

# The Paradox of Forgiveness

*By*

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Thesis presented for the degree of

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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Spring 2016







# Abstract

This thesis deals with *the paradox of forgiveness*. The presumed outcome of the paradox is that forgiveness is impossible. To determine whether the outcome of the paradox is correct I start by giving an overview of the contemporary philosophical debate about forgiveness. I present what has been classified as two different and competing accounts of forgiveness: conditional and unconditional forgiveness. Further, I problematize making a distinction between two different kinds of forgiveness and propose that we look at them as two different practices, rather than two competing accounts. Further, I diagnose what appears to be a mix up of two importantly different questions concerning the nature of forgiveness: “what is forgiveness?”, and “how can forgiveness be morally justified?” I claim that we can find a solution to the paradox by focusing on giving a descriptive account of conditional forgiveness. Furthermore, the existence of the paradox of forgiveness relies on certain metaphysical assumptions about the connection between agent and act. By looking closer at this relation, and at theories about the role of wrongdoing, blame and forgiveness in our moral lives I present a way of revising these metaphysical assumptions. My conclusion is that if we look at wrongdoing and the affects it has on us as something that persist in social space, and not as private, mental events, we can explain how forgiveness is possible.



# Acknowledgments

First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisor Christel Fricke for introducing me to the topic of forgiveness; for valuable discussion, generous feedback and excellent supervision.

I have also been so fortunate as to take part in a reading group on blame and blameworthiness along with Andreas Brekke Carlsson, Caj Strandberg, Christel Fricke, Knut Olav Skarsaune, Lars Christie, Conrad Bakka and Mathias Helseth, while working on this thesis – and I would like to thank everyone participating for great discussions, important inspiration and feedback.

Further I would like to thank Hallvard Sandven, Nadia Noorman, and Sindre Fjeldstad for insightful feedback during our master reading-group. I am also in great debt to Andreas Brekke Carlsson, Eivor Mæland, Mariona Eiren Bohlin Sturm and, especially, Conrad Bakka for being so generous with their time and providing feedback and comments on drafts to this thesis. I would like to stress that all remaining errors are mine.

Finally I would like to register my appreciation for receiving a stipend from the Centre for the Study of Mind in Nature (CSMN).

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# 1 Introduction: Forgiveness as Philosophical Subject

In this thesis, I will be focusing on the secular, philosophical dimension of forgiveness, leaving aside the related approaches from theology, political philosophy, psychology, sociology, and law. I will limit my examination to questions pertaining to forgiveness as a phenomenon taking place between individuals. This means that I will not discuss cases of forgiveness between states or groups of people. Neither will I examine in depth cases of third party forgiveness, self-forgiveness, or the possibility of forgiving the dead.<sup>1</sup>

Forgiveness is a philosophical issue that gradually has gained attention in contemporary secular ethics. There are many disagreements about how exactly forgiveness should be understood in the literature, but one thing that is agreed upon is that forgiveness is a positive response to moral wrongdoing, and the phenomenon of moral wrongdoing depends on moral laws that determine moral rights and duties between members of a moral community.

We do not forgive natural disasters even if they have caused us physical, psychological or emotional harm: The need for forgiveness only arises where a moral agent, with certain moral duties, can be held responsible for a morally wrong action, and where the victim has certain moral rights not to be treated this way. Thusly, forgiveness first becomes an issue when a *moral agent* has performed a *morally wrong action* towards another *morally relevant* person. Discussions on forgiveness thus relate to the philosophy of responsibility: We must be able to hold the wrongdoer responsible for the morally wrong action. Because wrongs taking place between moral agents depend on moral agency, and thus on the assumption that we, as rational human beings have certain rights and duties towards each other, the damage caused by such wrongs is of a character that cannot be judged of in terms of mere material damage and re-compensation: The damage is of a moral kind. Repairing such damage requires more than legal sanctions: it requires *forgiveness*.

This much is generally agreed on by philosophers writing on forgiveness. This is, however, just the underlying framework giving rise to a need for forgiveness. Within the

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<sup>1</sup> These are all cases of forgiveness that can be seen as problem cases. I will get back to the difference between such cases and the paradigm case of forgiveness between individuals in Chapter 2.

philosophical literature there is little agreement on how forgiveness itself should be defined. What an account of forgiveness should be able to accommodate is first of all its possibility: it should include a description of how forgiveness can be *possible*. A further and separated question is how and when forgiveness is *justified*. The description and justification of forgiveness both naturally rely on our idea of what forgiveness *is*, more fundamentally, and this conception relies on our ideas of what purpose forgiveness has in our moral lives.

## 1.1 Terminological clarifications

One important aspect of our commonsensical conception of forgiveness that the philosophical debate has brought forward relates to how we should distinguish forgiveness from other positive responses to wrongdoing. In other words, our different ideas about what should be classified as ‘forgiveness’ and what should not seems to be at odds.

The verbs ‘to pardon’ and ‘to excuse’ are generally listed as synonyms of forgiveness in English dictionaries. Contemporary discussions have shown, however, that what is *pardonable* or *excusable* might not be the same as what is *forgivable*. If an act is merely pardonable, or excusable, it seems like the wrongdoer is not blameworthy and that forgiveness is therefore not necessary. As mentioned, for forgiveness to be an issue the wrongdoer must be morally responsible. If the agent cannot be held responsible for the wrongdoing she should be *excused* for it, not forgiven. In this sense, excusing is also a positive response to wrongdoing, but one directed at an agent which is not accountable for the action. Unlike a pardon or an excuse, forgiveness is a response to wrongdoing that is done knowingly by an agent that can be held morally responsible, and where there are no justificatory circumstances. In other words, there has to be *something* to forgive. Furthermore, if forgiveness is differentiated from an excuse or a pardon on the grounds that the wrongdoer is being held accountable for a morally wrong action, it seems like the act of forgiveness must contain something more, something that testifies to or annuls the moral wrong that separates it from these other acts. This leads us to the question of what it is that forgiveness *does*, and to what *end* it does so. It has been suggested that the goal of forgiveness is to forswear the resentment, or moral anger, experienced by the victim (Butler 1970/1726, Murphy 2003, Darwall 2006, Griswold 2007). It also seems plausible that for this to be possible the wrongdoer must do something, e.g. repent or apologize, so that the victim has a *reason* for forswearing her resentment. Other reasons for forswearing resentment has also been proposed, such as prudential reasons (Hallich 2013) or reasons pertaining to our common

humanity or solidarity (Gerrard and McNaughton 2003, Johansson 2009, Zaibert 2009). Discussions about what reasons we may have for forgiveness has led to a new debate about what reasons may *justify* forgiveness. The question has then turned from “what is forgiveness?” to “when is forgiveness justified?”

If forgiveness can be either justified or unjustified depending on what reasons we take to have motivated it, it follows that forgiveness can be either commendable or objectionable from a moral perspective. A common example used to illustrate this is Gordon Wilson’s reaction to the death of his daughter, following the Remembrance Day Bombing carried out by The IRA on 8 November 1987.<sup>2</sup> Wilson claimed to forgive the assassins, even if they had done nothing to deserve forgiveness. Some have argued that Wilson’s forgiveness is objectionable from a moral standpoint, others that it is commendable. The question I will be focusing on, however, is whether forgiveness such as this, which lack repentance on the part of the offender, is logically *possible*.

‘Condonation’ is another concept that is often group together with forgiveness, and the verb ‘to condone’ is generally explained as being: to forgive, excuse or overlook. However, condonation is importantly distinguished from excusing in the debate on forgiveness. When we excuse someone we are doing so on the grounds that the presumed offender is not blameworthy for the offense after all. While when we condone someone, the offender is judged to be blameworthy for the offense, but he is still not held accountable. In other words we choose not to expect or demand any form or restoration, repentance or reparation from the wrongdoer even if he is held rightly responsible for the moral wrong. Condonation illustrates the difference between the discussion about what forgiveness *is* and when forgiveness *is justified* because the relation between forgiveness and condonation can be described in two different ways. Firstly, condonation evokes negative connotations: It is a form of ‘letting a moral wrong slide’. As such, condonation might be morally objectionable. From this perspective condonation is unjustified forgiveness, and by distinguishing forgiveness from condonation in this way one is answering the question “when is forgiveness justified?” Second, and crucially, condonation can be separated from forgiveness in a similar way as excusing can, because one can argue that *condonation is not forgiveness*. To argue that condonation is not forgiveness one must first determine what it is that separates the two phenomena and thus answer the question “what is forgiveness?” In sum, either condonation is

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<sup>2</sup> See Gerrard and McNaughton, “In Defense of Unconditional Forgiveness” (2003:39), Bennett “Personal and Redemptive Forgiveness” (2003), and Leo Zaibert “The Paradox of Forgiveness” (2009:384).

seen as an objectionable, and not morally adequate instance of forgiveness, or simply as a different phenomenon from forgiveness entirely.

The debate on when one *ought* to forgive can thus be separated from the discussion on what forgiveness *is*.<sup>3</sup> I hold that the related debate on when it is morally objectionable or commendable to extend forgiveness can be separated from this issue, and that this is of a secondary concern. Because the discussion on the role of forgiveness in our ethical lives has been dominated by an attempt to procure reasons for forgiveness, it has been prone to a mix-up of these two questions. My guess is that this has happened because the reasons proposed have been framed as either justified or unjustified reasons for forgiveness, and they have consequently been interpreted as reasons that make forgiveness objectionable or commendable as opposed to logically possible.

This diagnosis of the debate on forgiveness can explain some of the disagreements on the nature of forgiveness. By separating the attempts to answer the question “what is forgiveness?” from those attempting to propose answer to the question “when is forgiveness justified?” we might get a better answer to the first question. To my mind, the most pressing issue is to determine whether forgiveness is at all logically possible, and to do this we need a descriptive account of forgiveness. A descriptive account should correspond as closely as possible with our commonsensical intuitions about the role forgiveness has in our moral life. I will propose to this by creating a paradigmatic case of forgiveness and determine what its goal is. As will become clear there are disagreements about what the purpose of forgiveness is, and I will discuss these disagreements in Chapter 2. Suffice it to say here that I will claim i) that there are two different kinds of forgiveness, conditional and unconditional. And ii) that the goal of conditional forgiveness is to re-establish the moral standing of the victim and the wrongdoer, as well as to rebuild the relationship between them – and the goal of unconditional forgiveness is simply to forswear resentment or get rid of guilt because it is better for the victim or the wrongdoer not to have these emotions.

It should be mentioned that a descriptive account might contain normative constraint. This does not have to mean that these constraints are moral, normative constraints that lead to the conclusion that forgiveness is objectionable if they are not fulfilled. Instead, I will claim that they limit the scope of what can be classified as forgiveness. As we will see, some of the challenges such an account meets is how to limit the scope of the concept ‘forgiveness’ so

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<sup>3</sup> This point has been raised by Zaibert (2009). I disagree with his account, but agree with his diagnosis of the debate. I will discuss Zaibert’s account further in Chapter 4.

that it does not conflate into excusing or condonation. Further, the account must justify these constraints by explaining what it is that separates forgiveness from e.g. condonation. I have started this discussion above, and I will continue it in the remainder of this thesis.

## 1.2 The paradox of forgiveness and its commentators

The central topic of my thesis is to examine the paradox of forgiveness as outlined by Aurel Kolnai in “Forgiveness” (1973:73). The apparent upshot of the paradox is that forgiveness is logically impossible. Kolnai’s argument is based on the assumption that if one forgives a wrongdoer that has not repented or attempted to make up for her morally wrongful action, what one is doing should rather be classified as *condonation*. Further, if the wrongdoer has repented and done what can be expected of her to make amends she has annulled the morally wrongful action, been separated from it, and there is then seemingly nothing or no one to forgive.

Roughly put the two dilemmas of the paradox can be stated as the following: 1) the wrongdoer does not repent, and the victim is thus addressing the wrongdoer *qua* wrongdoer. In this case one cannot forgive because by forgiving an unrepentant wrongdoer one is actually condoning the action. And 2) the wrongdoer repents and makes amends, and the victim addresses him as someone who is no longer a wrongdoer. In this case one cannot forgive because there is nothing, or rather no one to forgive. The paradox relies on the assumption that forgiveness can only be proper if it is subject to constraints that separate it from excusing and condonation, and that the victim only can forgive if the wrongdoer has met the conditions put forward in these constraints. Further it relies on the idea that by meeting these constraints the wrongdoer can absolve herself of blameworthiness and thus nullify the morally wrong action. If this last assumption is correct it seems like forgiveness becomes redundant. Together these two dilemmas make forgiveness appear impossible: There is seemingly no way in which we can forgive. Either we misuse the term ‘forgiveness’ when condoning an unrepentant wrongdoer or we attempt to forgive someone who no longer is blameworthy.

To understand the paradox properly, I believe it is necessary to look at the assumptions about forgiveness that underlies Kolnai’s two dilemmas. I will do this in Chapter 3. Further, there have been proposed several possible ways of resolving the paradox in the literature. In Chapter 4, I will look at some of them, starting with Leo Zaibert’s paper “The Paradox of Forgiveness” (2009). I argue that Zaibert’s account of forgiveness differs too much from our commonsensical intuitions about the role forgiveness plays in our moral lives

to present a plausible solution to the paradox. Zaibert does, however, present an important diagnosis of the philosophical discussion on forgiveness, namely that the discussion suffers from the common misstep of mixing up the normative and the descriptive enterprises involved in giving an account of forgiveness. I have already touched upon this topic in the previous section, and I will discuss it further in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4. The problem of mixing up the descriptive and normative enterprises surfaces again when I look at Oliver Hallich's response to Kolnai's paradox: "Can The Paradox of Forgiveness be Dissolved?" (2013). I argue that Hallich's attempt at dissolving the paradox by providing prudential and non-mandatory moral reasons for forgiveness fails because he has misinterpreted the outcome of the paradox, with the consequence that the reasons he gives for forgiveness are of the kind that justify forgiveness rather than of the kind that explains how forgiveness can be logically possible. I will also briefly examine Ingvar Johansson's paper "A Little Treatise of Forgiveness and Human Nature" (2009) and Kim Atkins' attempt at dissolving the paradox in "Friendship, Trust and Forgiveness" (2002). I claim that Johansson's attempt fails because he does not properly account for the purpose of forgiveness in our moral lives, and that this has the consequence of compromising the victim. However, I do believe that Johansson is able to account for one important part of the purposes of forgiveness, and I will implement this in my own attempt to resolve the paradox in Chapter 5. Further, I argue that Atkins' account of forgiveness, as something that depends on trust between close friends, holds a lot of promise, but that the reliance on close friendships limits the scope of forgiveness to such a degree that it no longer corresponds with our intuitions about the purpose forgiveness ought to have in our moral lives.

My contention is that none of these solutions are entirely successful in dissolving the paradox. My aim is therefore to propose a new possible solution. This solution will be shaped by an understanding of forgiveness as an intersubjective process. The background for this is the idea that we are all part of a moral relationship and the claim that the purpose of forgiveness is to re-establish moral standing as well as the relationship between the parties involved. Forgiveness thus has two different goals – re-establishing moral worth, and re-establishing the relationship between wrongdoer and victim.

### **1.3 Approach to the problem**

The claim that I seek to defend is that it would be fruitful to look for a solution to the paradox of forgiveness by giving a better descriptive account of the role forgiveness plays in our moral

lives. It is my contention that we, as moral agents and members of a community, take part in a moral relationship. I intend to ground the need for and the possibility of forgiveness on the existence of such a moral relationship. I am here inspired by T. M. Scanlon's (2013) account of a moral relationship, and Kim Atkins' (2002) account of forgiveness as dependent on interpersonal relationships.

We stand in a moral relationship to all rational creatures. To maintain this relationship, and the moral status of the participants in it, we need to repair damages that come about as results of wrongdoings done by one member towards another. When someone has become a victim of morally wrong action their moral standing has been devalued and when someone has done wrong they have forfeited their duties to uphold the standards of others, as part of a moral relationship. To repair the damage, then, the relationship must be reinstated in some way and the moral standing of both the victim and the wrongdoer must be restored. I will argue that this is not a process that can come about as a private subjective mental event; it must be a result of a communicative process between the violator and the violated.

Notice, however, that even if the concept of a moral relationship is a normative concept, the question I will be dealing with – whether forgiveness is logically possible – is not a question that can be answered by appealing to normative moral reasons. In other words, the challenge is not to justify forgiveness, but to explain how it can be logically possible.

By grounding the meaning and purpose of forgiveness in the individuals' participation in a moral relationship, forgiveness appears as a phenomenon that relies on communication between wrongdoer and victim. Further it relies on constraints that specify conditions both for the victim and the wrongdoer. I will therefore propose that the way to solve the paradox has to be through accepting a kind of conditional and communicative forgiveness. I do not thereby contest the existence of another kind of forgiveness, one that can be private and unconditional, but I claim that this second kind of forgiveness is not what we are dealing with in the paradox. I will make the distinction between these two kinds clearer in the next chapter.

## 1.4 Methodological reflections

I will, when accounting for the practice of forgiveness, make a paradigm based explanation of forgiveness.<sup>4</sup> Because forgiveness is a practice that is internally diverse, I believe that a conceptual analysis that attempts to achieve necessary and sufficient conditions will not be

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<sup>4</sup> See Miranda Fricker's explanation of paradigm based explanations in «What's the Point of Blame? A Paradigm Based Explanation» (2016).

able to account for all the non-necessary conditions put on forgiveness. Instead, I will propose one paradigm case of forgiveness through accounting for the purpose this practice has in our moral lives. As we will see in the next chapter, Charles L. Griswold (2007) has already done most of the work by laying out a paradigm case of forgiveness. I will rely on this case a great deal. I choose a paradigm based explanation over one based on conceptual analysis because there seems to be disagreements about what should and should not count as forgiveness. Even if the paradigm based explanation is able to account for more instances of practices we would like to refer to as ‘forgiveness’ than a conceptual analysis would, the account is limited by what I have defined as the point and purpose of forgiveness. I will therefore conclude that there might be another kind of forgiveness, with a different purpose, that does not fall in under the paradigm case. The test for my hypothesis is whether it can explain how forgiveness can be possible and thus resolve the paradox.

Forgiveness is first and foremost a practice taking place in our social life as a response to moral wrongdoing, and the commonsensical understanding of the phenomenon should have an impact on how we discuss it as a philosophical problem. This does not mean, however, that what we might find in philosophical discussion should not have an impact on how we understand forgiveness in our common social interactions. I will several times propose that our commonsensical understanding of forgiveness is inadequate. I believe that we would benefit from a better understanding of the concept of ‘forgiveness’ through philosophical exploration.

## 1.5 Outline

The structure of my investigation is as follows: Chapter 2, “Conditional and Unconditional Forgiveness”, is concerned with the developed and partly underdeveloped distinctions within forgiveness. I begin (2.1) by analyzing what I refer to as *conditional forgiveness*, before I go on to look at the opposing distinction (2.2) *unconditional forgiveness*. In section 2.3 I examine the related distinction between communicative and private forgiveness, and discuss the underlying metaphysical assumptions connected to this divide as well as the implications this has for the role forgiveness has in our moral lives. Following this, section 2.4, deals with the difference between a normative and a descriptive account of forgiveness. In section 2.5 I problematize making a distinction between two different kinds of forgiveness and discuss how we ought to think of these distinctions. I conclude that we need a conditional, communicative and descriptive account of forgiveness to make sense of the paradox. Lastly,

in section 2.6 I present an outline of what this account could look like, by drawing on and implementing conditions put forward by Griswold (2007).

In Chapter 3 “The Paradox of Forgiveness” I examine the paradox of forgiveness as outlined by Kolnai (3.2.). Further, in section 3.4, I present a different, but related, way of formulating the challenge of the paradox, given by Hieronymi (2001). I conclude this chapter with that, given the outcome of the paradox, forgiveness appears impossible or redundant.

In Chapter 4 “Responses to Kolnai’s Account of The Paradox” I present and critically discuss four attempts at resolving the paradox. I start (4.2) by discussing Zaibert’s attempt at resolving the paradox, followed by (4.3) Hallich and Johansson’s proposed solutions. I end (4.4) by looking Atkins’ approach to the paradox. I conclude that neither of the attempts are entirely successful in solving the paradox and that further investigation is needed.

