fam-

ily have the right to take compensation from A, but there are plausible moral limits to the way in which 'equivalent' or 'greater' compensation can be construed. In such cases B or B's family have the right to take very considerable compensation of a different kind, for example money or property or many years of compulsory service. I wrote earlier with respect to voluntary atonement that if it is not possible to restore a stolen item, A has an obligation to replace it by a similar item or an item chosen by B which B would reasonably consider to be of similar value to him- subject to a qualification. We can see from these plausible limits to the kind of compensation which can be taken involuntarily, the kind of qualification on the reparation and penance that can be required from a victim: that the victim cannot require from the wrongdoer his life or a physical mutilation, unless the wrongdoer suffering these things is the means to a similar benefit for someone else.

Few humans today live in a Wild West situation; we belong to nation states which have courts of law to determine (for most serious kinds of wrongdoing) who has wronged whom, and of what kind the compensation should be, and police to enforce the decisions of law courts. In accepting membership of nation states, which we almost all do - albeit implicitly, we hand over to the law courts our right to take back our own stolen property or compensation for it. Law courts determine on our behalf the kind of compensation to which we are entitled; and insofar as it consists of elements other than restitution (in a literal sense) of stolen property or property of equivalent value, it is called punishment. And law courts have the right (within limits laid down by laws issued by the governing authority of the nation state) to determine the nature and amount of the punishment on grounds additional to retributive ones - for example on the utilitarian grounds of preventing similar crimes by the wrongdoer, deterring others from committing similar crimes, and reforming the wrongdoer. But the wrongdoer still owes repentance and apology to the victim, and the victim alone can forgive him. Courts of law often - for utilitarian reasons - take into account in determining the punishment any repentance shown and apology offered by the wrongdoer. It is of course good for all of us that (for most kinds of wrongdoing) we do hand over the right to determine the amount of compensation and punishment due, and the duty to extract the compensation and administer the punishment. But the consequent separation between the victim who has the right to forgive and the judges who have the right to extract the equivalent of reparation and penance, means that the victim's decision to forgive can be independent of the amount of reparation and penance determined by judges and whether or not it has been extracted.

It is important to clarify the relation between the victim's right to compensation and the state's duty to punish the wrongdoer. By his

wrongdoing the wrongdoer has given the victim the right to compensation which (subject to such superior obligations as I mentioned) he (or the state on his behalf) may take in the form of harm to the wrongdoer. The wrongdoer 'deserves' to be punished in the sense that he has lost some of his normal rights. But it doesn't follow that it is always bad if he is not punished. My argument suggests that at least in some cases the state has the right to impose the death penalty for murder - for example when the wrongdoer is likely to kill again, but I endorse the normal Western European view that - barring quite exceptional circumstances - it would be bad to do so, despite the financial cost of life imprisonment, for the utilitarian reasons of the benefit to the wrongdoer of life, the risk of a mistaken conviction, and the effect of the practice of capital punishment in brutalizing society. And similar reasons, albeit less strong ones, count also against the use by the state of corporal punishment (beating). The state does not however in modern Western societies take over responsibility for dealing with the consequences of all serious wrongdoing (for example, marital infidelity), and does not take over responsibility for dealing with the consequences of most lesser wrongs (for example, insults).

Just as no one has any obligation to forgive, so no one has any obligation to treat the wrongdoer who does not repent as one who has wronged them. The victim could simply ignore the wrongdoing and continue to have exactly the same relations as before with the wrongdoer. But, I suggest, in the case of serious intentional wrongdoing, it would be bad to do so. To use again the example which I used in Swinburne (1989)- suppose that I have murdered your dearly loved wife; you know this, but for some reason I am beyond the power of the law. Being a modern and charitable person, you decide to overlook my offence. 'The past is the past', you say; 'what is the point of nursing a grievance? The party we are both going to attend will go with more of a swing if we forget about this little incident.' But of course that attitude of yours trivializes human life, your love for your wife, and the importance of right action. And it involves you failing to treat me seriously, to take seriously my attitude towards you expressed in my action. Thereby it trivializes human relationships, for it supposes that good human relations can exist when we do not take each other seriously. We could describe this as a situation where you have 'forgiven me' but it was bad to do so; but I suggest that it is more natural to count it as a situation when you have condoned, not forgiven, my act. (By 'condoned' the act, I mean 'treated the act too trivial to need forgiveness'.) We should count an act of no longer treating the wrongdoer as one who has wronged you as an act of 'forgiving', only if it is a response to at least some repentance and apology on the part of the wrongdoer. It is of course appropriate to treat wrongdoing which is really trivial, as trivial. -

that is, to condone it.

The victim has no obligation to insist on reparation and penance before forgiving the wrongdoer; as with any obligation, the one to whom the obligation is owed can waive the obligation. But while one may forgive someone without insisting on reparation (let alone, penance), it is sometimes good (in a situation where the law is not involved) if the victim insists on some reparation. It is good for the wrongdoer that he himself should take responsibility for what he has done, and so try to make reparation. But it is up to the victim to determine how much reparation (up to a maximum proportional to the wrong done) to demand before he gives forgiveness. If he insists on reparation, the victim can only – except when the law takes on the responsibility to exact reparation – give conditional forgiveness in advance of the reparation being paid. When the state has taken on the responsibility for imposing reparation and so punishment, and determined its amount by law, judges have an obligation to impose punishment within the bounds allowed by law. For the victim not to insist on some or any reparation is to show mercy, and likewise for judges to impose no punishment (if the law allows this) or to impose a lesser punishment within the range allowed by the law, is also to show mercy.

When the victim has forgiven the wrongdoer, the victim's guilt is wiped away. But suppose the wrongdoer repents sincerely, and apologies profusely, gives (or has taken from him by judges) full reparation and penance, and the victim still refuses to forgive, does the wrongdoer's guilt remain? I suggest that under those circumstances the wrongdoer's guilt disappears, since the wrongdoer has done all that is required on his part to make the world as far as is possible a world in which he had not done that wrong. His moral condition is as far as possible such as it would be if he had not done the wrong – even if the world is not as far as possible such as it would be if the wrong had not been done. In that circumstance the victim no longer has the right to blame the wrongdoer. We speak of a wrongdoer having 'atoned for his wrongdoing', quite apart from whether the victim has forgiven him. But the victim has the ability to remove the wrongdoer's guilt long before the wrongdoer has made full atonement; and he has the right to refuse to do that. The victim has the right not to be the agent of the removal of the wrongdoer's guilt. But if the wrongdoer is not able to make proper atonement, or – though able – does not do so, only the victim's forgiveness can remove the guilt.

While, as I wrote earlier, I find it implausible to suppose that normally by wronging a victim and then seeking forgiveness, the wrongdoer can put the victim under an obligation to do a new act – of forgiving him, there is an issue of whether, when the wrongdoer is unable to make proper atonement after trying for a long time to do so, the victim then has an obligation to forgive. On that, I find my own

intuitions unclear. But undoubtedly it would be a very good thing for the victim to forgive the wrongdoer in this situation. And even if the wrongdoer has removed his guilt by making full atonement, it is still good for the victim to forgive him, because only if the victim forgives the wrongdoer (and so himself undertakes no longer to regard the wrongdoer as someone who has wronged him and so no longer 'holds it against' the wrongdoer that he did the wrong), will both parties have done what they can to make the world be as far as possible a world in which the wrong was not done. Only then would the world be as far as it is possible for anyone to make it thus, a world in which the wrong was not done.

III

Such is my account of the nature of forgiveness in the 'performative utterance' sense, which fits - I claim - naturally with other moral concepts. It is sometimes claimed that the Greeks did not have this concept; they were often reconciled with their enemies, or agreed to overlook the wrongdoing of others, but they did not forgive them. (See for example Konstan 2010, chs 2 and 3.)⁸ It is however very widely agreed that the concept of forgiveness plays a crucial role in the Judaeo-Christian tradition; and I endorse the view that the importance of forgiveness is central to the teaching of Jesus, as set out in the Gospels. This has been denied by Konstan on the grounds that the teaching of Jesus and the subsequent Christian church is primarily concerned with God's forgiveness of human sins, not with forgiveness by one human of the wrongdoing of another human. However contrary to Konstan, it seems to me that the teaching of Jesus contains all the elements involved in inter-human forgiveness which I have been describing. The 'Lord's prayer' (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4) was clearly the only prayer taught by Jesus to be learnt by rote by his disciples. The prayer asks God the Father to 'forgive' (αφειναι) our 'sins' (αμαρτίαι) (in Luke's version) or our debts (οφειλήματα) (in Matthew's version) just as we forgive everyone indebted (οφειλοντι) to us. The same word - αφειναι - is used for what we ask God to do to us, as we claim to do to other humans. For some people to use one word and other people to use a different word in a prayer learnt by rote suggests that they thought that the difference in words made little difference to the meaning, and so that a 'sin' was a 'debt'. That same word, αφειναι, is used elsewhere in the New Testament for what God does for us if we repent (μετανοειν). And we are told to forgive those who sin (αμαρτειν) against us seven times in one day (Luke 17:4) or 'seventy times seven' (Matthew 18:22) each time they sin; and the qualification 'if