In the fifth and last chapter, entitled “A New Solution to The Paradox” I look at Kolnai’s own solution to the paradox (5.1), and compare this to Hieronymi’s answer to the challenge (5.3) and propose a new possible way out of the paradox by proposing that forgiveness has two separate goals, and that there can still be something for forgiveness to do after the wrongdoer has repented. Finally, in section 5.4 I conclude by summarizing the findings from this thesis.

## 2 Conditional and Unconditional Forgiveness

In this chapter, I will discuss the distinction between conditional and unconditional forgiveness. I start by looking at what has been claimed about conditional and unconditional forgiveness in the philosophical literature on forgiveness, and examine the arguments for and against each of the accounts respectively. The main distinction between the two accounts is whether or not forgiveness is conditioned on the victim and the offender meeting certain requirements.

The separation between conditional and unconditional forgiveness leads to other important distinctions that will have an effect on our understanding of forgiveness. I will mainly discuss the distinction between *communicative* and *private* forgiveness, and the distinction between a *descriptive* and a *normative* account of forgiveness. I claim that the disagreements as to whether forgiveness ought to be conditioned on certain requirements or whether it should be a purely private and mental phenomenon is due to two different ideas about what the point or purpose of forgiveness is.

Further, the conditional account of forgiveness relies on normative constraints. Whether these constraints should be thought of as determining when forgiveness *is justified*, or as determining what forgiveness fundamentally *is* has caused some confusion in the literature. I attempt to diagnose this confusion, and conclude that we should take care to separate these issues when examining forgiveness.

Distinguishing two different account of forgiveness is not unproblematic, and I will discuss how we should think of this divide. What appears to be the main issue is that practices we would like to refer to as ‘forgiving’ are classified as something else, i.e. *not forgiveness*, within the conditional account of forgiveness. We are then faced with the question of whether we should see the divide as between two different accounts of the scope of the concept of ‘forgiveness’, or between two different forms of forgiveness occurring in our social practice of forgiving. In the literature, there is disagreement about which account is better or more correct in this respect. I claim that our account of forgiveness should correspond as closely as possible with our actual practice, but my aim is also to show that forgiving is a practice governed by constraints, and that our account of forgiveness has to limit what practices can be

included in our conception of forgiveness. I conclude that if we describe forgiveness as a phenomenon that admits of degrees of perfection, a conditional account of forgiveness can explain almost all the instances of practices we intuitively would like to refer to as ‘forgiveness’. I nonetheless propose that we have two different conceptions of forgiveness, conditional and unconditional forgiveness, and that they respectively refer to two different phenomena in our practice of forgiveness, with two different goals.

I will argue that the conditional, communicative and descriptive account of forgiveness is the preferred kind of forgiveness, and that it is a prerequisite for the paradox of forgiveness as outlined by Kolnai. It is a preferred kind of forgiveness because the final end of conditional forgiveness, which also limits the scope of the use of the concept of ‘forgiveness’, has a more important function in our social lives. I do not contest the existence of unconditional forgiveness as such, but rather its adequacy compared to conditional forgiveness in relation to the expected, or hoped for, goal of the enterprise. Given this, I will focus on conditional forgiveness when examining the paradox in the following chapters. Finally, I will outline what an account of conditional forgiveness should look like by integrating and building on proposals by Charles Griswold (2007) and Pamela Hieronymi (2001).

## 2.1 Conditional forgiveness

What has emerged as a standard definition of forgiveness is what I will call, following Warmke (2015), *the Resentment Theory of Forgiveness*.<sup>5</sup> The idea is, roughly, that a necessary condition for forgiveness is that the victim forswears resentment, or more precisely: that the particular negative emotions the wrongdoing has occasioned in the victim have to be overcome for forgiveness to come about. This condition is connected to the aforementioned idea that a requirement for forgiveness to be an issue at all, is that the wrongdoing is severe enough to warrant an emotional response in the victim. If the victim felt no moral anger, it would seemingly make no sense to forgive anyone.<sup>6</sup> The moral anger one feels when being

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<sup>5</sup> In an earlier paper, Warmke refers to this view as *the Resentment View* (2011). John Kekes (2009) and Leo Zaibert (2009) label it *the standard view* of forgiveness. Zaibert’s account, which I will discuss in chapter 4, is a novel account because it argues that forgiveness is not the forswearing of resentment, but rather the deliberate refusal to punish (2009). Some defenders of the so-called Resentment Theory are Warmke (2015), Murphy (2003), Griswold (2007), Darwall (2006).

<sup>6</sup> Our reactions to wrongdoing, or the nature of our blame, can take many different shapes: We might not respond with moral anger, but with sadness, disappointment, lack of trust, changed intentions towards the wrongdoer and so forth. Forgiveness would then be the overcoming of these emotional responses. I agree that these are common responses to wrongdoing, and that resentment might not be the best concepts to encapsulate what we have to

wrongly treated also testifies to the conception of ourselves as moral subjects with certain rights not to be treated in this way by other moral agents. As such, the emotional response can be described as a way of protesting being treated immorally, and thus as protecting our moral worth and conception of ourselves as morally relevant subjects. This is an important point that will play a big role in my discussion on conditional forgiveness in the rest of this thesis.<sup>7</sup>

Resentment is the reactive attitude that is most commonly used as an example of what the victim has to overcome. It is nonetheless not unequivocally clear how resentment should be understood. Hieronymi (2001) understands resentment as ‘moral protest’, Hughes (1993) as ‘moral anger’, Gerrard and McNaughton (2003) as ‘hostile feeling’, and Murphy (2003) describes it as a ‘vindictive passion’. What they all have in common is that they view resentment as a negative, emotional response the victim has towards the wrongdoer and her actions. I believe that the reaction one has towards the wrongdoing can vary greatly depending on the victim’s personality and the particular relationship she has to the wrongdoer. The reactive feelings might be expressed overtly, or kept hidden.<sup>8</sup> As Warmke (2015) points out, there is also no general agreement on how one can, or should, overcome resentment. On a conditional account, overcoming resentment will necessarily involve the wrongdoer.

A conditional account thus include the view of forgiveness that has been named the *forgiveness requires repentance thesis*.<sup>9</sup> The idea is, roughly, that the wrongdoer has to repent

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overcome to be able to forgive. However, there is an overwhelming focus on the topic of resentment in the literature on forgiveness, and I have therefore chosen to use the terminology most common to the discussion. Further, I do not believe that my account would change drastically were it to include such reactions to wrongdoing. Whether this is the best terminological choice or not could easily be the topic of another paper. Thanks to Andreas Brekke Carlsson for pointing this out to me.

<sup>7</sup> When talking about moral worth or standing I am referring to the conception we have of ourselves as morally relevant subjects in social interaction. Being subject to a moral wrong does of course not deprive us of our moral dignity. I follow Kant’s idea of moral dignity (See *The Metaphysics of Morals* 1797/1998), and thus believe that moral dignity is something we all have in virtue of being rational, human beings. However, the fact that we have intrinsic moral dignity does not make us invulnerable to moral wrongs. The fact that we can be treated as if we did not have the same moral standing as the wrongdoer, and that we do respond to such wrongdoing with reactive attitudes or other negative emotional responses testify to our vulnerability as social beings. We are vulnerable within social relations because the way other people see and treat us affect how we experience ourselves. Thusly, moral wrongs devalue our moral worth within the social understanding of ourselves as moral agents, as well as the relationship we stand in to others, and this is why we need forgiveness to re-establish, or re-state our moral worth even if we’ll never lose our moral dignity.

<sup>8</sup> How we should understand resentment, and whether this is the best way to describe the reactive attitude of the victim, is too big a topic to get into here. Suffices to say that I believe most of these definitions to have their merit, I will use ‘resentment’, ‘moral anger’, ‘reactive attitudes’ and ‘moral protest’ interchangeably in this thesis. I take all these definitions to refer to the negative emotional response the victim experiences, and I use the different terms as synonyms.

<sup>9</sup> Among those arguing that forgiveness cannot come about without repentance: Kolnai (1974), Lang (1994), Murphy (1988), Novitz (1998), Richards (1988), Swinburne (1989), Wilson (1988), Griswold (2007), Hieronymi (2001). To my knowledge, Zaibert (2009) was the one who coined the term of the thesis.

and show remorse – thereby showing the victim she no longer endorses her wrongful action – for forgiveness to be possible. The importance of repentance is often connected to the idea that we can communicate without using words, and that a morally wrongful action thusly can be seen as claiming something about the moral worth of the victim. What the wrongdoer is communicating is that the victim can be treated in a certain way, and that she is not worthy of being treated morally correct (Murphy 1988:25 and Hieronymi 2001:546). If this view of wrongdoing is sound, repentance is important because it testifies to the wrongdoer retracting the claim that the victim can be treated in this way. What we resent when we become the victim of moral wrongdoing is this claim (that we are not worthy of moral consideration), thusly repentance can be a justified reason for forswearing resentment. Unjustified reasons for forswearing resentment do not depend on rational control in the same way the judgment that the wrongdoer no longer claims that the victim is not worthy of being treated morally correct does. I will discuss the claim that forgiveness depends on rational control further in section 2.2. Suffice to say that forgiveness is an action and not just a hoped for result of other steps we take (Zaragoza 2012:610). This means that on a conditional account of forgiveness, forswearing of resentment is not sufficient for forgiveness; forgiveness depends on other necessary constraints, and one of them is the wrongdoer's repentance.

Repentance can take many forms, but for it to be a reason for forswearing resentment, it has to be overtly expressed. In this sense repentance is an action, and not just a mental state, that testifies to the wrongdoer's attitude towards her own action. Severe wrongdoing of the kind that warrants forgiveness varies greatly in kind, and the reactive attitudes the victim experiences will vary accordingly, for this reason the criteria put on the wrongdoer will also vary. Repentance and forswearing of resentment is therefore not always the only conditions put on forgiveness, and repentance alone can involve several actions and expression depending on the relationship between the wrongdoer and the victim and the context of the wrongdoer. Some other conditions that can be included under the heading of resentment are: that the wrongdoer actively asks for forgiveness; that the wrongdoer expresses her understanding of the phenomenological experience of the wrongdoing from the victim's standpoint; and that the wrongdoer shows by way of action that she will not continue in the same path of wrongdoing. I will discuss these conditions further in the last section of this chapter.

On a conditional account of forgiveness both these processes, repentance and forswearing of resentment, are closely intertwined and dependent on each other: The victim

depends on the wrongdoer's repentance to be able to overcome her resentment, and the wrongdoer depends on the victim's overcoming of resentment to be forgiven. Conditional forgiveness can thus be understood not just as something conditioned on the wrongdoer's actions and emotional processes, but also on the victim's. Following this description, forgiveness seems better described as a process than as one single action.

The importance of putting conditions on forgiveness is often argued for by appealing to the victim's self-respect (Hieronymi 2001, Griswold 2007, Murphy 1988). This line of thought is conceived through considering what it would mean to forgive someone without expecting the wrongdoer to repent; and it has been claimed that forgiveness without repentance is not genuine forgiveness, but rather some form of excuse, or more precisely, *condonation* (Kolnai 1974, Hieronymi 2001, Murphy 1988, Griswold 2007).

Hieronymi argues that justified resentment is grounded in three beliefs: 1) That the wrong done by the offender was a serious one; 2) That you do not deserve to be treated in this way; and 3) That the wrongdoer is someone you can expect not to do such a thing (2001:530). For forgiveness to be genuine, on Hieronymi's view, you have to continue to hold these three beliefs. If you let go of your belief that the wrong done was a serious one – by for example discovering that there are justificatory circumstances – forgiveness is not an issue anymore, and the wrongdoer can be excused. If you let go of the belief that you do not deserve to be treated in this way, you have devalued your own moral worth, and by forgiving you are actually condoning. And, finally, if you let go of the belief that the wrongdoer is someone you can expect not to act in this way, you are claiming that the wrongdoer is not morally responsible, or blameworthy, in which case forgiveness is not an issue anymore. In Hieronymi's terminology, forgiveness becomes *compromising* if we let go of any of these beliefs. It is compromising because it compromises the moral worth of either you or the wrongdoer. I focus in particular on the belief that 'you do not deserve to be treated in this way'. Murphy argues similarly that we should not seek restoration of relationships at the cost of our human dignity. If we forgive too easily, it testifies to a lack of self-respect (Murphy 1988:17–18).

The underlying thought in these arguments is that when we have been severely wronged the offender has treated us as someone who does not deserve the consideration of being treated morally correct. If we do not resent this wrongful action, we are thus accepting that we do not have the status that is required for having a right not to be morally wronged. Conditional forgiveness can therefore be seen as depending on a general idea of moral

dignity: a dignity we all share in virtue of being moral agents participating in a moral relationship, community, or other. Our moral dignity is not something we can lose by being victimized by a morally wrongful action: “The dignity which, according to Kant, every human being has simply in virtue of being human is a source of moral rights and duties, and no actual disrespect of these rights and duties can destroy it” (Fricke 2011:55). The self-conception of ourselves as morally significant agents, however, can be damaged by such disrespect. As Christel Fricke points out, moral dignity is “not an intrinsically social status” (2011:53). It is as social being we become vulnerable to moral wrongs, not as human beings with intrinsic moral worth. We do not lose our moral dignity by being wronged, but if this dignity made us invulnerable, we would never have the need to forgive anyone. In other words, it is within the intersubjective and social understanding of ourselves as moral agents, which again depends on others understanding of ourselves as morally relevant agents, that forgiveness becomes an issue. Consequently it is our self-conception that is being damaged by wrongdoing, not our intrinsic dignity. “After all, the psychic reality of our self-respect depends on our experience of other people’s respect rather than on our intrinsic moral value” (Fricke 2011:57). As such resentment is a protest of this damage and it testifies to us taking our own moral worth seriously. Further, because our understanding of ourselves as morally relevant subjects is socially constructed it depends on the relationships we have to others, and a morally wrongful action damages the relationship we stand in to the offender (Fricke 2011:52). Consequently, conditional forgiveness has as its main goal to re-establish the victim’s moral worth, and, I claim, a secondary goal of re-defining the relationship between wrongdoer and offender.<sup>10</sup> If one accepts that this is indeed the purpose of forgiveness, and that re-establishing moral worth depends on the wrongdoers repentance, it follows that forgiveness extended without repentance and forswearing of resentment, is not rightly classified as ‘forgiveness’ on the conditional account.

It is essential to specify that when I talk about repentance as a justified reason for forswearing resentment, this does not mean that it is also a justified reason for forgiveness. As mentioned, there are normative constraints bearing on conditional forgiveness, but they are not of the kind that renders forgiveness immoral if not met. In other words, I am not looking for an answer to the question for when forgiveness is justified, only to the question of how forgiveness can be possible. When talking about what makes forswearing of resentment justified, I am thus not trying to establish what makes forgiveness morally adequate, I am

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<sup>10</sup> I will discuss this further in section 2.3.

rather trying to describe the practice of forgiveness as something that has as its goal to re-establish the moral worth of the victim. For this goal to be logically possible to achieve it is necessary to forswear resentment as a response to repentance, because repentance seems to be a necessary condition for us to re-establish moral worth.

To sum up, a conditional account of forgiveness limits the scope of the concept of ‘forgiveness’ to phenomena that necessarily depend on forswearing of resentment on the part of the victim and repentance on the part of the wrongdoer. Further, repentance and forswearing of resentment are mutually dependent processes that also involve other constraints. The constraints are there because the role we attribute to conditional forgiveness in our moral life is that of re-establishing moral standing and re-defining the relationship between the wrongdoer and the victim. This goal can only be met if these requirements are met. The challenges this position faces are 1) that it seems unable to explain phenomena we would like to refer to as ‘forgiveness’, like forgiving the dead and third party forgiveness, as well forgiving the unrepentant; and 2) that it removes the prerogative to forgive from the victim because it depends on actions performed by the wrongdoer.

## 2.2 Unconditional forgiveness

*The Resentment Theory of Forgiveness* is generally accepted as a standard definition of forgiveness in the literature.<sup>11</sup> That forgiveness also depends on the wrongdoer’s repentance is, however, not universally accepted as the best conception of forgiveness. There are several contributions in the literature on forgiveness that argue for forgiveness as a phenomenon that does not depend on the wrongdoer meeting certain conditions.<sup>12</sup> These accounts of forgiveness can be called unconditional, unilateral or private forgiveness because they only depend on the victim’s mental state, and not on the offender’s repentance or wish to be forgiven.

One incentive for this view can be found in its appeal to a more commonsensical understanding of forgiveness. It seems plausible that we often forgive without expecting the wrongdoer to meet certain criteria. One might suddenly discover that one has no reactive

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<sup>11</sup> We will see in Chapter 4 that there are exceptions to this claim. Leo Zaibert argues that one can forgive even if one still feels resentment towards the wrongdoer (2009). Forgiveness is thus something we do for a moral reason and not something we do for the victim’s sake. Traditional unconditional forgiveness holds that we should let go of resentment for the sake of the victim, or for the sake of the wrongdoer (Johansson 2009:550). We forgive for the victim’s sake if we forgive for reasons of mental health or closure. And we forgive for the wrongdoer’s sake if we forgive for solidarity or benevolence on the grounds that we are all fallible moral beings.

<sup>12</sup> See Zaibert (2009), Bennett (2003), Gerrard and McNaughton (2003), Downie (1965), Holmgren (1993), Derrida (2001) and O’Shaughnessy (1967).

attitudes towards someone who hurt us in the past without the offender having done anything to make up for the wrongdoing or actively asked for forgiveness. Further, it seems plausible that we are able to forgive the dead, and that we are able to forgive someone on behalf of someone else. Should we not be able to call this forgiveness?

The proponent of conditional forgiveness might argue that one cannot, or should not, call this forgiveness because if we did, forgiveness would get dangerously close to forgetting or condoning. It is argued that forgetting is not forgiving because forgiving is something we do, not something that merely happens to us (Murphy 1988:15, Hallich 2013:1000). If the assumption that forgiveness requires forswearing of resentment is true, we thus need a justified reason to let go of resentment, so that forgiveness becomes a rational choice, and not just something that happens to us. Oliver Hallich (2013) argues that forgiveness is separate from forgetting mainly because forgiving is something we do for a reason, and something we sometimes think we ought to do, while forgetting is not (2013:1001).<sup>13</sup> If forgiveness is not the result of a rational choice but rather just something that happens to us, it is a practice that is outside our agency, and thus not something we can control or extend at will. It would consequently not make sense to ask for forgiveness; because forgiveness would then be something we only could hope for. Zaragoza (2012) points out that if one equates forgiveness with the loss of resentment itself, or the non-rational manipulations of it, like taking a specially design pill that removes the resentment, or forgetting, one faces a problem. First, if one equates forgiveness with the loss of resentment itself one loses the kind of control one thinks is essential to forgiveness, because loss of resentment can come about in many ways that do not depend on our rational choice. Further, by equating forgiveness with non-rational manipulations, like forgetting, there is no guarantee that one will actually forswear resentment, consequently forgiveness would not necessarily entail forswearing of resentment.

An unconditional account of forgiveness therefore has to provide a reason for forswearing resentment that is not based on non-rational activities, like forgetting, but that are active choices that preserve the kind of rational control an act of forgiveness requires.

Another way of establishing a reason for forswearing resentment unconditionally is by appeal to our common humanity. Gerrard and McNaughton (2003) argue that we have a reason to forgive unconditionally because we can acknowledge that we are all morally fallible

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<sup>13</sup> Hallich is here talking about reasons for forgiveness, as such, and not for forswearing resentment. I believe that forswearing resentment is necessary for forgiveness, but not sufficient. And as I will argue later, I do not accept Hallich's account of forgiveness. I will get back to the consequence of not separating reasons for forgiveness from reasons for forswearing resentment later in this section.

beings. This realization is supposed to make us forgive on the basis of solidarity with our morally fallible peers: In a possible world very close to this one, I might have done the same blameworthy action. Zaibert (2009) argues similarly that we should forgive for the moral reason that it would be better for all involved, overall, to forgive rather than to punish. As such this is a consequentialist form of unconditional forgiveness. Ingvar Johansson (2009) also defends the existence of unconditional forgiveness on a similar ground by appealing to benevolence. He claims that unconditional forgiveness might be stupid, but it is nonetheless possible because we have benevolent other-regarding desires (2009:552–553). On Johansson's view benevolent other regarding desires are basic desires that do not require objective reasons. This means that they cannot be justified but only explained by the subjective values and causal explanations available (2009:543). We can therefore forswear resentment unconditionally through our basic, benevolent, other-regarding desire.