[the sinner] repents' is added in two separate verses of the Lukan version (Luke 17: 3 and 4). Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer is followed by Jesus's instruction that if you forgive the faults (παράπτωματα) of humans, your Father will forgive you', but if you do not forgive other humans, your Father will not forgive you. The parallel between God forgiving us and us forgiving others is made very clearly explicit, when sin is treated as a debt. And this is reemphasised in the parable of the two debtors (Mathew 18:23-35), A who owed his Lord an enormous sum, and B who owed A a small sum. At A's pleading the Lord forgave A his debts, but despite B's pleading A refused to forgive B his small debt. The parable ends with the Lord retracting his forgiveness of A; the next verse is 'So will my heavenly Father do to everyone of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your hearts'.

These passages make it very clear that humans wrong each other as well as God, that wronging involves incurring a debt which has to repaid, and that the victim may choose to forgive or not forgive. Humans would not need to pray to God to forgive them if God would do so automatically; and God's forgiveness is not unconditional. The condition for us to receive forgiveness from God for our much greater wrongs against God without God insisting on compensation (except – see section IV- that provided by God himself) is that we should forgive other humans for their much smaller wrongs against us. It is also a natural interpretation of these passages that God will not forgive unless we repent, for to ask for forgiveness is to acknowledge having done wrong and so to repent. The Gospel which the disciples were told to preach to the world was one of 'repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (Luke 24:47).

The passages cited against this natural interpretation of the Gospels include the response of Jesus to scribes' exclamatory question 'who can forgive sins but God alone?' that he 'The Son of Man', 'has authority on earth to forgive sins' (Mark 2:1-12); and the prayer of Jesus from the Cross about his executioners 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do'(Luke 23:34). The response of Jesus to the scribes might seem to suggest that forgiving sins is the prerogative of God and those to whom he gives special authority to do this. But, when one human A wrongs another human B, he also wrongs those who have made A and B the kind of people they are. Hence – since God is the total cause of the existence of A and B and of all those who have nurtured A and B having the power to do - all sins against humans are also sins against God. Further, some sins are sins only against God, e.g. sins of blasphemy and failure to worship. So God (or his appointed deputy) is the major victim of our wrongdoing, and only he (or his deputy) can forgive those wrongs. In purporting to forgive the paralysed man, Jesus was not acting as the direct human victim; for the paralysed man had, as far as we know,

no previous interaction with the human Jesus. He was purporting, to exercise God's right to forgive sins against God, and it was to that that the scribes were objecting., not to the possibility of humans forgiving other humans.

The prayer of Jesus from the cross for his executioners 'Father, forgive them for they do not know not what they are doing' (Luke 23:34) might seem to imply that God can forgive without the wrongdoer needing to acknowledge his wrongdoing. But there is no need to understand it in that way. Perhaps, because there is no obvious other word in contemporary Greek for 'condone', Jesus is asking the Father to condone the wrongdoing of the executioners for the reason that their sins were unintentional, and so their guilt is merely objective. So I stand by my view that the Gospels picture Jesus as expounding the doctrine that forgiveness in return for atonement has the same form when the victim is human, as when the victim is God, given that we bear in mind that God is always at least the indirect victim of all wrongdoing. Contemporary English usage is such that it seems odd to call wronging a human 'sinning' against him, and we may wish to call wronging a person 'sinning' against him only when that person wronged is God; but sinning is always wrongdoing, and it is the logic of wrongdoing and its consequences that I have been exploring.