If Johansson is right, his argument contests the idea that forgiveness is something we do for a reason and that depends on rational control. I will get back to Johansson's account of forgiveness when discussing the different solutions to the paradox of forgiveness in Chapter 4. Gerrard and McNaughton, on the other hand, believes that our love for humanity represents a justified reason for forgiveness, and therefore that it preserves the kind of control we expect a victim to have when deciding to forgive. The problem with this account, however, is that human solidarity does not provide us with a justified reason to forswear resentment; instead it provides us with a justified reason for forgiveness. In other words, what Gerrard and McNaughton has given us, is an account of how unconditional forgiveness can be morally permissible, not how it can reach the goal of retaining the moral worth of the victim, or re-establish the relationship between victim and wrongdoer. Furthermore, if Gerrard and McNaughton did propose that human solidarity could be a reason for forswearing resentment, they would face the problem mentioned above. If we equate forgiveness with the non-rational manipulations or processes that can lead to forswearing of resentment (viz. human solidarity) there could be no guarantee that forgiveness would actually lead to forswearing of resentment because we can feel solidarity and still resent. Zaibert, on the other hand, believes that forswearing of resentment is not necessary for forgiveness, and that forgiveness does not have to be communicated in any way. As such, the unconditional forgiveness Zaibert argues for does not seem to have the same goal we saw that conditional forgiveness has.

Similarly, we have the view that a reason for overcoming resentment is that it is better for the victim's mental health.<sup>14</sup> It is what we are often met with when reading about forgiveness in the abundant self-help literature. Here forgiveness is being treated as a means to mental health. The reason we have for overcoming resentment, on this view, is simply that it makes us feel better. The problem with the two last views is that they do not provide an explanation of how the victim can re-establish her moral standing in the community, or how one can re-build the relationship between wrongdoer and victim. As we will see in the next section, this is because they treat resentment as a force that can be manipulated, and not something that is subject to rational revision. But also, that they do not seem to see the goal of forgiveness to be the re-establishing of moral worth and re-defining of the relationship between victim and wrongdoer, but rather the removal of resentment because it is good for the victim's mental health, or because it absolves the wrongdoer of guilt.

Given these considerations it seems like the proponent of unconditional forgiveness has several advantages, but also several challenges. The unconditional account has an advantage over the conditional account because it seems to fit better with our commonsensical understanding of the scope of the concept 'forgiveness', and because it retains forgiveness as the prerogative of the victim to a greater degree than the conditional account does. However, the account has to provide a reason for how we can overcome resentment, so far the best reason seems to be that we can forgive by way of our recognition of our human situation and our benevolence or respect for others, or our own well-being. This does however seem to mean that the purpose of unconditional forgiveness is different from the purpose of conditional forgiveness – and if the purpose of unconditional forgiveness is different from conditional forgiveness, we would be better of classifying them as two different kinds of forgiveness occurring in our social practice, rather than two different accounts of forgiveness.

### **2.3 The distinction between communicative and private forgiveness**

Conditional forgiveness seems to rely on communication between the wrongdoer and the victim in a way that unconditional forgiveness does not. This is simply because conditional forgiveness relies on some interpersonal exchange of meaning between the parties involved for the conditions to be met: The offender has to communicate to the victim that she has repented, and changed her heart. It can be discussed whether this communication has to be

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<sup>14</sup> Holmgren (1993) is one defender of the view that a reason for forgiveness is that it is good for the forgiver.

verbal, or if actions that testify to this change of heart are sufficient, but the offender also has to actively ask for forgiveness (there doesn't seem to be any way around verbal communication in this case). Further, the victim has to communicate her forgiveness to the offender.<sup>15</sup>

As mentioned, there is no agreement in the literature on how one can forswear resentment in a way that retains rational control. In her account of forgiveness, Hieronymi seeks to do something about this (2001). Hieronymi's worry is that the discussion on forgiveness deals with resentment, or reactive feelings in general, as "forces to be manipulated" (2001:535). Accounts of forgiveness that treat resentment as something 'to be overcome' through non-rational manipulation of resentment she refers to as *unarticulated* accounts (2001:530). Resentment has to be treated, Hieronymi writes, rather as feelings that carry information about how we experience the world, and thus important knowledge we should take seriously. This means that, on her account, emotions are judgment-sensitive attitudes (2001:535) and consequently not something we should try to conquer or banish without a good reason. In other words, revising our judgment about the wrongful action and forswearing resentment is something we do for a reason; and for this reason to be justified it must not compromise the victim's moral standing. As mentioned (in section 2.1), *uncompromising* forgiveness involves a change in judgment that leaves the three judgments that legitimate resentment standing. We thus need to articulate the change in view that lets us change our judgments about the wrongful action in a way that does not compromise the victim. Because our reactive attitudes are judgment sensitive, we need a change in judgment to forswear resentment; and because resentment is a reaction to wrongdoing, we need a reason to change our judgment about the wrongdoer to forswear resentment. On a conditional account of forgiveness, a repentant wrongdoer can be what prompts us to change our judgment.

Further, Hieronymi describes resentment as a moral protest: Resentment protests a past action that persists as a present threat (2001:546). Consider the classical example of the unfaithful spouse: If your wife has cheated on you, it is likely that you will react with resentment. Further, if your wife never expresses regret, or does anything to show you that

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<sup>15</sup> Other authors who have argued for a distinction between communicative and non-communicative forgiveness includes: Zaibert (2009), Schimmel (2002) and Bennett (2003). Schimmel uses the terms 'private' and 'interpersonal' (42ff?) and Bennett uses the terms 'redemptive' and 'personal' forgiveness. Bennett and Schimmel both focus on the power forgiveness has to restore relationships and moral status, while Zaibert distances himself from these view and argues that forgiveness can be entirely independent of the relationship between victim and wrongdoer (Zaibert 2009:386).

she does not consider this a wrongful action, but instead continues as if nothing had happened, you are likely to feel the possibility of her doing the same thing again as a persistent threat. This explains why overcoming resentment is so important for conditional forgiveness: Resentment is necessary because the wrong that needs forgiving has done harm, and it testifies to an attitude that persists as a present threat for the victim. I hold that the threat is not only one directed at the victim, but also at all members of the moral community to which the wrongdoer belongs. Your unfaithful wife's friends might consider this a threat to their friendship: someone who cheats on someone they love without feeling regret, attempting to make up for their wrong, or apologize, will probably be likely to betray their friends. In addition to being a communicative act between offender and victim resentment is thus also a communication that extends beyond their relation to a greater, moral relationship.<sup>16</sup>

According to Scanlon, a moral relationship can be described as a relationship we stand in to all rational creatures. Scanlon understands a relationship as "a set of intentions and expectations about our actions and attitudes towards one another that are justified by certain facts about us" (2013:86). The concept of a relationship, on this account, is a normative concept that is "specifying the conditions under which a particular relationship of this kind exists and the attitudes and intentions that parties to such a relationship ought, ideally, to have toward each other" (Scanlon 2013:86). Scanlon's account of a relationship can be applied to personal friendships as well as universal relationships, like the one we stand in to all rational human beings in virtue of being moral agents (Scanlon 2013:87). This means that, as members of a community, we are bound by normative constraints: There are certain things we should not do to each other. At the same time, we naturally have claims on not being treated in certain ways by others. One might see the moral relationship as something that can be damaged by wrongdoing, and to maintain it, and the moral worth of the participants in it, we need to repair damages that come about as results of wrongdoings done by one member towards another. Seen in relation to what I have said about our self-conception as dependent on how others see and treat us, this conception of moral relationships explains how it is that our moral worth is affected by wrongdoing. When someone has become a victim of morally

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<sup>16</sup> I contend that the relation between wrongdoer and victim is the most important in this context, and that it differs from the relation the victim and the wrongdoer have to the rest of the members of the community. Nonetheless, when someone has wronged someone else, and thereby devalued someone's moral worth, this has an effect on how both the wrongdoer and the victim are perceived by other members of the community, and on how they chose to behave towards other members. Whether we should separate the personal relationship between wrongdoer and victim from the general and universal relationship we all stand in to each other will be discussed in Chapter 5. I suggest that we should separate the two, and that restoring the balance within the universal moral relationship is more important, as well as more likely to be supererogatory than restoring the personal relationship, which is something that always should be the prerogative of the victim.

wrong action the conception of their own moral worth has been devalued; and when someone has done wrong they have forfeited their duties to uphold the standards of others as part of a moral relationship. In Scanlon's terminology we could say that one has indicated intentions and attitudes that are faulty by the standards of a relationship (Scanlon 2013:88). To repair the damage, then, the relationship must be reinstated in some way and the moral worth of both the victim and the wrongdoer must be restored. Conditional forgiveness appears to play an important role in this process.

Further, this is not a process that can come about as a private, subjective mental event; it must be a result of a communicative process between the violator and the violated. Because relationships hold between individuals, and the wrongdoing that renders the perpetrator blameworthy is connected to the existence of a moral relationship, it seems necessary that both parties have to be involved in an attempt at repairing (and perhaps continuing) this relationship.

If one accepts this framework it becomes evident how a harmful action can be viewed as communicating a threat. It is a threat because it compromises the moral worth of the victim (and the wrongdoer) as members of a moral relationship, constituted by normative rights and duties. Hieronymi proposes that actions can be seen as conveying a meaning; and in this sense as making certain claims. Actions can carry meaning because they convey the evaluations of the agent performing them (Hieronymi 2001:546). A morally blameworthy action can thus be seen as making a claim about how the victim can be treated. By resenting this claim the victim protests and challenges its meaning, and thereby conveying the judgment that she cannot be treated in this way. If such a claim, i.e. the meaning of a wrongful action, is not retracted, it will persist as a threat to the victim's moral standing in the relationship.

When the wrongdoer repents, what she is doing can be explained within this framework as changing the significance of the past wrongful action. The threat is then no longer standing because the wrongdoer has retracted the claim that the victim can be treated in this way. When the wrongdoer has repented and thus acknowledged the wrongfulness of the action and the moral status of the victim, a change in view or revision of judgments can come about. This is the only way we can forgive uncompromisingly, according to Hieronymi (2001:552). We thus have an account of how one can forswear resentment and retain the rational control required on a conditional account of forgiveness; and it depends on a repentant wrongdoer and on communication.

If forgiveness is seen as a private mental event, on the other hand, there is no need for communication. From the perspective of unconditional forgiveness, the victim can forgive simply by deciding, by herself, to do so. She has no need for the offender to communicate that she has changed her heart; she has no need for the offender to ask for forgiveness; and she has no need to communicate her forgiveness to the offender.

The benefit of an account of forgiveness that does not depend on communication is that it can explain how we can forgive the dead; that we can forgive someone with whom we cannot communicate for other reasons, as well as how we can forgive ourselves. By making forgiveness a phenomenon that only depends on the private, mental process of the victim the proponent of unconditional forgiveness can explain phenomena we refer to as ‘forgiveness’, that a conditional account cannot. However, given that it does not rely on the wrongdoer’s repentance, it seems to lack the ability to explain how we can overcome resentment in an articulate and uncompromising way. Within the framework of Hieronymi’s account, we can say that an unconditional account of forgiveness does not give us any good reason to change our judgment, and thus no way of rationally undermining resentment.

Another benefit of unconditional forgiveness is that it makes forgiveness the prerogative of the victim, to a greater degree than conditional forgiveness does. This is because the victim can freely choose to forgive, independently on any action performed by the wrongdoer.

As mentioned earlier, the proponent of unconditional account can argue that a reason for forswearing resentment can be our benevolence, our understanding of our common human condition, or simply the moral reason that it would be better for all involved if we were to forgive. The problem with appealing to benevolence or the love for humanity in this way, is, as Hieronymi points out, that there is no guarantee that these processes or non-rational manipulations will actually make us forswear resentment (2001:539). We can thus only hope that forswearing of resentment will come about as consequence of them, and this deprives us of the kind of control we expect to have over an act of forgiveness. Love and resentment are not incompatible feelings, so we could easily feel resentment or other reactive feelings towards someone we love. Further, if we forgive on the basis of our love for humanity this forgiveness is, following Hieronymi, compromising, because it does not involve a revision of the persistent threat that follows from uncorrected wrongdoing and it does therefore not re-establish the moral worth of the victim.

The discussion I have now presented seems to hint at conditional forgiveness as somehow superior to unconditional forgiveness. Nonetheless, conditional forgiveness excludes phenomena that occurs in our common practice of forgiveness, and that we would like to be able to refer to as ‘forgiveness proper’. As mentioned in the previous section, the solution to this problem might be that the best way to look at the different accounts, conditional and unconditional forgiveness, is not as competing views but rather as two different kinds of forgiveness as it occurs in our common practice. I will get back to this in section 2.5.

## 2.4 The normativity of conditional forgiveness

Another aspect of the conditional account that might prove problematic is that if forgiveness is impossible, ungenuine, or not proper in case the wrongdoer has not repented and the victim overcome feelings of resentment, the conditional account of forgiveness must explain *in what sense* forgiveness is not proper, genuine or possible without these conditions. Is forgiveness without repentance not genuine forgiveness in the sense that it is morally objectionable to forgive someone who has not repented? Or does it mean that it is logically impossible to forgive someone who has not repented?<sup>17</sup> In either case, it seems like conditional forgiveness implies that there are normative constraints bearing on forgiveness. There are normative constraints on forgiveness, if it is objectionable to forgive the unrepentant, because it says something about when we ought, or ought not, to forgive. These are moral, normative constraints. On the other hand, there are normative constraints on forgiveness if it is logically impossible to forgive the unrepentant, because this says something about when we ought to refer to a specific phenomenon as ‘forgiveness’. These are non-moral normative constraints.

We do in fact refer to instances of forgiveness without repentance as ‘forgiveness’, but what the proponent of the conditional account claims, is that this is not *forgiveness proper* – or genuine forgiveness, or uncompromising forgiveness – it is rather condonation, forgetting or excuse making. What is important is to specify, then, is which constraints are moral, normative constraints, and which are non-moral normative constraints – and thusly whether what one is doing is trying to answer the question of when forgiveness is justified, or rather, how forgiveness can be possible.

Normative constraints of the first kind, i.e. forgiveness is objectionable if the

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<sup>17</sup> Leo Zaibert (2009) has argued that most proponents of the ‘forgiveness requires repentance’-thesis are guilty of mixing up the descriptive and the normative when accounting for forgiveness.

wrongdoer has not repented, are motivated by the fact that if one condones, one fails to hold the wrongdoer properly responsible for the moral wrong. If the wrongdoer is not held responsible there is a chance that she will not be made aware of the fact that the action she performed was morally wrong and that she has caused someone harm. If this is the case, she will not be able to rectify her actions, and in the worst case, she would continue to cause offense to others. If one forgives someone who has not repented and this leads to the wrongdoer continuing her offensive behaviour, one could argue that this kind of forgiveness is immoral. Another motivation to claim that repentance is necessary for forgiveness to be justified is what was mentioned in relation to Wilson's forgiveness of the IRA bombers in the introduction. One might claim that this forgiveness is morally impermissible because it testifies to Wilson not taking the moral worth of his daughter serious enough, or that he does not take the terrorist action seriously enough.

Further, the first kind of moral constraints pertain to answers to the question “is forgiveness justified in this case?”<sup>18</sup> The answer to this question will be given in forms of reasons, and these reasons can be either justified or unjustified. If one interprets the normative constraints bearing on conditional forgiveness in the first sense, they are constraints on what reasons we should accept as justified reasons for forgiving. In other words, they have to be justified reasons for forgiveness that decide whether it is morally adequate to forgive the offender in this particular situation. The question I am dealing with in this thesis, however, is not about when forgiveness is morally objectionable or commendable, but rather about how forgiveness can be possible, given the challenges posed by the paradox I will discuss in the next chapter. It is thus a question about logical possibility, and not one of moral adequacy.

In the attempt to establish the logical possibility of forgiveness the need for justification is limited to reasons for forswearing resentment. The justification of forswearing resentment I have described in the previous section is not an attempt to answer the question of whether one morally ought to forgive when someone has repented, or whether forgiveness itself is justified. It is rather an attempt at describing what forgiveness, as such, must involve if it is to meet the goal of re-establishing the moral worth of those involved and re-constitute the relationship between them. The justification of forswearing of resentment plays a role in this description, but it is not proposed as an answer to the question of when forgiveness is

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<sup>18</sup> Murphy (1988) writes that “The Question ‘What is forgiveness?’ cannot after all be sharply distinguished from the question ‘How is forgiveness justified?’ ... We cannot define forgiveness and then ask what moral reasons make it appropriate” (1988:23). I have formulated the questions slightly different because I do believe we can talk about what forgiveness is without saying anything about its moral adequacy.

morally adequate. It is rather an attempt at limiting what conditional forgiveness has to look like if it is to be the kind of phenomena that re-establishes moral standing and interpersonal relationships. The logical possibility of conditional forgiveness thus seems to rely on non-moral normative constraints, and the constraints are necessary constituents of forgiveness as an enterprise with the specific goal of re-establishing moral worth and re-constituting relationships.

Moral, normative constraints are not the only normative constraints that can be bearing on forgiveness. The constraints I will be focusing on are not of the kind that determine when forgiveness is justified, but rather of the kind that specify what kind of practice should fall in under the concept of ‘forgiveness’. By calling a particular action ‘condonation’ as opposed to ‘forgiveness’ a conditional account implicates that forgiveness without repentance is logically impossible given the way the account has defined forgiveness. In this sense, they say something about when what we are doing is forgiveness, and when it is something else. These normative constraints are thus pertaining to the question: “what is forgiveness?”. And to answer this question we need to give a descriptive account of forgiveness.

## 2.5 The relation between conditional and unconditional forgiveness

The question I now turn to deals with how we should think of the distinction between conditional and unconditional forgiveness. Is what we are dealing with two separate accounts of forgiveness, where one is more accurate, or true, than the other? Or is it simply two different kinds of forgiveness, where both kinds exist in our common practice of forgiving, but where the end goal is different, or where one kind is more adequate in a certain context?

From the discussion in the previous section, I will argue that the goal of forgiveness is different within the two accounts. Forgiveness as a phenomenon that has as its final aim to re-establish the relationship between wrongdoer and offender necessarily contains normative constraints that limit what phenomena should be referred to as ‘forgiveness’. Forgiveness without such constraints will not be able to retain the goal of re-establishing the relationship between wrongdoer and victim, and thus becomes a different *kind* of forgiveness. The question is whether this other forgiveness should be understood as a different *kind* of forgiveness, or rather just as a less perfect instantiation of forgiveness.

Griswold (2007) proposes a divide somewhat similar to the one I have presented: He distinguishes between *perfect*, or *paradigmatic*, forgiveness, and *imperfect* forgiveness. Perfect forgiveness is something akin to conditional forgiveness and imperfect forgiveness is

something akin to unconditional forgiveness. Examples of imperfect forgiveness are scenarios where the wrongdoer or the victim are not alive, not in a position to communicate with each other, or where the wrongdoer is unrepentant, but where forgiveness can take place nonetheless. For example: forgiving the dead, third party forgiveness, or self-forgiveness. For Griswold the paradigmatic case of forgiveness is a scenario where both parties are alive, have an understanding of the offense as morally wrongful and a wish to restore the relationship.

On Griswold's account, forgiveness is something that admits of degrees: "The relation between ideal and non-ideal forgiveness is in that sense inclusive rather than exclusive. I am therefore subscribing to the view...that forgiveness admits of approximation or degree" (2007:114). His account is thus one that admits of imperfect forgiveness, but a kind of imperfect forgiveness that nonetheless has restrictions: there are certain threshold conditions that have to be met for a given action to be called 'forgiveness'. The threshold conditions Griswold enumerates are: 1) the willingness of the victim to lower her pitch of resentment (this condition also opens for the possibility that this willingness can be imaginatively reconstructed by a suitably qualified third party); 2) The willingness of the offender to take minimal steps to qualify for forgiveness (this condition is open for the imaginative reconstruction of the victim, and thus opens for forgiving the dead, for example); and 3) that the injury done by the wrongdoing is "humanly forgivable" (Griswold 2007:115).

The upshot of Griswold's account of forgiveness as something that admits of degrees, but nonetheless has certain threshold conditions, is that his account of forgiveness seems to be able to explain how some of the phenomena that are ruled out in the conditional account outlined in section 2.1, can be proper forgiveness nonetheless. The divide between perfect and imperfect forgiveness opens for the possibility that both conditional and unconditional forgiveness describe existing phenomena in our common practice of forgiving, but where imperfect forgiveness is something we only have to turn to where there is no possibility for perfect forgiveness.

I will rely on Griswold's paradigm based explanation of forgiveness in what follows; however I do not accept the full scope of his account. The possibility of imaginatively reconstructing someone's repentance does not seem to be the kind of conditional forgiveness I have described above. If we need to imaginatively reconstruct someone's repentance, or someone's loss of resentment, in order to forgive or be forgiven, it seems like the goal of this forgiveness is not to re-establish moral worth, or the relationships, but rather to reach a better state of mind for the victim or for the wrongdoer. Griswold's imperfect forgiveness thus

seems to be what I have called unconditional forgiveness.

Unconditional forgiveness is then the therapeutic process aimed at reaching, either a better state of mind for the victim, for the wrongdoer, or for all involved. Forgiveness is thus a virtue in the sense that it would be better if we forgave because feelings of guilt, resentment, and moral anger are negative and we would prefer if no-one had to experience them. From the perspective of conditional forgiveness, on the other hand, forgiveness has another main goal: It is aimed at restoring the relationship between the wrongdoer and the victim, as well as their moral standing in a moral community as a whole. The goal is thus what decides what kind of forgiveness one is referring to in the given context.

I will, from now on, focus on conditional forgiveness. I do this because, even if there is a separate kind of forgiveness that does not require repentance, the goal of unconditional forgiveness has more important implications on our social practice of forgiving. It is therefore more urgent to understand how unconditional forgiveness is possible. Furthermore, when examining conditional forgiveness we are met with a paradox that threatens to render forgiveness impossible. In the remainder of this thesis, I will focus on dissolving this paradox.

In the last section of this chapter, I will outline and discuss some of the conditions that should be met for forgiveness to be genuine according to a conditional account of forgiveness.

## 2.6 Conditional forgiveness further defined

Griswold has in his book *Forgiveness: A philosophical exploration* (2007) given a thorough account of what conditions should be put on forgiveness. In the following chapters, I will to a large extent rely on Griswold's account of conditional forgiveness and what he refers to as the paradigmatic case of perfect forgiveness: or in his words *forgiveness at its best*.

Griswold's paradigmatic forgiveness is something happening between two persons on equal footing where both parties are alive and able to communicate with each other. Included in the idea of *forgiveness at its best* is also the assumption that the offender really has done wrong; is responsible for the wrong done; that the wronged person's resentment is warranted; and that the offender (not the act) is the proper object of resentment and forgiveness (Griswold 2007:47).

It should be mentioned that Griswold's account of forgiveness emphasizes the importance of resentment as a response to wrongdoing, and the importance for the victim to forgive by letting go of this resentment for the *right* reasons. For Griswold, the aim of

forgiveness is “to understand, to relinquish revenge and resentment, all the while holding the offender responsible” (2007:47). The emphasis on holding the offender responsible is an important part of forgiving for the right reasons; if one forgives for the wrong reasons forgiveness will turn into something else: “[F]orgiveness comes with certain conditions or norms, else it would collapse into forgetting, or excusing, or condonation, or rationalization, as the case may be” (2007:47).

Griswold divides his discussions of the conditions put on forgiveness in two, one part deals with the transformation the wrongdoer has to go through for there to be forgiveness, and the other with the victim’s transformation. The transformations are mutually dependent: The offender depends on the victim in order to be forgiven, and the victim depends on the offender in order to forgive. The victim depends on the wrongdoer because she needs reasons to forgive, or, in other words, in order to commit to giving up resentment – or at least to giving up the judgment that the offender warrants continued resentment (Griswold 2007:49). The conditions Griswold enumerates are supposed to show what these reasons are.

The first of these reasons is “the wrong-doer’s demonstration that she no longer wishes to stand by herself as the author of those wrongs” (Griswold 2007:49). This reason includes the wrongdoer taking responsibility for the wrongdoing and acknowledging the wrongfulness of the action.

Second, the wrongdoer must repudiate her deeds; this includes disavowing the idea that she could author such deeds again in the future. Repudiating the past wrongful deed is, according to Griswold, the first step in showing that one has changed as a person, and become someone who deserves to be forgiven (2007:50). This change of heart is an important part of the conditions put on forgiveness, and I will discuss it further when accounting for the paradox of forgiveness. Suffice to say now that when one repudiates a previous action one is taking responsibility for it and admitting that “I did X,” while at the same time repudiating the self that did X. This is problematic because one has to take responsibility for an action one has done, thus admitting that the action was done by oneself, while at the same time show that one has changed in a way so that one no longer endorses the action one once performed, *i.e.*, one is, in some sense, no longer the same person one was before. Whether this is possible depends on a view of personal identity that allows for psychological continuity despite psychological change over time. Griswold writes: “I note that the core of the repudiation in question actually depends on a recognizable continuity of self, else the moral work that the wrong-doer must perform in order to earn forgiveness cannot be undertaken (she would

simply say the equivalent of ‘it wasn’t ‘me’ who did the wrong, I had a schizophrenic episode,’ which is to offer ground for excuse)” (2007:50).

Further, the third condition Griswold mentions is the need for the wrongdoer to express regret at having caused the injury to the particular person. These three conditions entail that memory is essential for forgiveness: If one has forgotten the moral injury there does not seem to be any reason for forgiveness.

Fourth, the offender must commit to becoming the sort of person who does not inflict injury, and this commitment must be shown through deed as well as words.

Fifth, the offender must *understand*; this means that the offender must show that she understands the gravity of the injury from the victim’s perspective and thus sympathize with her experience of the wrongful action (Griswold 2007:51). Griswold here asks what the motivation for the offender to take these steps could be. The answer he suggests is that it could be a wish for the offender to alleviate herself of guilt.

When these conditions are met, the victim can forgive with an assurance that her forgiveness targets what the offender actually is being forgiven for, and that this forgiveness is justified. The importance of justified forgiveness has been outlined above (section 2.4), to recap, forgiveness must be justified in order not to become condonation or excusing and thus not be part of a process that preserves and re-builds the moral worth of the parties involved.

The conditions put on the offender are not alone sufficient for forgiveness. As mentioned forgiveness should be thought of as an intersubjective process where the victim and the offender depends on each other. This means that there is a process the victim has to go through too, and thus conditions the victim must meet as well. Forgetting these conditions would again open for the possibility of un-genuine forgiveness. If all that is required is that the wrongdoer goes through a specific process – and the victim thereby simply claims to have forgiven her without having gone through any change of heart herself – what is stopping the victim from continuing to resent the offender and also continuing to express this resentment through over blaming? There is therefore a sixth condition, one that the victim has to meet in order for forgiveness to be genuine; and that is the forswearing of resentment.

I will rely on the conditions mentioned here when examining the paradox in the next chapter.

### 3 The Paradox of Forgiveness

This chapter deals with *the paradox of forgiveness*. As mentioned, the aim of this thesis is to investigate the logical possibility of forgiveness. So far I have established that we have two different conceptions of forgiveness, with two different goals. Further, I have argued that conditional forgiveness is more important than unconditional forgiveness because its purpose is to re-establish moral worth, as well as the relationship between wrongdoer and victim – as opposed to just being a practice that leads to a more preferable state of mind for the victim or the wrongdoer. Conditional forgiveness is thus limited by the constraints entailed by this goal, and most importantly that the wrongdoer repents. On the conditional account, forgiveness is a logical impossibility if the wrongdoer has not repented because then, what we are doing will be classified as condonation, and no forgiveness. The paradox I will look at now, poses a second challenge to the possibility of forgiveness, namely that forgiveness seems to become redundant when the wrongdoer has repented.

To start with I present a thorough reading of the first account of the paradox, as articulated by Aurel Kolnai (1973-74).<sup>19</sup> The upshot of the paradox is that forgiveness is impossible, either because forgiving someone who has not repented is not proper forgiveness, or because a repentant wrongdoer seems no longer to be blameworthy. I will discuss the two parts of the paradox, entitled ‘condonation’ and ‘a change of heart’, respectively. Following this discussion I conclude that we should focus on the second part of the paradox when attempting to resolve it. Based on the previous discussion of conditional and unconditional forgiveness, I claim that the first part of the paradox can be explained by appeal to condonation. Given the conclusion that condonation is not forgiveness we must accept that forgiveness is logically impossible in the first part of the paradox. The challenge for the defender of a conditional account of forgiveness will thus be to explain how forgiveness is not redundant in the second part of the paradox. I meet this challenge in Chapter 5.

Further, I will give a brief discussion of the general nature of a philosophical paradox, and problematize to what extent Kolnai’s paradox can actually be classified as a ‘paradox’. Lastly I will bring in a different account of forgiveness that seems to meet the same challenge as Kolnai’s paradox, namely Pamela Hieronymi’s (2001). Hieronymi’s account contributes

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<sup>19</sup> I chose to start with Kolnai’s account because this is the first one, and all the other accounts refer back to Kolnai’s. I therefore think it pertinent to understand the original account properly before examining the possible solutions to it.

with an important insight about the nature of resentment; that will prove important when trying to articulate a solution to the paradox in the last chapter. I will end this chapter with the conclusion that forgiveness appears impossible and redundant. This counterintuitive and undesirable conclusion needs to be challenged, and in the last two chapters I will look at different possible ways of meeting this challenge, and give my own suggestion as to how it could be done.

### **3.1 Kolnai's account of forgiveness**

In his discussion of the phenomenon of forgiveness, Kolnai limits the scope of his examination by defining forgiveness as a concept referring to a context of interpersonal relations (1973-74:91-92). On Kolnai's account, like most others, forgiveness applies to a situation between two equal parties where one has wronged the other; where the wrong in question is a serious one that does not admit of excuses; and where the offender can be held responsible for the action (1973-74:92-93). Kolnai distinguishes forgiveness from excusing on the grounds that an excuse testifies to a lack of indignation or retributive attitudes, and thus to the fact that one does not judge the offender to be blameworthy (1973-74:94). Similarly forgiveness is distinguished from *revised judgment*, which refers to a situation where the victim has come to understand that the offender was not guilty of the offense after all, given additional information about the circumstances of the offense (1973-74:95). Forgiveness is also distinguished from what Kolnai calls *emotional prescription* (1973-74:95). Emotional prescription is one-sided forgiveness, where the victim has let go of her retributive attitude, or resentment, over time, but not as a response to the wrongdoer's repentance. Emotional prescription can be equated with forgiveness for therapeutic reasons, or simply forgetting.

As discussed in the previous chapter, emotional prescription is not conditional forgiveness because one lacks the rational control we expect an act of forgiveness to have. Further, forgiving with the goal of improving one's own mental health is a one-sided kind of forgiveness and is therefore not the kind of forgiveness I am dealing with, it should therefore either be classified as unconditional forgiveness or not forgiveness at all. From this it follows that the Griswold inspired account of forgiveness discussed in Chapter 2 seems to fit well with Kolnai's account so far: if someone can be excused; if additional information leads to a revision in judgment about the blameworthiness of the offender; or if one forgives because one has forgotten the offense or as a means to achieve mental calm, what one is doing is not forgiving but something else.

A distinction that plays a crucial role in the paradox is the one made between forgiveness and condonation. I will discuss Kolnai's account of how forgiveness differs from condonation in what follows; suffices to say here that he classifies condonation as 'ungenuine forgiveness'. Whether *ungenuine forgiveness* should be interpreted as 'imperfect forgiveness' or rather as 'not forgiveness at all,' I will get back to below.

Forgiveness, on Kolnai's account, can thus be seen as a process both the victim and the offender actively have to take part in. Further, Kolnai is also a representative of the view that forgiveness requires forswearing of resentment as a response to repentance. In other words, Kolnai's account of forgiveness is one of conditional forgiveness. Nonetheless, Kolnai emphasizes that he does not wish to examine whether forgiveness is *commendable* or *objectionable*, but rather whether it is *logically* possible. The paradox he presents is thus supposed to be logical in nature (1973-74:91). This seems to amount to a descriptive account of forgiveness, because a purely logical account of forgiveness, as opposed to one that examines whether forgiveness is commendable or objectionable, should only be concerned with how one best can account for the possibility of forgiveness, and not with when forgiveness is morally adequate. It is not so clear, however, that Kolnai's account is purely logical in nature.<sup>20</sup> Kolnai namely argues that condonation is *immoralistic* (1973-74:96). And that condonation is an "intrinsically bad thing" (1973-74:97). This is so, Kolnai believes, because if you do not expect the wrongdoer to change her ways, or let her know that what she has done is morally blameworthy, she might continue to do the same thing again and hurt someone else. Forgiveness should thus emphasize a pro response to value, according to Kolnai, but without repentance forgiveness would not serve this purpose: it would rather be indifferent to the moral worth of the action.

The problem, as I here see it, is that Kolnai mixes up two different ways in which normative constraint can be bearing on forgiveness. Kolnai seems to claim two mutually exclusive things: That an account of forgiveness should not deal with whether forgiveness is commendable or objectionable, and that we have a phenomenon called *ungenuine forgiveness*, within which forgiveness is objectionable. He is thus claiming that there are moral constraint on forgiveness, and that not meeting these constraint is immoralistic, and at the same time, that his account is strictly descriptive, and not normative, in nature. Following the distinction made between conditional and unconditional forgiveness and how we should view this divide, made in the previous chapter, I believe we can resolve this confusion on

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<sup>20</sup> This is also pointed out by Zaibert (2009).

behalf of Kolnai. Kolnai's account is clearly not strictly descriptive; he *does* presuppose moral normative constraints bearing on forgiveness. The moral normative constraints he presupposes also seem to lead to the conclusion that forgiveness without resentment is morally wrong. What he wants to say however (if we are to take his word for it), is that forgiveness without resentment is logically impossible. What Kolnai ought to have done is to separate the normative and the descriptive elements of his account, or at least separate the normative elements that are needed in order to limit the scope of forgiveness, and claim that condonation simply is not forgiveness (and not just ungenuine forgiveness) from the *moral* normative element that says something about when forgiveness can be immoral. He could then present a descriptive account of forgiveness, with non-moral constraints pertaining to the importance of repentance and forswearing of resentment for genuine forgiveness, and avoid the morally normative constraints that makes forgiveness objectionable or commendable. It should be clear from the preceding chapter that the concept of forgiveness is limited by what the purpose of forgiveness ought to be, and that this is what grounds the normative constraints bearing on conditional forgiveness. If one agrees that the purpose of forgiveness is to re-build relationships and moral-worth, condonation will not be classified as forgiveness because it cannot serve this purpose. Thusly it does not follow that condonation is morally objectionable, only that it is not forgiveness.

### **3.2 Condonation: The first part of the paradox**

Kolnai starts to frame the first part of the paradox as follows: "Fred is clearly aware of Ralph's wrongdoing, insult, offense or viciousness and *per se* disapproves of it but deliberately refrains from any retributive response to it" (1973-74:95). Kolnai refers to this scenario as both *ungeuine forgiveness* and *condonation*. Condoning is, in other words, ungenuine forgiveness on Kolnai's account.

It is not entirely clear how we should understand Kolnai's grouping together of condonation and ungenuine forgiveness: should condonation and ungenuine forgiveness be understood as what Griswold calls *imperfect forgiveness* – and thus just a less ideal kind of forgiveness – or should it rather be understood as similar to excusing and forgetting, and thus not as forgiveness at all? I have argued that it should be understood as a phenomenon separate from forgiveness, but as we shall see this might not be Kolnai's intention. I argue that Kolnai has mixed up the normative and the descriptive in his account, and that, as a consequence his paradox seems to dissolve before it is erected. However, I do think Kolnai has a point to make

nonetheless, and that there is a paradox after all. I will get back to this below, but first I turn to see why condonation cannot be genuine forgiveness, on Kolnai's account.

Condoning an action can be explained as accepting something reluctantly, but without protest. An act of condoning might in many cases be experienced as a kind of forgiveness from the perspective of the offender: Psychologically one might say that the victim recognizes that something morally wrong has been done towards her, and that the wrongdoer is responsible for the wrongdoing. Nonetheless she does not seem to be able to hold the perpetrator responsible for it in the required way for genuine forgiveness to come about.

There are many circumstances that might lead the victim to condone rather than engaging in a process of forgiveness that involves repentance and forswearing of resentment. The victim might condone the action because she thinks the offender has other merits that outweigh the offense, or she does not think the retributive response will have any effect. Condonation can also come about from prudential reasons<sup>21</sup>: The victim might want to remain in a favorable relation to the wrongdoer in the future, for example (Kolnai 1973-74:96). Importantly, Kolnai stresses the point that condonation can come about as a result of the victim's "... proneness to tolerate 'weaknesses proper to human nature' ..." (1973-74:96). This goes to show why Kolnai would not support an account of unconditional forgiveness that resort to our understanding of all human beings as morally fallible, as a reason for forgiveness. The fact that we acknowledge our human predicament as creatures prone to commit morally wrong action, is not a reason for us to forgive: Taking this as a reason for forgiveness leads us to condoning, and condoning is not forgiveness on Kolnai's account. Recall that the love one feels towards humanity in virtue of our common nature has been contradicted as a reason for forgiveness in the previous chapter, on the grounds that we can feel love and still resent – so the love for humanity is not a good candidate for what makes us forswear resentment.

This comes to show that Kolnai puts an emphasis on the importance of repentance for genuine forgiveness. Ungenuine forgiveness, is a result of the Christian credo that one ought to love the sinner, but hate the sin: By separating the sinner from the sin, one can, according to the gospel, forgive an unrepentant and even relapsing sinner unconditionally, Kolnai writes (1973-74:97). This view is mistaken, Kolnai claims, because genuine forgiveness should have a clear *pro* response to value and *con* response to disvalue. In other words forgiveness entails

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<sup>21</sup> As we will see in the next chapter, Hallich (2013) attempts to resolve the paradox by appealing to prudential reasons for forgiveness. My contention is that such reasons should be classified as 'condonation', and thus not as 'forgiveness'.

a normative element that necessitates a change towards value on the part of the wrongdoer. “The contrast lies between genuine forgiveness with its backbone of a crystal-clear *pro* response to value and *con* response to disvalue on the one hand and condonation with its innuendo of spineless complicity, or “compounding with” disvalue, on the other” (Kolnai 1973-74:97). I will discuss this further in the next chapter, but it should be mentioned that Kolnai here seems to mix up a normative and a descriptive account of forgiveness. By claiming that the reason for why condonation is not genuine forgiveness is that it does not have a clear *pro* response to value; Kolnai is actually saying that condonation is an objectionable *form of forgiveness*, as opposed to saying that it is *not forgiveness at all*. What I am claiming, however, is that condonation is *not forgiveness at all*: I am not interested in whether it is immoral. What is nonetheless clear is that condonation is possible. Further, by claiming that condonation is an objectionable kind of forgiveness, Kolnai’s paradox actually dissolves before it has been constructed, because immoral forgiveness is surely possible, and it is the possibility of forgiveness Kolnai is challenging. To salvage what I take to be Kolnai’s point, namely that condonation is not forgiveness at all; I will interpret his account thusly and leave aside the discussion on whether forgiveness can be objectionable and immoral.

Further Kolnai writes that “condonation very easily takes on the semblance of forgiveness and may therefore be seen as constituting the first term of the *logical dilemma*: ‘Forgiveness is objectionable and ungenuine inasmuch as there is *no reason to forgive*, the offender having undergone no *metanoia* (“Change of heart”) but persisting in his plain identity *qua offender*’ (1974-74:97). Kolnai has thus defined the first horn of the paradox: *ungenuine forgiveness*, that is, if the offender is merely condoned and not held rightly responsible for the morally bad action through expectation of repentance or ‘change of heart’, what we are faced with is condonation, and ungenuine forgiveness.