IV

It is a central Christian doctrine that forgiveness from God is available to us only through the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. There have been various different theories in the history of Christian thought of how the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus provided the atonement for our sins which made that forgiveness available to us. (See for example Swinburne (1989, chapter 10.) But the one which fits best with my account in this paper of the nature of forgiveness is Anselm's 'satisfaction' theory as improved by Aquinas. 'Satisfaction' is Anselm's word which Aquinas adopts, for what I have called 'reparation and penance'. Aquinas acknowledged (3a.48. 2 ad1) that 'the one who sins must repent and confess' but 'satisfaction consists in an exterior act, for which one can make use of instruments, among which friends are included'.; and Aquinas is saying that the wrongdoer (a human) can present to the victim (God) reparation and penance made by a friend, that is Christ. (In future when speaking of 'reparation' I include also 'penance'.) I noted earlier that when wrongdoers are not able to make adequate reparation, others can provide the reparation for them; but it is the wrongdoers who must offer the reparation to the victim, repent, and apologise. We hu-

mans wrong God so often. As I commented earlier, when we hurt our fellow humans, we wrong God in two ways – first because God made and sustains in existence those fellow humans, and secondly because God made and sustains in existence us wrongdoers who have mis-used the powers which God gave us; and we also wrong God in not interacting with him adequately in prayer and worship, seeking to discover and to execute his will for us. Yet we owe God so much anyway that it would be difficult for us to make adequate reparation, which anyway we have often have little inclination to do. We need someone else to provide the reparation for us to offer to God. It is up to the victim, in this case God, to determine (within reason) what would constitute adequate reparation; and one perfect human life (especially if it is a voluntarily offered life of a divine person who is also human) would surely not be too great a reparation. So a generous God might well himself live a perfect human life under the most difficult circumstances under which many humans live which we could offer back to him, saying ‘Please accept, instead of the life which we ought to have lived, this perfect human life’. A perfect human life lived under the most difficult circumstances under which humans live might well end in a painful death, of a kind wrongly judged by others to be shameful.

God could of course have forgiven us in response to our repentance and apology, without requiring the reparation which we are unable ourselves to provide. But it is good for wrongdoers to take responsibility for their serious wrongdoing, and they do that to a limited extent if they have to offer to God such a serious sacrificial offering. Various passages in the New Testament assert that forgiveness is available through the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, whom other passages and subsequent Christian tradition identify as God himself, God the Son, whose life was offered to God the Father on our behalf. Some theologians seem to have thought of the reparation made by Christ merely as his death. But Christ did not commit suicide (and in my view it would have been wrong for him to have done so.) What was important about his death was that it was the result of a series of events which led to his involuntary death, brought about by his free actions of living a perfect life under the difficult circumstances when telling the truth is likely to lead to a cruel involuntary death. It was this life leading to his cruel involuntary death which constituted the reparation for our sins; and his subsequent Resurrection which constituted God the Father's acceptance of that reparation.

This account of how Christ made an atonement coincides with the account in terms of sacrifice given in the Letter to the Hebrews, the one book of the New Testament which discusses the mechanism of the Atonement at any length. The letter regards Christ's death as an effective sacrifice which achieved what the sacrifices in the Jewish

temple could not achieve. 'The blood of Christ' constituted a sacrifice 'without blemish' (Hebrews 9:14) to 'bear the sins of many' (9:28). It was offered only once, and that was all that was needed - 'He entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption' (9:12). In the most primitive way of thinking about sacrifice lying behind (the far more sophisticated) Old Testament thought, a sacrifice is the giving of something valuable to God who consumes it by inhaling the smoke, and often gives back some of it to be consumed by the worshippers (who eat some of the flesh of the sacrificed animal). (See Pedersen 1959, 299-375, esp. 359.) The sacrifice of Christ is then Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God the Son, giving to God the Father the most valuable thing he has - his human life, a perfect life of service to God and humans in difficult circumstances, leading to its being taken from him by his crucifixion. In order for the sacrifice to be successful (that is, for God to accept the sacrifice) Christ 'entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf' (Hebrews 9:24); and the letter also alludes to what the writer must regard as our evidence of Christ's exaltation, that God 'brought [him] back from the dead ... by the blood of the eternal covenant' (13:20).