### **3.3 A change of heart: The second part of the paradox**

At one end of its spectrum then, according to Kolnai, forgiveness threatens to collapse into condonation. And “at the other end of its spectrum, forgiveness seems to collapse into mere *redundancy*, or the mere *registering* of moral value in the place of previous disvalue” (Kolnai 1973-74:98). At this end of the spectrum Kolnai continues the line of thought pertaining to a ‘change of heart’. The second dilemma of the paradox is thus a scenario where the offender has changed her heart, apologized in an unmistakably genuine fashion, and paid her dues, so to speak. She has, in other words, done what can and should be done to receive forgiveness.

What Kolnai is getting at here is that in this scenario it appears as if forgiveness now has lost its reason: “The objection arises that forgiveness has now lost its ground and *raison d'être*: that there is no room for it, seeing that *there is nothing to be forgiven*” (1973-74:98). Kolnai seems to claim that there no longer is something, or someone, to forgive, because if the offender has made up for her wrong she has changed status, from offender to not-offender, and the laudable action is somehow dissolved. We can only forgive someone who is blameworthy, and someone who has repented seems no longer to be blameworthy: If the wrongdoer has annulled the wrongdoing, why do we need to forgive her? Forgiveness thus appears redundant.

This is where the real trouble lies, in my opinion. The first dilemma of the paradox can be accepted by anyone who vouches for a conditional account of forgiveness as outlined in Chapter 2 in this thesis. Condonation is not forgiveness, so forgiveness is impossible if the wrongdoer has not repented or changed her heart. The second dilemma, however, seems a lot more problematic, because, in what sense can one say that the person has ‘changed her heart’? In what sense is there no longer anything to forgive? The upshot of the second dilemma is what was hinted at by Griswold when he laid out the conditions put on forgiveness. Recall that the second condition Griswold enumerates is that the wrongdoer has to repudiate her deed. When repudiating her deed the wrongdoer takes responsibility for the wrongful action – and acknowledges that the action was morally wrong – while at the same time renouncing the deed. This implies that the victim no longer supports the action she committed and wishes to separate from it, so as to be forgiven. However, as have been discussed at length in the previous chapter, in relation to Hieronymi’s account of forgiveness, we cannot give up on the judgment that the wrongdoer is responsible when we forgive; if we do we are simply excusing her. The problem we are faced with in the second dilemma of Kolnai’s paradox is thus how we can hold someone responsible while at the same time let them change their heart so that they may be forgiven. If changing one’s heart leads to the consequence Kolnai envisions, a repentant wrongdoer is no longer blameworthy, and forgiveness becomes redundant.

To sum up, the two dilemmas of the paradox of forgiveness are:

- 1) The wrongdoer does not repent, and the victim is thus addressing the wrongdoer *qua* wrongdoer. In this case one cannot forgive because the wrongdoer is still a wrongdoer. (When forgiving an unrepentant wrongdoer one is actually condoning

and not forgiving; this is why forgiveness is logically impossible in the first dilemma).

- 2) The wrongdoer repents, and the victim addresses him as someone who is no longer a wrongdoer. In this case one cannot forgive because there is nothing, or rather no-one to forgive. (A repentant wrongdoer has annulled the wrongful action and is thus no longer blameworthy).

These are the two dilemmas of the paradox, and they both equally render forgiveness presumably impossible. In the first dilemma, forgiveness is impossible because the wrongdoer has undergone no change of heart, and on the conditional account of forgiveness the wrongdoer has to go through a process of repentance before we can refer to the putative forgiveness as forgiveness proper. In the second dilemma the problem is how we can continue to hold someone responsible for a wrongdoing after they have changed their heart. If the wrongdoer has made up for her moral wrong and repented, it seems as if there no longer is a need for forgiveness. The challenge is thus to show how, and why, the victim can forgive a repentant wrongdoer and how the wrongdoer can be an appropriate object of forgiveness after a process of repentance.

### **3.4 The nature of the paradox**

Kolnai's point is that if one accepts the existence and the rigor of the paradox, there is no such thing as genuine forgiveness. On one side, forgiveness is impossible because it slips into condonation which is not genuine forgiveness, and on the other side forgiveness becomes redundant and thus also impossible. It can be discussed whether what Kolnai presents really is a *paradox*, and not rather a *dilemma*.

In the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy a paradox is described as “a statement claiming something which goes beyond (or even against) ‘common opinion’ (what is usually believed or held)” (Cantini 2012). Understood in this sense, what Kolnai describes is indeed a paradox. We believe that forgiveness is an enterprise people engage in, but given the paradox, forgiveness seems to be impossible. In other words, we believe forgiveness to be possible; put the paradox presents it as impossible. The upshot of the paradox is thus a statement claiming something that goes “beyond or against, common opinion or understanding”. Kolnai's paradox does, however have two parts, and this makes it look more like a dilemma: A

dilemma, can be defined as a situation in which a difficult choice has to be made between two or more alternatives, especially ones that are equally undesirable.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to discuss the nature or understanding of what a philosophical paradox is, so I will rely on the terminology in the literature, where the challenge is referred to as a paradox. What is of importance here is not whether the challenge should be defined as presented as a paradox or a dilemma, but rather that a paradox is something that makes us re-think our previous convictions and intuitions, with the result that we gain a better understanding of things we thought we knew.

### **3.5 Hieronymi's account of the challenge**

Pamela Hieronymi articulates a problem that can be compared to the one we are faced with in the second part of Kolnai's paradox. Hieronymi does not directly address the problem of the paradox; her account of forgiveness is rather motivated by the worry that the literature on forgiveness often refers to resentment and anger as something that can be manipulated or conquered. As a response to this worry she presents an account of resentment as an attitude that is sensitive to one's judgments, and thus subject to rational revision (2001:535). This view of resentment nonetheless contributes importantly to Kolnai's paradox because it explains further why condonation is not forgiveness, as well as, why forgiveness seems redundant in the second dilemma of the paradox. Further, Hieronymi's account of resentment provides a starting point for what I claim can be a way of resolving the paradox. The thought is that it is through viewing resentment as judgment sensitive and as a moral protest we understand that forgiveness must be an interpersonal and communicative process, and that only through seeing forgiveness this way can we provide a solution to the paradox. I will get back to this issue in the last chapter on this thesis (Chapter 5).

Hieronymi agrees with Kolnai that forgiveness requires forswearing of resentment. To avoid ungenuine forgiveness, or condonation, Hieronymi focuses on what she calls *uncompromising forgiveness*. On her account condonation is defined as *compromising forgiveness*, which is in essence the same as ungenuine forgiveness on Kolnai's account. In comparison with Griswold's account, compromising forgiveness would not be classified as forgiveness at all, because if we forgive compromisedly we are not engaged in forgiving, but in excusing or condoning. As mentioned when discussing Hieronymi's account in Chapter 2, uncompromising forgiveness can only come about if one continues to hold the three following beliefs (2001:530):

**Wrong:** the act in question was a serious wrong worthy of moral attention.

**Responsible:** the wrongdoer is a legitimate member of the moral community who can be expected not to do such a thing. As such she is someone who can be held responsible, and she is worth being upset by.

**Self-worth:** the person wronged ought not to be treated this way, and the act is an offense to her person.<sup>22</sup>

In other words: If one gives up any one of these judgments one will absolve the offender of culpability, and forgiveness becomes condonation or excusing. Hieronymi sees resentment as something justified by these three statements. Resentment should be viewed as a protest against the claim the action makes - and one should not abandon this protest without a good reason (2001:530).

Further, Hieronymi claims that the account we give of forgiveness should be *articulate*. By an articulate account she means that it should do more than provide reasons for just overcoming/managing resentment: not just any kind of reasons lead to genuine forgiveness, so we need *good* reasons, and a good reason has to be a rational revising of one of the statements that justify resentment. As mentioned, Hieronymi's views resentment, or other reactive attitudes, as more than forces to be overcome; they are feelings that carry important information about how we experience the world (2001:535). Instead of providing reasons for managing resentment, then, the account should provide us with reasons for revising resentment in relation to the information we have about the wrongdoer and the wrongful action (2001:531). An account of genuine forgiveness, on Hieronymi's account, must articulate this revision in judgment or change in view (2001:530).<sup>23</sup> However, as mentioned, we cannot revise any of the three statements above; if we do, the account would

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<sup>22</sup> This way of defining the different beliefs, as **Wrong**, **Responsible**, and **Self-worth**, I have stolen from Warmke (2015).

<sup>23</sup> The ‘change in view’ or ‘revision of judgment’ about the threatening claim is not the same as the wrongdoer’s ‘change of heart’ we meet in Kolnai’s account. The change in view Hieronymi accounts for is something the victim has to go through in order to be able to let go of reactive attitudes and forgive, but it seems to me that it must be occasioned by a change in the object judged of, namely persistence of a threatening claim occasioned by a previous wrongful action. And this, the change happening in the object, corresponds with a change of heart the way Kolnai talks about it.

be compromising because it would lead either to the offense being excused or condoned. The problem is thus how an account of forgiveness can be both *uncompromising* and *articulate*. This can be seen partly as the same problem we are faced with when looking at the second part of Kolnai's paradox because to resolve the paradox we need an account of forgiveness that allows the victim to hold the offender responsible for the wrongdoing, and avoids slipping into condonation (i.e. continue to believe the three claims: **Wrong, Responsible, Self-worth**) and at the same time let the wrongdoer change her heart and thus provide the victim with the information necessary for her to overcome resentment; change her judgment that the previous action articulates a present threat; and be in a position to forgive.

The three judgments that secure genuine forgiveness and secure it from slipping into condonation are also what rationally justify resentment. Hieronymi's point is that if one neglects to consider which judgments rationally justifies resentment, one cannot find out what judgments rationally undermine it (2001:545). Letting go of resentment is necessary for forgiveness to be possible, but how can we forgo resentment if the judgments that rationally justify resentment necessarily have to be left standing for genuine forgiveness to take place?

According to Hieronymi resentment protests a past action that persists as a present threat (2001:546). As explained in Chapter 2, this is an account of wrongdoing that explains why forgiveness is necessary in a moral community: Forgiveness is necessary because what is in need of forgiveness is the agent that represents the threatening and persisting claim.

Underlying the three judgments there must be an idea of shared moral values. If the offender and the victim together can be able to decide on the action as a morally blameworthy action, they must share some idea of what counts as morally blameworthy, and thus what counts as a morally wrongful action. There must also be a shared idea of the moral dignity of human beings, if there is no such shared idea no one can make a rationally justified judgment about how one can or cannot be treated, and how one can and cannot treat others. Given such a view of morality one can argue that resentment is a protest against the threat represented by the unrepentant wrongdoer, and as long as the action has not been retracted by the offender it will persist as a present threat to the victim's moral standing as someone who can be treated this way (i.e. morally wrongfully). Hieronymi's articulate account thus adds a fourth belief to the three, namely **Threat**:

**Threat:** The previous wrongful action makes a threatening claim that persists as a present threat to the victim's moral standing.

When the wrongdoer repents and asks for forgiveness the victim can rationally revise her judgment about whether the wrongdoer represents a persisting threat to her moral worth. Forgiveness given on basis of such a revision will be both uncompromising and articulate. Now we have an account of why resentment is an important part of the process of forgiveness, and why resentment is justified as long as the wrongdoer has not changed his or her heart. This confirms, once again, that condonation is not genuine forgiveness, but it also tells us something about the relation between agent, act and victim. The object of forgiveness, in Hieronymi's account is the agent of the wrongful action. However, Hieronymi explains how the wrongful action can be seen as a claim by referring to how an action has meaning through conveying the evaluation of its author. So the claim is inseparable from its author. What we saw in the second part of the paradox was that forgiveness became redundant because the wrongdoing was eliminated merely through an act of repentance, and so far Hieronymi's account will be met by the same challenge. If the claim is retracted by the wrongdoer the threat disappears and there seems to be no explicit need for forgiveness. What is there for forgiveness to do, and what role is left for the victim but acknowledge the fact that the threat is gone and the wrongdoer no longer someone who warrants resentment? This is what I will provide an answer to in the next two chapters.

# **4 Responses to Kolnai's Account of the Paradox of Forgiveness**

In the two preceding chapters I have discussed forgiveness as a philosophical subject; several different ways of conceptualizing forgiveness in the contemporary discussion; and some of the challenges we are met with when attempting to create a narrative that fully explains the phenomenon of forgiveness. Further, I have presented a thorough reading of Aurel Kolnai's paper "Forgiveness" (1973–74), which is where the paradox of forgiveness is first formulated, and briefly discussed the implications the paradox has for our understanding of forgiveness.

In this chapter I present a critical discussion of four different attempts at dissolving the paradox: Leo Zaibert (2009), Oliver Hallich (2013), Ingvar Johansson (2009) and Kim Atkins (2002), respectively. My contention is that the paradox, as presented by Kolnai, has been misinterpreted in most of the replies (Atkins is an exception), and that this misinterpretation is due to a lack of consensus on how to define forgiveness. The misinterpretations of the paradox and their proposed solutions do, however, shed light on some of the challenges an account of forgiveness must meet: Without a clear idea of what the goal of forgiveness is, we cannot limit the scope of the concept of forgiveness. Further, without a clear account of what should count as forgiveness and what should not, we will also not be able to account for how forgiveness can be possible.

By relying on diverging accounts of forgiveness some of the authors (Zaibert, Hallich and Johansson) arrive at a new formulation of the original paradox. I will therefore compare the new formulations of the paradox, and their possible solutions to Kolnai's original paradox. I conclude that none of the proposed solutions are successful in dissolving the Kolnai paradox, but that there might be a solution to a different paradox. The new paradox does not help us solve the old, however, because it is a result of trying to explain how forgiveness can be morally adequate, as opposed to how it can be logically possible, of trying to explain how unconditional forgiveness can be possible, as opposed to how conditional forgiveness can be possible. Recall that what I am trying to show is how conditional forgiveness can be possible.

## **4.1 The relation between the original paradox and the divide between conditional and unconditional forgiveness**

At this time, it will be helpful to provide a concise formulation of the paradox as presented by Kolnai:

The paradox of forgiveness:

Part one: The wrongdoer does not repent, and the victim is thus addressing the wrongdoer *qua* wrongdoer. In this case one cannot forgive because the wrongdoer is still a wrongdoer, and by forgiving one would actually be condoning.

Part two: The wrongdoer repents and thereby absolves herself of blameworthiness; the victim thus addresses her as someone who is no longer a wrongdoer. In this case one cannot forgive because there is nothing, or rather no-one to forgive.

In the first part of the paradox, forgiveness is impossible because the wrongdoer has undergone no change of heart, and following the account of conditional forgiveness given in Chapter 2 the wrongdoer has to go through a process of repentance before what we are doing can be referred to as ‘forgiveness’. In the second part of the paradox the problem is how we can continue to hold someone accountable for a wrongdoing after they have repented. If the wrongdoer has made up for her wrong and repented, it seems as if forgiveness has become superfluous.

Given the discussion on conditional and unconditional forgiveness in Chapter 2, it seems like what is needed to resolve the paradox is either an acceptable account of unconditional forgiveness which explains how forgiveness can be possible without a change of heart, or in other words: how condonation can be forgiveness (attacking the first part of the paradox); or an account of conditional forgiveness that explains what is left for forgiveness to do after the wrongdoer has repented, and thus how the wrongdoer can be an appropriate object of forgiveness after a process of repentance (attacking the second part of the paradox).

The first reply to Kolnai’s paradox I will consider, proposes to solve the paradox by defining forgiveness as a private, mental event that does not depend on the offender’s repentance. Condonation would then be classified as forgiveness.

## **4.2 Leo Zaibert: “The Paradox of Forgiveness”**

In his paper from 2009, Zaibert sets out to show how forgiveness might not be quite as paradoxical as is assumed in much of the literature on the topic. The paradox can be resolved, according to Zaibert, by distinguishing between the definition and the justification of

forgiveness, as well as by distinguishing between forgiveness understood as a mental phenomenon and forgiveness understood as an overt communicative act. What Zaibert is proposing is thus something similar to what I have claimed in Chapter 2, namely that the justification and the explanation of forgiveness must be separated, and that forgiveness can be either communicate or private. What Zaibert does not do, however, is defining the two kind of forgiveness as two different practices of forgiveness; instead he classifies private and communicative forgiveness as two different accounts of forgiveness. Furthermore, he claims that we can only give a descriptive account of private forgiveness, and that communicative forgiveness cannot help us solve the paradox. I wish to challenge this claim, and show that communicative forgiveness does admit of explanation without justification, and that this is the only account of forgiveness that can make sense of the paradox.

Zaibert focuses on two different formulations of the paradoxical nature of forgiveness: Kolnai's "Forgiveness" – which I have gone through in detail above – and Jacques Derrida's formulation from *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (2001).<sup>24</sup> Kolnai defines forgiveness as something that requires repentance; his is thus a form of conditional forgiveness. Derrida, on the other hand, is concerned with a form of unconditional forgiveness, which is also what Zaibert wishes to defend. Further, Zaibert's account relies on the connection between punishment and forgiveness – they are, according to him, different and incompatible responses to wrongdoing. The definition he gives of his own position is: "to forgive is to deliberately refuse to punish" (2009:368). Forgiveness understood as the deliberate refusal to punish, separated from any justification of forgiveness and freed from constraints of communication is supposed to escape the paradox outlined by Kolnai. I will argue that this attempt at resolving the paradox fails for two reasons; firstly, because it relies on a misinterpretation of the original paradox, and secondly because what we are left with after having enforced Zaibert's restrictions does not fit with either of the accounts of forgiveness given in Chapter 2.

#### 4.2.1 Zaibert's formulation of the paradox

In his account of Kolnai's formulation of the paradox Zaibert describes the two parts of the paradox as follows: (1) either someone has done something wrong unknowingly, and should

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<sup>24</sup> I will be focusing on Zaibert's account of Kolnai's formulation of the paradox. I do this for several reasons: Firstly, Kolnai presented the first formulation of the paradox, and this formulation is the main topic of this thesis. Secondly, Zaibert himself states that Derrida's formulation is "yet more unhelpful than Kolnai's" (2009:368). Third, Zaibert defends a view very close to Derrida's, so not discussing Derrida's formulation of the paradox will save me from repetition.

therefore be excused, not forgiven; or (2) they have done something wrong, knowingly, and should therefore be punished, not forgiven (2009:366). Compared to my interpretation of Kolnai's formulation of the paradox there is here a clear discrepancy. Recall that my interpretation of Kolnai's paradox defines the two parts of the paradox as: (1) either forgiveness collapses into condonation and is thus un-genuine, because the perpetrator has undergone no change of heart and there is no reason to forgive; or (2) forgiveness is redundant because the perpetrator *has* undergone a change of heart and there is then no-one to forgive because the perpetrator is no longer blameworthy.

Zaibert's formulation of the paradox is fairly different from Kolnai's, even if Kolnai's paradox is what Zaibert claims to be examining. Firstly, the first part of the paradox as described by Zaibert does not belong in the Kolnaian paradox at all; if someone has done something wrong *unknowingly* they should not be held morally responsible for the action. If you cannot be held responsible you are not blameworthy and should be excused.<sup>25</sup> The reason why forgiveness is not genuine in the first part of Kolnai's paradox is *not* that the perpetrator is not blameworthy for her action, but that she is not held accountable, and thus not required to repent and make up for something she indeed is blameworthy for – this is therefore condoning, and not forgiving. Forgiveness is never an issue if the wrongdoer can be justifiably excused; Zaibert nonetheless takes the first part of the paradox to be that forgiveness is impossible if the wrongdoer can be excused because forgiveness requires a culpable wrongdoer. However correct this statement is, excuse does not feature in Kolnai's original paradox – the second part of Kolnai's paradox is a direct consequence of his account of forgiveness as something that requires repentance.

Zaibert's formulation of the second part of the Kolnaian paradox does not fit with the original articulation for the same reason, namely that it is not a result of seeing repentance as a necessary condition for forgiveness: In Kolnai's paradox it is the fact that the wrongdoer has repented that causes trouble, because a repentant wrongdoer seems no longer to be blameworthy. On Zaibert's account the second part of the paradox is constituted by the fact that if the wrongdoer is culpable we do not seem to have any reason to forgive, because culpable wrongdoing should be punished, not forgiven.

This comes to show that, in his account of Kolnai's paradox, Zaibert has actually

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<sup>25</sup> Zaibert describes the first part of the paradox as involving someone who does not know that they are doing something wrong. He underlines that we are not talking about culpable ignorance (2009:366).

constituted his own paradox.<sup>26</sup> As we will see, it has become somewhat of a trend to interpret Kolnai's paradox in a way akin to Zaibert's formulation. For the sake of clarity, what I will call *Zaibert's paradox* can be stated as:

First part: Either, the wrongdoer is not blameworthy, and because forgiveness requires a culpable wrongdoer the wrongdoer should be *excused* and not *forgiven*, or:  
Second part: The wrongdoer is blameworthy, and *ought* (or *can*) therefore not be forgiven; but punished.

The upshot of Zaibert's paradox is similar to Kolnai's: Putative cases of forgiveness are either not cases of forgiveness at all (on Zaibert's formulation of the first part of the paradox they are cases of excusing, and on Kolnai's they are cases of condoning), or they are cases where forgiveness is unjustified or impossible (on Zaibert's formulation forgiveness is unjustified following the second part and in Kolnai's they are impossible or redundant). Zaibert's formulation of the paradox is nonetheless quite different, particularly because it does not rely on the idea that forgiveness requires repentance. In Kolnai's formulation the idea that repentance is a necessary condition for forgiveness is what constitutes the paradox, and forgiveness seems to be impossible given this requirement. Zaibert has constructed a paradox that is not a result of the need for repentance. On Zaibert's view forgiveness is impossible because, if an act is excusable, we cannot forgive, and if it is not excusable the wrongdoer is blameworthy and we should treat her as such. The paradox Zaibert has constructed seems to be a result of not seeing repentance as a necessary part of forgiveness, because we are left with no reason to forgive the blameworthy wrongdoer.<sup>27</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Justification and definition

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<sup>26</sup> To avoid confusion: when I refer to my interpretation of Kolnai's paradox I will from now on either make it explicit or just write 'Kolnai's paradox'. When I refer to Zaibert's interpretation of Kolnai's paradox, I will make it explicit that it is Zaibert's interpretation I am referring to.

<sup>27</sup> On a side note I would like to mention that Zaibert quotes Collingwood: "to 'forgive' the no longer guilty is no longer to forgive" (1995:127). This quote shall, according to Zaibert, say something important about the nature of forgiveness (2009:369). What is puzzling with this reference is that this quote refers back to my interpretation of the second part of Kolnai's paradox, and thus a phenomenon completely absent in Zaibert's formulation, namely the problem with how we can forgive a repentant wrongdoer, and that if the wrongdoer is no longer guilty after she has repented, and forgiveness becomes redundant. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the problem with the repentant wrongdoer is the big challenge in Kolnai's paradox. Nonetheless, Zaibert's formulation of the paradox, just as his account of forgiveness, explicitly does not rely on repentance. What is so puzzling about Zaibert using this quote from Collingwood is that this challenge is absent in Zaibert's formulation of the paradox. This might testify to Zaibert being aware of this challenge after all, unfortunately he does not explore it further.

Zaibert is skeptical of what he names the *forgiveness-requires-repentance thesis*, i.e.; the idea that forgiveness requires repentance. One of Zaibert's main points against the *forgiveness-requires-repentance thesis* is that the term 'unforgiveable' seems to refer both to the *impossibility* of forgiving, and to the *inappropriateness* of forgiving. The error of confusing these two senses of the term is the error of confusing descriptive and normative enterprises (Zaibert 2009:370). The issue as Zaibert here sees it is whether the paradox entails that forgiveness is a logical or a normative impossibility. If it is a normative impossibility it means that forgiveness in this case is morally objectionable, rather than logically impossible.

Zaibert is not clear on what exactly the normative claims put on forgiveness are – if one claims that the term 'unforgivable' refers to the inappropriateness of forgiveness – but I think a safe bet is that he sees this view as advocating the normative claim that if the wrongdoer has not repented it will be morally wrong, or objectionable, to forgive her. Zaibert here points to a prevalent (and perhaps not adequately justified) strategy in the debate about forgiveness, namely the disposition to include a justification of forgiveness in the description of forgiveness – and according to him the solution to the paradox might partly be found by separating these two enterprises.

What Kolnai (and most others writing on forgiveness) are doing, according to Zaibert, is mixing up the definition and the justification. This mixing up is a direct result of the claim that forgiveness requires repentance, Zaibert believes, because he interprets the claim that forgiveness is not genuine without repentance as the claim that it would be immoral to forgive the unrepentant. Separating the justification of forgiveness from the definition of forgiveness would help resolve the paradox because by removing what Zaibert takes to be normative constraints he believes he can show that forgiveness can be possible without repentance. If repentance is not necessary for forgiveness we will neither have a problem with condonation, nor with forgiveness becoming redundant because the wrongdoer has repented. This comes to show that Zaibert's solution to the paradox might work on my interpretation of Kolnai's paradox as well. The problem with this solution, however, is that it can only explain how unconditional forgiveness can be possible, not how conditional forgiveness can be possible.

To see the implications of Zaibert's objection to the *forgiveness-requires-repentance thesis* for Kolnai's paradox, we must first look at how Zaibert interprets it in relation to his own formulation of Kolnai's paradox. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Kolnai claims that his account of forgiveness is chiefly logical in nature, and that he is not interested in whether forgiveness is commendable or objectionable. To this Zaibert objects that only the

first part of the paradox can be seen as logical in nature: recall that on Zaibert's interpretation of the paradox the first part is that a wrong done unknowingly is not blameworthy, and should therefore be excused, not forgiven. This is a chiefly logical and descriptive statement. The second part, Zaibert argues, is not chiefly logical because it relates to the normative discussion concerning the justification of forgiveness. Recall that on Zaibert's interpretation the second part of the paradox is that a blameworthy wrongdoer ought not to be forgiven, but punished. In his interpretation of the second part of the paradox, Zaibert brings in what he believes is the solution Kolnai himself proposes, namely that forgiveness can be possible after all, but only if the wrongdoer has repented. I will later argue that Kolnai's own solution to the paradox does not rely on repentance<sup>28</sup>; repentance is rather what constitutes the paradox. What Zaibert is getting at here is what I have already mentioned in the previous chapter, namely that Kolnai mixes up the idea that forgiveness is an enterprise with the goal of re-establishing relations and moral standing, and therefore also a phenomenon that necessarily depends on some form of repentance with the idea that it is morally objectionable to forgive someone that has not repented.

I agree with Zaibert that Kolnai is guilty of mixing up the claim that one should not forgive the unrepentant for moral reasons with the claim that it is logically impossible to forgive the unrepentant (Zaibert 2009:367, 375). If the *forgiveness-requires-repentance thesis* is interpreted in this way, namely that it is immoral to forgive someone who has not repented, the thesis does not offer anything of value to a descriptive account of forgiveness. Instead it creates confusion because it provides an answer to the question of when forgiveness can be justified, rather than to the question of how forgiveness can be possible. It should be kept in mind that Zaibert has given a different formulation of the paradox, and, as we will see, this mix up is not so fatal when we look at the paradox the way I have interpreted it.

I will now look at the implications the separation of the justification and the description of forgiveness would have for my interpretation of Kolnai's paradox. In relation to the first part of the paradox – which says that condonation is not genuine forgiveness – Zaibert could be right in claiming that Kolnai is guilty of a mix-up of the descriptive and the normative. I will discuss this in more detail below. Zaibert's concern with the mix-up is however mainly aimed at the second part of the paradox, and because he has misinterpreted the paradox, he does not realize that his worry is aimed in the wrong direction. In my description of the second part of the Kolnaian paradox, Kolnai is not guilty of any mix-up. Explaining how

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<sup>28</sup> I will discuss Kolnai's own solution to the paradox in the next chapter (Chapter 5).

someone can be forgiven after a process of repentance while at the same time being held accountable for a morally wrong action, is not a normative issue, it is a logical issue. It is an issue concerning how an offender can make up for her morally wrong action, be forgiven, cease to be an offender and at the same time take responsibility and be accountable for the wrongdoing.

Furthermore, if Zaibert did understand the paradox the way I do, and directed the worry of confusing normative and descriptive enterprises at the first part of the paradox, the problem would be whether the claim that ‘condonation is not genuine forgiveness’ is an attempt to smuggle a normative justification into a description of forgiveness. Kolnai’s paradox arises from a conception of forgiveness as a phenomenon that requires repentance, had not repentance already been a part of Kolnai’s account of forgiveness there would be no paradox.

As should be clear from the discussion on conditional and unconditional forgiveness in Chapter 2, the constraint put on forgiveness in the *forgiveness-requires-repentance thesis* is this: If the wrongdoer has not taken minimal steps towards repentance, what we are doing cannot be classified as ‘forgiveness’, but slips into condonation. In other words: If the wrongdoer has not repented, forgiveness is logically impossible, because what we are doing does not fall under the concept of ‘forgiveness’ if ‘forgiveness’ is defined as an action with the end goal of re-establishing relationships and moral worth.

It is not: if the wrongdoer has not repented forgiveness is morally objectionable. Zaibert is nonetheless right in accusing Kolnai of mixing up the descriptive and the normative, however, the mix-up is not taking place in the way Zaibert claims – it is not a result of Kolnai’s proposed solution to the paradox, it is rather a pre-existing and fundamental part of Kolnai’s understanding of forgiveness. Further, the normativity does not have to lead to the conclusion that forgiveness is objectionable without repentance, even if it appears to do so in Kolnai’s account of forgiveness. I have proposed a way out for Kolnai, by claiming that we can have non-moral normative constraints on conditional forgiveness.

To sum up, Zaibert has misinterpreted Kolnai’s solution to the paradox, as one that claims forgiveness can only be possible if the wrongdoer repents because it is immoral to forgive the unrepentant. I have claimed that Kolnai does not propose this as a solution to the paradox, but rather as a pre-existing idea about what forgiveness is. Further, I have suggested that Kolnai can avoid the problem of mixing up the normative and the descriptive by claiming that repentance is a necessary part of forgiveness defined as an enterprise with the goal of re-establishing moral worth and relationships, and that this goal cannot be met without

repentance. Conditional forgiveness thus becomes impossible, rather than objectionable.

#### 4.2.3. Communicative and private forgiveness

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, Zaibert does not only want to separate the descriptive and the normative enterprises in order to solve the paradox, he also proposes to separate communicative and non-communicative forgiveness. Zaibert believes that the *forgiveness-requires-repentance* thesis is motivated by a need to separate the sinner from the sin in an attempt to forgive the sinner: The idea being that repentance allows the sinner to separate herself from the sin (2009:379). To be able to do this, communication seems necessary. One view that might be understood in this manner is Murphy's argument that wrongdoing can be seen as a *message or symbolic communication* (1982:508). In Murphy's account repentance is necessary for forgiveness because it testifies to the wrongdoer's condemning her previous wrong, and this is a possible way to separate the wrongdoer from her action. Another account of forgiveness that relies on repentance as communication is Hieronymi's (2001); where repentance is seen as a protest against the threatening claim we articulate when we perform a wrongdoing. Hieronymi's view rests on the idea that we can communicate our attitudes towards others without using words. What one communicates when one commits a moral wrong towards someone else is that the other person 'can be treated this way'; thereby devaluing their moral worth. The importance of repentance is thus argued for through the idea that actions such as wrongdoing and the different responses we have towards it, like forgiveness, represent our attitudes and feelings, and that by repenting we can 'take back' what we communicated with the previous wrongdoing.

Zaibert is skeptical of this defense of the importance of repentance and argues that it cannot account for unintentional culpable wronging, or for wrongdoing that is intentional but random. This objection relies on the idea that, if a wrongdoing can be seen as communicating a threat towards the victim, the wrongdoer must do this intentionally. The example Zaibert presents as evidence, is that of a car-thief that steals a random car: The car just happens to be yours, but this does not mean that the wrongdoing communicates anything to or about you (2009:379).<sup>29</sup> Another objection, voiced by Zaragoza (2012:613), is that this account of wrongdoing as communicative cannot explain why we judge someone blameworthy for having a weak will. I might know fully well that my action is blameworthy, but choose to perform it because I just cannot stop myself, and not because I have any specific belief about

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<sup>29</sup> This example was first given by Gerrard and McNaughton (2003).

how the victim of my action ought to be treated or not. If Zaibert and Zaragoza are correct and wrongdoing does not entail communication, then why should repentance do so?

I hold that the car-thief and the weak-willed person's actions nonetheless are symbols of someone's regard for others as members of a universal moral community. As argued in Chapter 2, if we are all members of a universal moral community, we have certain duties and right that constrain how we should treat others. By stealing someone's car we have devalued their moral worth, and thus communicated something about how we think others can be treated. The fact that it was my moral standing that was devalued in this instance was random – but I am still a victim of it. If the car-thief is a morally responsible agent, which he must be to be blameworthy, he will be aware that he is causing one particular person damage by stealing their car. Furthermore, the wrongdoer's repentance will let me know that she understands that her action was hurtful, and that she does not stand by such actions, thereby removing the threat to my moral worth. In the next chapter I will discuss a view of forgiveness as something happening on two different levels; a moral and universal level, and a personal level. The random wrongdoing does not require forgiveness on a personal level, but forgiveness still seems to be an issue. The reason why is that is not only the moral worth of the victim that is being devalued by the car-thief, but by violating moral norms the car-thief has violated her own moral worth as well. To get rid of the guilt she will feel as a response to having done wrong, then, the wrongdoer is in need of forgiveness. This would amount to a kind of moral forgiveness, as opposed to a personal forgiveness, and repentance is just as important on both levels of forgiveness.

It seems, then, that we can argue that wrongdoing always does communicate something and that the following reactive attitudes and resentment will do so too. I do contend that there is a significant difference between random and personal wrongdoing, but the difference will only be one of degree in relation to the reactive attitudes and the expected repentance. Furthermore, in the case of the weak willed person, I hold that one can be responsible for one's weak will, and that not being able to stop oneself from doing something one knows will hurt someone else, just because one feels the need to, does not exempt one from blameworthiness. Not administering self-control is thus a way of communicating how one thinks others can be treated.

#### *4.2.4 Zaibert's solution to the paradox*

Forgiveness can only be possible, on Zaibert's account, if we accept that forgiveness is not

the forswearing of resentment, and instead view it as a private mental phenomenon where one forgives for *a moral reason*. This moral reason is grounded in the belief that the world would indeed *not* be a better place if one were to punish the wrongdoer, and the consequences of this belief is that one deliberately refuses to punish the wrongdoer (Zaibert 2009:387). In other words, forgiveness is just the deliberate refusal to punish, or rather the forswearing of punishment as opposed to the forswearing of resentment. This is a definition of forgiveness as a private non-communicative mental phenomenon where forswearing of resentment and repentance is unnecessary, and where the justification is separated from the definition.

Zaibert has thus provided a solution to the paradox, but the solution entails that only unconditional forgiveness can be possible, and that unconditional forgiveness ends up with a paradox because it mixes up the descriptive and the normative. I will now take a closer look at the kind of unconditional forgiveness Zaibert describes, and see whether this is a better way of describing forgiveness than the account of conditional forgiveness I have proposed in Chapter 2.

Zaibert ascertain that both punishment and forgiveness are responses to blame. And even if Zaibert's account of blame in the article I have referred to so far (2009) is one of private blame, he does not deny the existence of overt blame elsewhere (2012). I take private blame to be the disposition to regard a wrongdoer in a certain way, and overt blame to be the disposition to treat the wrongdoer in a certain way (cf. Warmke 2011:617). Overt blame can be seen as outwards manifestations of blame, and usually take the forms of public and social sanctions against the wrongdoer. In other words, overt blaming is the social manifestation of resentment or other reactive attitudes.

Punishment is another way of responding to blame. On Zaibert's retributivist account of punishment, one punishes by doing something towards the wrongdoer one thinks will be painful for the wrongdoer to endure, with the belief that it will offset the wrongdoing (Zaibert 2009:387). On Zaibert's account, forgiveness and punishment are mutually exclusive responses to blame, because forgiveness is simply the refusal to punish. By forgiving one thus deliberately refuses to punish on the basis of the judgment that the world would not be a better place were one to punish the wrongdoer. Recall that Zaibert has not provided us with any reason for forswearing resentment because he does not think forgiveness depends on forswearing of resentment; it only depends on the forswearing of punishment.

Brandon Warmke has pointed out in a critique of Zaibert's account of forgiveness that punishment and overt blame (or overt resentment) seems to be different phenomena because

punishment entails the belief that the action performed will cause pain, while overt blame does not (2011). All overtly expressed blame does therefore not amount to punishment, which is what Zaibert seems to argue (Warmke 2011:618). The upshot of Warmke's argument is that even if one forswears punishment, one can still continue to blame overtly, because overt blame and punishment are separate phenomena. If one can continue to overtly express one's blame towards a wrongdoer, then, how can Zaibert call this forgiveness? It should be pointed out that Warmke's argument also relies on the assumption that Zaibert believes all blame is private and not overt, which, given what I've mentioned above, is not true. Zaibert has further objected to this critique by arguing that overt blame most likely also contains the belief, if not the intention, that the reactive attitudes manifested will cause some kind of pain (2012:106). Zaibert's objection to Warmke's critique leaves him vulnerable to another objection, however: If overt blame and punishment are so similar, how can it be that forgiveness is the forswearing of punishment and not also, or just, the forswearing of resentment?

Zaibert distinguishes resentment from punishment and revenge by claiming that punishment and revenge are things we *do*, while resentment is just an emotion that we *experience* (2012:104). But he fails to explain *why* resentment cannot be something we do on par with punishing, and what I have said about overt blame above problematizes this distinction further. It seems to me that resentment can be something we do. Eve Garrard and David McNaughton has, for example, argued that resentment is a 'hostile feeling' with an aim of inflicting harm on the offender (2003). And Pamela Hieronymi describes resentment as 'moral protest' (2001).

I have earlier argued for why this moral protest should be understood as a public protest because what it protests is a public statement about the moral worth of the victim. It is likely that resentment expressed as overt blame will be very troubling for the wrongdoer to experience. But by describing forgiveness simply as the decision not to punish the wrongdoer, Zaibert has forgotten about the wrongdoers emotional responses to her own wrongdoing. As members of a moral community our self-conception is influenced by how others treat and see us. The wrongdoer that has not made up for her wrongdoing by repenting or making amends will continue to be viewed as a wrongdoer by others, and consequently she will continue to experience guilt. Conditional and communicative forgiveness is aimed at restoring both the wrongdoer and the victim to the state of moral worth they had before the wrongdoing: The wrongdoer's guilt cannot be absolved without communicative forgiveness, but this feature of forgiveness is missing in Zaibert's account.

Moreover, I find it hard to accept the moral reason Zaibert thinks we have to forgive; is it at all plausible that the belief that the world will be a better place were we not to punish the wrongdoer, can account for the motivations we normally have to forgive someone? On a conditional account of forgiveness, the reactive attitudes like resentment are what make forgiveness necessary, because, on this account the aim of forgiveness is to re-establish the relationship and re-instate the moral standing of the victim and the offender. If we simply choose to privately not punish or express overt blame towards a wrongdoer, nothing has been done to the matters of fact that lead us to judge the wrongdoer as a present threat, and without repentance from the wrongdoer we have no reason to extend forgiveness.

Zaibert's position, however, is one advocating the possibility of forgiving without letting go of resentment. His account of forgiveness as the forswearing of punishment doesn't provide any solution to how we can deal with resentment. In fact, punishment seems to be rather similar to resentment. The kind of forgiveness Zaibert has described is thus one that does not fit with either of the two accounts described in Chapter 2, because the goal is neither to restore moral worth or relationships nor to better the mind state of the victim or the wrongdoer. His account is one of consequentialist forgiveness, because one is expected to choose to forgive instead of to punish because the world would not be a better place if one decided to punish.