I have written that Christ 'provided' an atonement and pointed out that the benefits of sacrifice are available only to those who associate themselves with it. And clearly Christians have always claimed that Christ's act makes no difference to us if we do not in some way appropriate it for ourselves. (Christ is 'the source of salvation to all who obey him' - Hebrews 5:9.) We can say to God 'Please accept instead of the life which I ought to have led the perfect life of Christ as my reparation.' Thereby we join our repentance and apology with the reparation which Christ provides. The ceremony of entry into the Christian church is baptism. The Nicene creed echoes various New Testament texts in affirming belief in 'one baptism' (that is, a non-repeatable ceremony) 'for the forgiveness of sins'. The answer of Peter to the crowd who heard his Pentecost sermon and asked 'What should we do?' was 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven.' (Acts 2: 37-8)¹⁰. The association of Christ's death with the forgiveness of human sins, established by baptism is renewed at each eucharist when, St Paul claims, 'as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes' (I Corinthians 11:26). In Matthew's account of the Last Supper, Jesus describes the wine of the eucharist as 'my blood of the covenant for the forgiveness of sins' (Matthew 26:28). So various New Testament texts claim, as does later theological tradition, that God forgiving us is a performative utterance, uttered by the administration to us of the sacraments of the Church (and perhaps in other ways also).

Notes

- 1.Thanks to members of the Notre Dame Center for Philosophy of Religion seminar, to members of the Oxford 'work-in-progress seminar, and to Dana Nelkin and Brandon Warmke for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.
- 2.Holmgren assumes (2012, 12) that 'all persons have equal intrinsic worth and moral status' and so rejects 'the claim that moral worth is based on moral merit'. Of course no one wishes to deny that wrongdoers have, in virtue of still being moral agents, very considerable moral worth; but she denies that they have any less moral worth in virtue of having done wrong, and that involves a denial that they suffer from a guilt which constitutes a stain on their nature.
- 3.For justification of the claims of the last two sentences see my (2013, 214-227).
- 4.Eckel (1997,132) mentions p. 132) the practice of monks of Theravada Buddhism to confess at twice-a-month ceremonies the occasions on which they have broken the monastic code. He quotes a recent account of this code which 'makes it clear that the purpose of confession is not to wipe away guilt or to eliminate the effects of bad action.' Confession is useful, however, according to this account, 'to strengthen one's resolve to refrain from such behaviour in the future, and to reassure other bhikkhus that one is still serious about the training'. Humphreys (1951, 123-4) quotes Amanda Coomaraswamy writing 'The Karmic law ... asserts that this direction [of our life] cannot be altered suddenly by the forgiveness of our sins, but must be changed by our own efforts'.
- 5.The account of my own views (as opposed to my responses to the views of others) which I give in this and subsequent sections is almost entirely the same as that put forward in Swinburne (1989), especially chapters 5 and 10. My view of a paradigm use of forgiving as a performative utterance is developed in Warmke (2016). For reasons of space, my account in the present paper discusses only its application to paradigm cases where one individual can forgive another individual. I do not discuss its application to groups forgiving or being forgiven, or its application to cases where either the victim or the wrongdoer is dead.
- 6.On the appropriateness of the debt analogy see Warmke (2014).
- 7.For the contrary view that at least in some cases, especially when full atonement has been made, there is an obligation on the victim to forgive, see Nelkin (2013) and Griswold (2007,67). But if it were the case, that under certain conditions, the victim has an obligation to forgive the wrongdoer, then, I think that it follows - analytically - contrary to Griswold and Nelkin (2013,27) - that the wrongdoer has 'a right' to be forgiven; although - as they both insist - it is compatible with the view that the wrongdoer is not 'entitled to demand' the fulfilment of the obligation. I argue later that there is just possibly one kind of case where there is an obligation on the victim to forgive, and that is where the wrongdoer tries very hard but is unable to make full atonement and so the victim alone can remove his guilt.
- 8.See Carter (forthcoming) for detailed justification of the claim that Aristotle had a full concept of forgiveness.
- 9.St Paul claimed that 'if Christ had not been raised, your faith would be futile, and you would be still in your sins' (I Corinthians 15:17).
- 10.In discussing the paradigm case of the forgiveness of sins in adult baptism, I pass over its application to infant baptism, and to the forgiveness of 'original sin'. I discuss 'original sin' in Swinburne (1989,137-47, 157, 161).

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18. Quotations from the Bible are taken from the translation in the New Revised Standard Version.