### **4.3 Reasons for forgiveness**

The two account of the paradox I will be looking at next (Hallich 2013 and Johansson 2009) both define the paradoxical nature of forgiveness in terms of us not having any *reason* to forgive. Compared to Kolnai's formulation this would mean that, in the first part of the paradox, we have no reason to forgive because the wrongdoer has not repented; and in the second part, that we have no reason to forgive because the wrongdoer has annulled the wrongdoing through repentance. The accounts that I will be discussing below, defines the paradox differently, and I examine whether their take on the paradox, as well as their proposed solution, can help us solve Kolnai's paradox nonetheless. I conclude that they do not succeed in dissolving the paradox, because the focus on reasons for forgiveness leads to a conception of the paradox we would like to avoid, namely one that mixes up the descriptive and the normative enterprises. In the previous section I argued against Zaibert's attempt to attack Kolnai on this point. Kolnai can avoid the mix-up of descriptive and normative enterprises because he formulates the paradox differently. My claim is that Hallich and

Johansson's accounts cannot avoid Zaibert's objection. Johansson does, nonetheless, provide us with an important insight into the phenomenon of forgiveness that will prove helpful when we are attempting to understand what more than forswearing resentment forgiveness really is.

#### *4.3.1 Oliver Hallich: “Can the Paradox of Forgiveness Be Dissolved?”*

In his paper from 2013, Oliver Hallich attempts to dissolve the paradox by showing how it is a result of a too narrow conception of ‘reasons’. To do this, he examines three kinds of reasons for forgiving: (1) Moral reasons that make forgiveness morally mandatory; (2) Prudential reasons; and (3) Moral reasons that pertain to the character of the forgiver and that favour forgiveness without making it morally mandatory (2013:1002). Hallich believes that the paradox can be dissolved when we consider the last two kinds of reasons. As we will see Ingvar Johansson relies on a similar account, and also tries to establish reasons for forgiveness. Johansson concludes that forgiveness relies on other-regarding desires, desires that are basic and therefore do not need to be justified. Hallich on the other hand attempts to account for justifiable reasons for forgiveness.

Hallich defines the paradox of forgiveness as follows:

Forgiving, unlike forgetting, is tied to reasons. It is a response to considerations that lead us to think that we ought to forgive. On the other hand, acts of forgiveness, unlike excuses, are responses to instances of culpable wrongdoing. If, however, the wrongdoing is culpable, there is (or seems to be) no reason to forgive it. So two mutually exclusive theses about forgiveness both seem to be equally warranted:  
Forgiveness is related to reasons, but there is no reason to forgive. (2013:999)

As I have showed, Zaibert's formulation of the paradox is not identical to the formulation given by Kolnai. Hallich's paradox seems to differ in a similar manner. In the first part of Hallich's formulation of the paradox, the problem is that the wrongdoer is not blameworthy; we therefore have no reason to forgive her because she should rather be excused. Forgiveness can only be a response to culpable wrongdoing, so if the act is not culpable, forgiveness is impossible. The second part says that if the action is not excusable, the agent is blameworthy and we thus have no reason to forgive. Or, more precisely, Hallich writes that “there can never be reasons for forgiveness and the claim that one *ought* to forgive is necessarily unjustified” (2013:1001). This formulation resembles Zaibert's rather than Kolnai's because, in the first part, forgiveness is impossible because the act can be excused, and the second part deals with the fact that we seem not to have any reason to forgive someone who is

blameworthy.

Hallich arrives at this formulation by looking at what separates forgiveness from forgetting. Forgetting is something that merely happens to us, while forgiving is something we do for a reason, he writes (2013:1000). Further, Hallich claims that “forgiving, unlike forgetting, is a response to consideration that lead us to think that we *ought* to forgive a wrongdoer” (2013:1000). The paradox is thus that we think we ought to forgive, but at the same time we have no reasons to forgive. This consideration leads Hallich to look for reasons for why we ought to forgive. At first glance this seems to be compatible with what we are doing in the second part of Kolnai’s original paradox.

In relation to my interpretation of Kolnai’s paradox, the problem can tentatively be formulated in terms of reasons: The first part, then, will be that we have no reason to forgive an unrepentant wrongdoer because the wrong is still standing, and we still feel resentment. The second part could be formulated as: We have no reason to forgive the repentant wrongdoer because the wrongdoing has been annulled through repentance. This formulation differs from the one I have given originally because it does not focus on the idea that forgiveness is impossible, but rather that we have no reason or motivation to perform it.

In the account of conditional forgiveness that I have outlined in Chapter 2, a motivation for forgiveness would be that the wrongdoer has made up for her wrongdoing through meeting a set of conditions. Meeting the conditions withdraws the threatening claim, and allows the victim to forswear resentment. Even so, I have argued that forswearing resentment is not sufficient for forgiveness because it seems to leave forgiveness redundant. The consequence of this, is that we still need a way of explain how forgiveness can be possible. But is this the same as looking for a reason for why we ought to forgive? I think not.

The problem with Hallich’s formulation of the paradox, then, is a result of how he explains the nature of forgiveness in relation to forgetting. Hallich concludes that what separates forgiveness from forgetting are two things: 1) That forgiving is something we do for a reason, and not something that merely happens to us; and 2) that forgiveness is a response to considerations that lead us to think that we sometimes *ought* to forgive. The first point, that forgiveness is something we do for a reason, can be made to fit with the account of forgiveness given in chapter 2. We revise our judgment about the wrongdoer and the wrongful action in light of the wrongdoer’s repentance. Forgiveness is thus something we do for a reason: the reason that the wrongdoer has retracted the threatening claim and apologized, or done her part in re-establishing the wrongdoer’s moral standing. The second point, on the

other hand, does not feature in the account of forgiveness I have given, or in Kolnai or Zaibert's definition of the paradox for that matter. Hallich has defined forgiveness as something we do because we sometimes think that we *ought* to. What does this amount to? I claim that it amounts to what Zaibert accuses Kolnai of, namely the mixing-up of normative and descriptive enterprises.

The question I am examining in this thesis is how, or whether, forgiveness can be possible, and the answer to this question should be given by a descriptive account of forgiveness. This means that we are not looking for an answer to the question: Why should we forgive? But rather: How can we forgive? Hallich's project, however, is to find justifiable reasons for why we sometimes *ought* to forgive. And he embarks on this project because he has defined the paradox in a way that explains forgiveness as something we do for a reason. It is true that forgiveness is something we do because we have reasons to forgive. We have the reason that we want to re-establish the relationship we have to the wrongdoer, and we have the reason that we wish to re-establish our moral standing as a part of a moral community, and we have the reason that the wrongdoer has made up for the moral wrong she did. These reasons put together function as a goal and a means to forgiveness, but none of them make us respond with an inclination that says we 'ought to forgive'. Whether or not we ought to forgive is a normative question outside the question of how we can take part in a legitimate process of something that rightly can be defined as 'forgiveness'. Hallich is attempting to answer the question "when is forgiveness justified", and not the question "how is forgiveness possible"? His attempt at resolving the paradox thus falls outside the scope of this thesis, as I am not interested in when forgiveness is morally adequate. The upshot of this is that we cannot expect to find a solution to the Kolnaian paradox in Hallich's account.

#### *4.3.2 Ingvar Johansson: "A Little Treatise of Forgiveness and Human Nature"*

In his paper from 2009, Ingvar Johansson defines the paradox of forgiveness as follows: "To forgive is to forgive a person for a particular culpable wrongdoing, but if the wrongdoing is culpable there is no reason to forgive him for it" (2009:538). Johansson has thus defined the paradox in a way similar to Hallich and Zaibert. What Johansson is looking for, is also reasons for forgiveness: But Johansson does not appeal to our inclination to sometimes think we ought to forgive, like Hallich does. Further, Johansson concludes that we do not need a justified reason for forgiveness to dissolve the paradox, only an explicatory reason.

Johansson's thesis is that the paradox of forgiveness dissolves (even with respect to

unconditional forgiveness) if one accepts a philosophical anthropology that includes *other-regarding desires and passions* as components of human nature. The debate Johansson connects to is dealing with the question of whether human nature only allows for desires and passions that are self-regarding, like desire for pleasure, aversion to pain etc. Johansson states that human nature has three main desires: 1) self-regarding desires, 2) benevolent other-regarding desires, and 3) malevolent other-regarding desires (2009:538). An anthropology that only accepts self-regarding desires cannot make sense of forgiveness, because, in the process of forgiving one has to forswear resentful feeling one has towards the wrongdoer, and this is only possible, in Johansson's opinion, if one can feel benevolent other-regarding desires (2009:538).

To make sense of Johansson's account I will give a short description of what he means a desire is, from a first-person perspective. On Johansson's account a desire is an intentional phenomenon with a world-to-mind direction of fit. This means when one has a desire, one wants to change the world in such a way as to satisfy the desire. A desired object thus has a subjective value and is therefore, in a desire-dependent sense, a *reason* for the subject to act in order to satisfy the desire (2009:540). In the case of benevolent other-regarding desires the intentional object is that the desires of someone else than oneself is satisfied, and similarly for malevolent other-regarding desires: the intentional object is dissatisfaction of someone else's desire (Johansson 2009:540). Desires can also either be basic, or means towards the satisfaction of basic desires. In Johansson's account the desire to be benevolent has to be regarded as a basic desire. Because the desire is basic it does not require an objective reason, it cannot be justified, only explained by the subjective values and causal explanations available (Johansson 2009:543).

From this account of desires Johansson proposes this claim as a solution to the paradox:

To forgive is to forgive a person for a particular culpable wrongdoing, and this is possible since a desire to be benevolent can overrule culpability; therefore, benevolence can give rise to forgiveness even where there is no repentance on part of the wrongdoer.

Because benevolence is a basic desire, it cannot be justified, only explained. The outcome of this, according to Johansson, is that forgiveness cannot be justified. Johansson's discussion of

the paradox is very swift, and he does not properly explain what he takes the challenge of the paradox to be. But he emphasizes that what we are looking for when attempting to resolve the paradox is a justified reason for forgiving, and thus an answer to the question “when is forgiveness justified?” (2009:543). The answer to this question, on Johansson’s account, is that this question cannot be answered. We do not need to answer it because we have a basic desire for benevolence, and benevolence overrules culpability (Johansson 2009:543). Even if it was not his intention, Johansson thus seems to have provided an answer to the question “how is forgiveness possible” while looking for an answer to the question “when is forgiveness justified?” His answer has some merits: benevolence will prove to be an important part of forgiveness, but because he does not provide us with an adequate account of forgiveness and the difference between conditional and unconditional forgiveness, his solution to the paradox has given us what we can, following Hieronymi, call a compromising and unarticulated account.

As I have argued in Chapter 2, love, or love for humanity is not a sufficient reason for forswearing resentment because we can easily love someone and still feel reactive attitudes towards them.

The conditions put on forgiveness in conditional forgiveness, are not necessary, according to Johansson, because all we need for forgiveness to be possible is benevolence. The conditions might render forgiveness deserved however, so unconditional forgiveness would thus be *undeserved* forgiveness, on Johansson’s account. “Conditional forgiveness is at bottom conditional benevolence” (Johansson 2009:547). Johansson argues that the conditions only reduce blame, punishment and retributive attitudes, and are not in themselves enough to render forgiveness possible because the culpability is still there.

Unconditional forgiveness might be stupid, in the sense that the wrongdoer does not deserve to be forgiven, and if one forgives someone who does not deserve it they might not be able to understand the possibly grave implications their wrongdoing has had on the victim. However, unconditional forgiving is possible, according to Johansson (2009:552).

The claim Johansson is trying to defeat, namely that forgiveness is in need of a justified reason, relates to the question of when forgiveness is morally adequate. As mentioned repeatedly this is not the question I am trying to find an answer to. Nonetheless I believe that Johansson’s account has provided us with an important insight about forgiveness. The claim that forswearing resentment is not sufficient for forgiveness, and that something more is needed, is important in relation to the second part of the paradox. Recall that we are

stuck with the conclusion that forgiveness seems redundant after the wrongdoer has repented, and that there seems to be nothing for forgiveness to do. In the next chapter we will see that there is indeed something more for forgiveness to do, and that benevolence might be important for forgiveness nonetheless.

#### **4.4 Kim Atkins: “Friendship, Trust and Forgiveness”**

In his paper from 2002, Kim Atkins proposes to solve the paradox of forgiveness through changing the focus from the level of the individual to the level of the relationship between the wrongdoer and the victim (Atkins 2002:111). The strategy he chooses is to make forgiveness dependent on the affection and “drawing” which he means is a necessary component of close friendships.

Atkins is one of the few writing on the paradox of forgiveness that has interpreted the challenge it poses the way Kolnai formulates it. The problem is, he writes: “retaining a sense of the moral quality of the agent of harm, without either condoning a moral wrong or eliminating the moral quality of the harm” (2002:111). In other words, the problem is how one can forgive uncompromisingly, i.e. continue to hold the beliefs that grounds justified resentment, and articulate i.e. treat resentment as an attitude that conveys information about persisting threats to our moral worth. Further, Atkins points out that we must be aware not to eliminate the moral quality of the harm, I take this as a testament to the view that even if the wrongdoer has repented there seems to be something for forgiveness to do, i.e. repentance is not sufficient for forgiveness because the moral harm cannot be eliminated by repentance alone. Atkins argues for forgiveness as an interpersonal, communicative process that requires active participation from both parts (2002:124-125). On his view, both parties have to be actively participating agents for forgiveness to be possible. This is, Atkins believes, because both parties are necessary parts of the conditions that give rise to trust, and without trust we would not be in need of forgiveness (2002:125). This means that forswearing of resentment is not alone enough for forgiveness to come about. Something more is needed, and according to Atkins this is the resumption of trust. As mentioned before, Atkins believes that the paradox arises as a result of the individualistic approach to forgiveness: He writes that it is through an individualistic approach we get the problem of how to retain the moral quality of the agent of the harm (the victim), without either condoning a moral wrong or eliminating the moral quality of the harm (Atkins 2002:111). Atkins believes that his account of friendship can reveal how forgiveness can be possible.

The problem here, as I see it, is Atkins' attempt at solving the paradox with insisting on it only being possible in a close friendship. His definition of forgiveness rightly grounds forswearing of justified moral anger (or resentment) as an essential part of forgiveness, however, it also goes beyond this and includes the “resumption of trust made possible through a process of mutual direction and interpretation on the issue of the harm” (2002:112). What I wish to show is that forgiveness is possible, *in general*, not just in certain cases where wrongdoing has been committed in close friendships. However, Atkins account of what gives rise to the need for forgiveness might be used to explain how forgiveness can be possible outside close friendships as well.

Atkins presents an account of friendship he calls “the drawing view of friendship” where a close friendship is defined by how close friends direct and interpret each other’s actions and attitudes (2002:115). Furthermore, he supplements the theory with Merleau-Ponty’s account of our fundamental mutual vulnerability, which is a result of human embodiment (Atkins 2002:117). The outcome of this account of friendship is that human selves are not independent atomistic souls, but that they depend on communication and intersubjective processes to become *persons*: we become who we are partly through others. So far his account can give important motivation to my earlier discussion about a universal moral relationship. If our personal identity relies on communication and interaction with others, so will our moral agency.

Atkins account thus renders the self, indeterminate and actively changing, as opposed to a self that is static and has a determined essence. We are thus fallible, or flawed, because we are indeterminate in ourselves; we depend on other people’s interpretations of our attitudes and actions. This fallibility is what makes trust such an important part of intersubjective relationships, according to Atkins (2002:120). Trust is particularly important in the drawing model of friendship because in this account of friendship openness and vulnerability are particularly prominent: One has to be open to the influence and interpretation of someone else’s attitude and action and of their interpretation and response to one’s own – and this openness entails vulnerability. Because we are fallible, one cannot always stay true to the expectation inherent in the trust in close relationships (Atkins 2002:121). Atkins believes that forgiveness only becomes intelligible in the understanding of this tension (2002:122). It is thus the fallibility of a close friendship that makes forgiveness appropriate. If we were not indeterminate, but constant, it seems like forgiveness would not be possible, according to Atkins, because if we did not know that we were all subject to

mistakes we would not have any reason to forgive. This view can be comrade to the one voiced by Fricke in Chapter 2, as well as the idea of a universal moral relationship. We depend on others interpretation of ourselves to constitute or self-conception. And because we our self-conception is influenced by social interaction in this way we become vulnerable, despite the equality we have as beings with moral dignity.

The upshot of Atkins' incessant reliance on the importance of trust for the possibility of forgiveness as something that only takes place within close friendships; however, is that his attempt to resolve the paradox fail. What makes forgiveness possible on Atkins' account is the discovery of our mutual imperfection; the common human condition and fallibility. In other words, we can forgive because we realize that we are not perfect, and that making mistakes (performing morally wrongful actions) is something that can happen to us all. This reason for forswearing resentment is very similar to the one Johansson proposes, namely benevolence as a basic human desire. Forgiveness extended on the grounds of any reason like this will not be able to reach the goal we expect conditional forgiveness to have, it will not let us revise our judgment about the persisting threat posed by the unrepentant wrongdoer, and thusly it will not re-establish the moral worth of the victim.

There is some merit to Atkins' account, however, and that is the attempt to change the focus from the level of the individual to the level of the relationship. This is partly what I have attempted to do earlier in this thesis when explaining the importance of repentance on the grounds that it protests a past wrong that persists as a present threat. The reason why an unrepentant wrongdoer poses a present threat to a victim is because the past wrong has devalued the moral worth of the victim, and this moral worth is something she has in virtue of being part of a universal moral relationship. Wrongdoing thus persists in social space, and conditional forgiveness with its goal to re-establish this moral worth as well as the relationship between the victim and the wrongdoer can only come about as a process that both wrongdoer and victim actively take part in. Further, Atkins view of our identity and self-conception as socially constructed explains why we are vulnerable to moral wrongs, and why forgiveness is necessary to rectify this wrong.

## 5 A new Solution to the Paradox

In the previous chapter I examined some proposed solutions to the paradox and concluded that none of them succeeded in their attempt at dissolving the paradox. The most important reason why they fail is that we seem to lack a methodological agreement about how forgiveness should be defined and limited. Consequently we are still faced with the problem of the second part of the paradox: namely, how forgiveness can be possible after the wrongdoer has repented. I will now look at Kolnai's own proposed solution and emphasize the metaphysical underpinnings of the problem Kolnai has discovered. By drawing on Pamela Hieronymi, Kim Atkins and Ingvar Johansson's contributions to the debate I will propose a new way out of the paradox.

The solution I propose relies on the account of forgiveness I have outlined in Chapter 2, and continued to argue for throughout this thesis. I argue that an account of forgiveness must be able to explain what the goal of forgiveness is and limit what falls under the concept of forgiveness in relation to this goal. I have argued for what I think the goal of forgiveness is, and proposed a way this theory can be formulated so as to account for as many of the phenomena we intuitively would like to refer to as 'forgiveness', as possible. The account of forgiveness I have given proposes that conditional forgiveness has two goals: To re-establish the moral worth of the victim, and to re-establish the relationship between the wrongdoer and the offender. As will become evident it seems plausible that the second goal of forgiveness, to re-establish the relationship, is an optional enterprise that depends on something more than forswearing of resentment as a response to repentance. In other words, the victim can actively decide whether to forgive the wrongdoer and continue the relationship or not. By separating these two enterprises, forgiveness becomes the prerogative of the victim, because it retains forgiveness as something the victim can actively choose to do. This might entail that reaching the first goal of forgiveness, re-establishing moral worth, is not always the prerogative of the victim. I conclude that forgiveness can be possible because our actions as moral agents persist in social space, and repentance alone cannot absolve the wrongdoer of guilt, further, there is more to forgiveness than repentance and forswearing of resentment, there is also an active decision to carry the emotional damage, and this is something the victim has to do. Why the victim should choose to carry the emotional damage herself, it might be argued, relies on non-justifiable reasons, such as our basic desire to feel benevolence.

## **5.1 Kolnai's attempt at resolving the paradox**

One of the attempts to resolve the paradox – that I have not yet discussed – is the one offered by Kolnai himself. Kolnai attempts to dissolve the paradox by loosening the rigid alternatives the paradox presents us with. In other words it does not have to be the case that forgiveness either becomes condonation – and thus ungenuine – or that there is no one to forgive because the wrongdoer has repented and does not require forgiveness anymore: Forgiveness might be possible as something in between these rigid alternatives. Kolnai approaches this middle-ground forgiveness through looking at how the attitudes the wrongdoer has shown towards the victim may vary greatly from one scenario of forgiveness to another: A wrongdoer can have many different attitudes when performing a morally wrongful action; and the reaction to the wrongdoing and the possibility of forgiveness will depend on this attitude.

In questioning the first part of the paradox Kolnai thus opens for the possibility that the victim can assess the *character* of the wrongdoer: Is the wrong that has been committed a one-time offense or is it rather the expression of “a comprehensive *habitus* of immorality” (Kolnai 1973-74:99)? This assessment is supposed to open for the possibility of a form of condonation that is not necessarily ungenuine forgiveness. In other words, by examining the character of the wrongdoer, and when concluding that her character and attitude is not one that represents an immoral, or perpetual wrongdoer, we can forgive. Kolnai has thus presented a revision of the conditions for forgiveness in a way that seems to allow condonation to become genuine forgiveness. Kolnai seems to imply that clear and overt repentance is not necessary but that we can assess the character of the wrongdoer as someone who is ‘moving towards’ repentance. The act can still be forgiven, even if the guilt is subsisting, because the victim can assesses the wrongdoer as someone who is moving towards not committing a similar offense in the future (1973-74:101).

It might be objected that this appears to be a kind of unilateral forgiveness, because the wrongdoer has not repented. However, when writing that “One most important factor is of course Fred’s impression and assessment of whether Ralph is engaged in an ‘upward’ movement or struggle or on the contrary is gliding down the slope...” (1973-74:100), it seems like what Kolnai is proposing is that forgiveness is something that admits of degrees. In effect his account becomes akin to Griswold’s account of perfect and imperfect forgiveness. We can forgive someone who has not repented if she has met certain threshold conditions. Kolnai has thus offered a solution to the first part of the paradox by claiming that we can forgive the

unrepentant if they have met the threshold condition of having taken minimal steps towards repenting or, by assessing their character of the wrongdoer and concluding that the character holds for an imaginatively reconstructed scenario of repentance.

Furthermore, this possibility for forgiveness gets very close to what Murphy calls forgiving “for old times’ sake” (1988:29). When we forgive someone because they have repented, we forgive them for what they are *now*, because they have changed from wrongdoer to repentant wrongdoer we have a reason to forgiven, but when we forgive for old times’ sake, we forgive them for what they *once were*. Murphy suggests that this can be a reason for forgiveness, but he does not discuss further whether it is a *justified reason* for forswearing resentment. The underlying metaphysical implications of this move, forgiveness for old time’s sake, are the same as those underlying the second part of the paradox: Namely the assumption that act and agent can come apart. If we can divorce act and agent, a wrongdoer can nullify the morally wrong action by repenting. As we have seen, this leads to the conclusion that forgiveness is redundant or impossible because there is nothing left for forgiveness to *do*. The problem is thus that there seems not to be anything more to forgiveness than simply acknowledging the fact that the wrongdoer no longer stands by her action.

Moving on from Kolnai’s discussion of the first part of the paradox, to the second, Kolnai believes that he has offered a solution to this as well by loosening the rigidity of the options. Kolnai argues that a change of heart does not undo the offense – one does not simply forget the offense once the wrongdoer has changed her heart. If a change of heart alone can undo the offense, Kolnai claims, the victim must only have imagined herself to have been offended (1973-74:101). In other word: Kolnai is here going against the claim that repentance can divorce the agent from the action. The offender is in one sense not the same person, but at the same time she is still identical with herself as the person who committed the offense.

Kolnai writes:

The Ralph who has undergone this *metanoia* is in one sense no longer identical with Ralph the offender *qua* offender, but in another sense he is still identical with the Ralph who committed the offense, for he is still Ralph, *i.e.*, the same person; in English verbal idiom, he is still the Ralph who *has committed* the offense. Hence there is still ‘something to be forgiven’ and an act of forgiveness on the wronged person’s – Fred’s – part is required in order to eliminate the offense from the texture of their relationship and in that sense ‘annul’ it (while it cannot be undone in the sense of effecting its not having been committed). (1973-74:101)

This is somewhat cryptic, but the essence of what Kolnai is conveying is that ‘the person who committed the offense’ is still the same person after a change of heart as she was when she committed the offense, but at the same time, she is no longer an ‘offender’, but perhaps something like a ‘repentant offender’. For the offense to be eliminated from the relationship between the wrongdoer and the victim however, more than a repentant offender is required. “The present Ralph is not discontinuous with the Ralph who once ‘wronged’ Fred; our revoking, disavowing, regretting, condemning, repenting, *etc.* a past act of ours cannot, however decisively it may change our moral status, wish away our responsibility for that act” (1973-74:101). This seems to entail that there is still something to be forgiven after the wrongdoer has repented; the wrongdoer is still responsible for the action she committed. In other words, repentance alone is not sufficient for forgiveness.

Instead of continuing his account with an analysis of what more there is to forgiveness, Kolnai goes on to argue that the fact that the sinner and the sin is *inseparable* but *distinguishable* allows for one kind of forgiveness, namely what he has mentioned before: “It is possible to ‘re-accept’ somebody – the essence of forgiveness – without exculpating him and without hoping for anything like a thoroughgoing repentance on his part” (1973-74:104). In other words, the revising of the conditions on forgiveness Kolnai has proposed can be applied to both part of the paradox – with the consequence that we do not have to wait for repentance in order to forswear resentment. In other words, forgiveness is possible, on Kolnai’s account, because we can re-establish the relationship between wrongdoer and victim based on the attitude of the wrongdoer.

Kolnai’s somewhat inconsistent attempt to resolve his own paradox fails in several ways, however, there are some part of Kolnai’s text that might lead us in the right direction. The solution fails, I argue, because by attempting to solve the paradox by proposing something similar to Griswold’s imperfect forgiveness, Kolnai does not account for how we can re-establish the moral worth of the victim. As I have argued in Chapter 2, this very loose definition of ‘imaginatively reconstructing’ repentance seems to lead to a kind of unconditional forgiveness because the ultimate goal of this enterprise is to reach a better state of mind for the victim (or to absolve the wrongdoer of guilt, and thus reach a better state of mind for the wrongdoer). This is not the goal of conditional forgiveness; the goal of conditional forgiveness is to re-establish moral worth, and to re-build the relationship between wrongdoer and victim. As we have seen throughout this thesis, to be able to re-define the relationship between victim and wrongdoer one must first re-establish moral worth, and this

part falls out of Kolnai's account because he opens for a kind of imperfect forgiveness a 'la Griswold. Kolnai's solution fails on another point as well, when attempting to explain how we can forgive a repentant wrongdoer Kolnai breaks off his discussion without proposing any clear solution. Recall a part of the citation above: "Hence there is still 'something to be forgiven' and an act of forgiveness on the wronged person's – Fred's – part is required in order to eliminate the offense from the texture of their relationship and in that sense 'annul' it..." (1973-74:101). What Kolnai is saying is that there is more to forgiveness than forswearing of resentment as a response to repentance, unfortunately he says preciously little about what this is, other than that 'an act of forgiveness is needed'.

## 5.2 The two goals of forgiveness

As described in Chapter 3, Hieronymi's account of forgiveness meets the same challenge we see in the second part of Kolnai's paradox. As Hieronymi describes it, the challenge is: Firstly, when the wrongdoer repents she somehow becomes a "new man", in the sense that one, by apologizing can separate oneself from the past deed. After the wrongdoer has repented, it is merely up to the victim to acknowledge this new moral fact. No forgiveness is necessary because the meaning of the misdeed is cut off from its source (Hieronymi 2001:549). Hieronymi here points to the underlying metaphysical claim that the wrongdoer can separate herself from the wrongful deed simply by repenting. If these metaphysical assumption are correct there doesn't seem to be any need for forgiveness. Hieronymi gives us a two-fold answer to the challenge of the second part of the paradox, and explains what is left for forgiveness to do after the wrongdoer has repented. Firstly, Kolnai relies on the social nature of our identities, by saying that the offender cannot absolve herself of the persistent guilt (1973-74:100). This means that both the guilt the offender feels, and the meaning of the wrongful action persist in social space after the wrongdoer has repented (Hieronymi 2001:550). In other words, repentance alone cannot allow the wrongdoer to separate from the action; because the wrongful action has ramifications beyond the wrongdoer's state of mind she depends on forgiveness from the victim to let go of her guilt. If we see this in the light of what I have said before about the moral relationship we stand in to all human beings, and the social construction of our self-conception, I argue that the first thing forgiveness does, is re-establish the moral worth of the victim and the wrongdoer within this moral relationship. For forgiveness to fulfill this purpose, something more than repentance is required. Repentance is not alone enough for the wrongdoer to overcome her guilt; she must also have ratification

from the victim to be able to know that she has been forgiven. This is so exactly because our self-conception can be influenced by how others perceive and treat us. If our identities are partly socially constituted, as Atkins claims, that explains how forgiveness can still be possible after a change of heart on the part of the wrongdoer. The offender cannot be separated from the wrongful act simply by repenting; there must also be a social recognition of the repentance. In line with Hieronymi's account, one might say that the victim has to show in some way, through a speech act or other publicly understandable communication that she has chosen to forgive the offender. This could also be connected to Kolnai's proposed solution to the paradox. Kolnai does indeed state, however indecisively, that the wrongdoer cannot separate herself from the action by repenting. The problem with Kolnai's solution is just that he grounds the possibility for forgiveness in the character of the wrongdoer, and gives up on the need for repentance which is so important to retain the moral worth of the victim, as well as the wrongdoer.

The challenge of the second part of paradox can thus be explained within the framework of the account of conditional forgiveness I have proposed. Forgiveness is possible because the account of forgiveness I have given in Chapter 2 can revise the metaphysical assumptions underlying the Kolnaian paradox. The sinner cannot be separated from the sin by repenting, because the sin is an action carrying a meaning that is connected to the wrongdoer's attitude, and because our self-conception is partly constituted through social interaction and by how others see us, the wrongdoer will not be able to rid herself of guilt if the victim does not perform a communicative act of forgiveness. If forgiveness is seen as a process, like described in Chapter 2, it is dependent on the wrongdoer's repentance, and on the ratification of this repentance on the part of the victim. By repenting the wrongdoer re-establishes the moral worth of the victim and by forgiving the victim re-establishes the moral worth of the wrongdoer. As such, conditional forgiveness cannot reach its goal of re-establishing moral worth if both parties are not involved in the process. In the second part of the paradox forgiveness appears redundant after the wrongdoer has repented because it seems like all there is for forgiveness to do is to re-establish the moral worth of the victim, and this can come about if the wrongdoer repents. But the wrongdoer cannot absolve herself of the guilt, and step out of her role as a wrongdoer if the victim does not grant forgiveness. To explain why forgiveness is still required after the wrongdoer has repented one must view wrongdoing as something that persists in social space, it affects the self-conception of both wrongdoer and victim, and it does not vanish before both parties have restored their moral

worth. Further restoring moral worth is not something the victim, or the wrongdoer can decide to do by themselves, it has to be a communicative process.

However, there is also a second thing for forgiveness to do, namely re-establish the relationship between wrongdoer and offender. This is necessary because there seems to be more to the wrongful deed than a threatening claim: There is also a psychic damage done to the victim. Hieronymi describes this as a damage the wrongdoer normally cannot repair (2001:550). It is thus not a damage of material or economic kind, or a damage to the moral worth of the victim. When the victim forgives, what she is doing is agreeing “to bear in her own person the cost of the wrongdoing and to incorporate the injury into her own life without further protest and without demand for retribution” (Hieronymi 2001:551). This is the second goal of conditional forgiveness, and the second thing forgiveness *does*.

What Hieronymi does not propose a solution to, however, is how we can be able to make the decision to carry the damage ourselves. This is where I propose to bring in Johansson’s account of forgiveness as something we do because we have a basic desire to be benevolent. If forgiveness has two goals – to re-establish moral worth, and to re-define the relationship between victim and wrongdoer – and the re-establishing of moral worth depends on repentance and forswearing of resentment, what is it that prompts us to re-establish the relationship, and, furthermore, what does it mean to re-establish a relationship?

Christel Fricke proposes a divide between *personal* and *moral* forgiveness (2011:62). Moral forgiveness, Fricke writes, “obtains where the victim forgives his offender just insofar as he is a human being” (2011:62). This kind of forgiveness is the only one that can take place where the victim and offender did not have a personal relationship before the offense, according to Fricke, and it is also what happens if the victim decides not to resume or re-build her relationship with the wrongdoer (2011:62). I propose that Fricke’s account of moral forgiveness can be compared to what I have claimed is the first thing forgiveness does: it is what we do as a response to repentance, we forswear resentment on the grounds that the wrongdoer no longer poses a threat to our moral worth, and absolves the wrongdoer of guilt by granting forgiveness. Moral forgiveness thus encapsulates the elimination of resentment, absolution of guilt, and thus the re-establishing of moral worth for both victim and wrongdoer.

Personal forgiveness, on the other hand, requires something more than mere forswearing of resentment, and I have proposed that this is the second thing forgiveness can do, namely, re-establish the relationship between wrongdoer and victim. This seems to be a

decision the victim has to make, because even if the wrongdoer has repented and is no longer a threat to the victim's moral worth, there might be too much psychological damage for the victim to decide to re-establish the relationship. Personal forgiveness is thus always the prerogative of the victim.<sup>30</sup> In connection to Hieronymi's account above, this can be equated with the decision to carry the damage oneself, because it is only within a continuing relationship it becomes important not to overtly blame the offender, and thus decide to carry the emotional damage oneself.

The problem with this separation of the two goal of forgiveness, however, is that it seems like forgiveness only can reach both its goals if the wrongdoer and the victim have had a personal relationship before the offense. I would therefore like to expand on Fricke's suggested divide by proposing that personal forgiveness can be possible outside personal relations as well. This seems important, because when we have been wronged we are already in some sense in a relation with the wrongdoer, and if we can only grant personal forgiveness to someone we have had a personal relationship with in the past, the second thing forgiveness does becomes too restricted: We should be able to re-establish our relationship with everyone we are in a moral relationship with, because everyone taking part in this relationship are in a position to influence our self-conception. We saw in the previous chapter that Atkins proposed a theory of how we could forgive within close relationships. If we view Atkins account of a relationship as something that can be expanded to a universal moral relationship, it can be argued that our self-conception depends on our interaction with everyone taking part in our social lives, because they all influence the constitution of our identity. On Atkins account forgiveness only makes sense within a close relationship because our personal identity relies on the interpretations of others, we are thus indeterminate in ourselves. We can only forgive, on this account, because we are indeterminate, and we know that we cannot be perfect moral subjects, but liable to cause each other offense. This realization makes forgiveness possible. I claim that, Atkins does not have to rely on a close personal relationship to claim that we are indeterminate. If our personal identity depends on social interaction, the influence we get from social interaction does not have to be limited to close friendship, but can be expanded to all social interaction whatsoever.

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<sup>30</sup> Whether moral forgiveness can be supererogatory under any circumstances would be an interesting topic to examine further. It is, however, outside the topic of this thesis. Warmke (2015) has argued that, following Hieronymi's account, forgiveness appears to become mandatory for the victim when the wrongdoer has repented. I believe that on my interpretation of Hieronymi's account, this is not a possible consequence because deciding to carry the psychological damage is the prerogative of the victim.

There is one problem with expanding on Atkins account however, we do not seem to have any immediate reason to want to resume or re-define a relationship with someone we have no previous relationship with except for through the offense. For the victim to decide to re-establish the relationship with the wrongdoer she must have a reason beyond the fact that the wrongdoer has repented, because re-establishing the relationship is not just a response to the fact that the wrongdoer no longer poses a threat to her moral standing, but it is a re-acceptance of the wrongdoer in a personal relationship. One suggestion for how this could be possible is that we have a basic desire for benevolence that prompts us to make the decision to carry the emotional damage and re-define the relationship nonetheless. To accept this suggestion one must also accept Johansson's account of our basic desire to be benevolent. It is not the purpose of this thesis to examine human desire, so I will not venture to defend Johansson's thesis. Suffices to say that his account of our basic desire to be benevolent is one way to explain how the second thing forgiveness does, or personal forgiveness, can come about outside close personal relationships.

To conclude: If we expand on Fricke's conception of personal forgiveness and Atkin's account of forgiveness as something that only can happen in a close friendship, by claiming that the second goal of forgiveness – re-defining the relationship between victim and wrongdoer – can come about between persons who have not had a close relationship in the past, it seems like the account needs something else to make the re-definition of the relationship possible. I propose that Johansson's account of our basic desire to be benevolent can be what makes it possible for us re-establish the relationship without there having been a close friendship or previous relation between victim and wrongdoer. As such, the second goal of forgiveness is something that is not limited only to close friendships, but something that can come about between close friends.

I would like to add that my reliance on Atkins' and Johansson's accounts of forgiveness in this last section does not mean that their accounts can solve the paradox. As discussed in the previous chapter, both accounts fail to resolve the paradox, either because they do not account for how we can restore the moral worth of the victim and the wrongdoer, or/and because they are looking for an answer to the question of how forgiveness can be justified, as opposed to the question of how forgiveness can be possible.

### 5.3 Concluding remarks

In this thesis I started out by giving an overview of the philosophical debate about forgiveness. I presented what has been classified as two different and competing accounts of forgiveness: conditional and unconditional forgiveness. Further, I problematized making a distinction between two different kinds of forgiveness. By spelling out the different accounts of forgiveness it became clear that the two accounts actually present different ideas about what the goal of forgiveness is. Conditional forgiveness seems to have the goal of re-establishing moral worth, as well as re-defining the relationship between wrongdoer and offender, while unconditional forgiveness seems to be more preoccupied with attaining a better state of mind for the victim or the wrongdoer simply by getting rid of resentment and guilt. I therefore proposed we look at the different kinds of forgiveness as two different practices, rather than as two competing philosophical accounts of what forgiveness is.

Further, by looking closely at the arguments for which account is a better description of forgiveness and corresponds more closely to our intuitions about and actual practice of forgiveness, we managed to diagnose what appears to be a mix up of two importantly different questions concerning the nature of forgiveness: “what is forgiveness?”, and “how can forgiveness be morally justified?” Philosophers writing on forgiveness seldom clarify which question they are actually trying to handle. This mix up became even clearer when looking at the paradox of forgiveness. The paradox has the presumed outcome that forgiveness is impossible. The philosophical literature on the paradox nonetheless ends up trying to find an answer to when forgiveness is justified, without clarifying what forgiveness is, fundamentally speaking. It is therefore paramount to have a clear account of what forgiveness is to be able to solve the paradox. If we don’t know what forgiveness is, as such, we have no way of presenting an answer to how it can be possible. I have argued that the paradox only arises within the conditional kind of forgiveness, and that to solve it we must give a descriptive account of conditional forgiveness.

Furthermore, the existence of the paradox of forgiveness relies on certain metaphysical assumptions about the connection between agent and act. And by looking closer at this relation, and at theories about the role of wrongdoing, blame and forgiveness in our moral lives I have presented a way of revising these metaphysical assumptions. What we saw in the second part of the paradox was that forgiveness became redundant when the wrongdoer had repented. It appeared as if there was nothing left for forgiveness to do, or that forgiveness simply was the forswearing of resentment. My proposition is that if we look at wrongdoing and the affects it has on us, as something that persist in social space, we can explain how

forgiveness is possible after the wrongdoer has repented. By drawing on and implementing the theories of different philosophers writing on the subject of morality and forgiveness I have thus presented a theory of how forgiveness can be possible as a process taking place within a universal moral relationship. Forgiveness is possible because the wrongdoer depends on the victim's ratification of her (the wrongdoer's) repentance to let go of guilt. Forgiveness is thus more than just forswearing of resentment as a response to repentance, it is a communicative process. Forgiveness, as such, is twofold. It has two purposes, and the two purposes can be explained separately. The first thing forgiveness does, is to re-establish the moral worth of the victim and the wrongdoer within the moral relationship. This has to come about as a response to repentance and result in forswearing of resentment and absolution of guilt. The second thing forgiveness does is to re-establish the personal relationship between wrongdoer and victim, this second process I suggest, might rely on our basic desire to be benevolent.

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