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# Virtuous Anger and Vicious Forgiveness

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# VIRTUOUS ANGER AND VICIOUS FORGIVENESS

by

Michael William Thousand

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Master of Arts  
in Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

### VIRTUOUS ANGER AND VICIOUS FORGIVENESS

by

Michael William Thousand

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2018  
Under the Supervision of Professor Stanislaus Husi

This essay can largely be seen as having two functions: contributing to the philosophical literature on the nature of forgiveness and defending anger as a morally worth class of attitudes. I will begin by sketching out some of the elements of forgiveness before presenting a prominent debate that is found in this domain. Essentially, this dispute focuses on whether or not conditions may be placed on instances of genuine forgiveness. Conditional accounts argue that it is perfectly acceptable or even rationally required that agents attach conditions to their forgiveness (e.g. a change of heart by the wrongdoer). Unconditional, as the name implies, will argue that the placement of conditions on forgiveness are unacceptable and harm the inherent nature of forgiveness to some degree. As I will argue, proponents of conditional views of forgiveness will often fail to provide a defense of the anger that one maintains when opting not to forgive. Given that my ultimate goal is to provide my own conditional account of forgiveness, I will attempt to provide that very defense by arguing that anger is, at times, an appropriate and morally worthy response to culpable wrongdoing. Ultimately, I will push this even further and argue that anger is morally superior to forgiveness in instances of severe wrongdoing committed by unrepentant offenders.

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This thesis is dedicated to Ashley, Tuukka, Plato, and my parents, William & Rae, for all of your constant love and support throughout the years.

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“Thus any one can be angry—that is quite easy...but to do these things to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right object, and in the right manner, is not what everybody can do, and is by no means easy; and that is the reason why right doing is rare and praiseworthy and noble.” ~ Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1109a)

## 1 – Introduction

It is easy to find arguments that anger, particularly sustained anger, is detrimental to both the person who holds it and society as a whole. One need only walk down the self-help aisle of their local bookstore to encounter such claims. Likewise, the philosophical literature on forgiveness is rife with such positions.<sup>1</sup> Most notable among these is Martha Nussbaum’s recent book, *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Jealousy*. In this paper, I will dispute Nussbaum’s claim that anger is ‘normatively problematic’ by arguing that certain instances of anger can be seen as both appropriate and even morally virtuous. Essentially, I will argue that this oft criticized attitude can be morally beneficial and serves an important role in upholding our common ethical norms. I will further argue that anger can be morally superior to forgiveness in certain instances. In such cases, I claim that the agent experiencing virtuous anger *must* continue to endorse and maintain said anger. To forgo one’s virtuous anger by engaging in forgiveness, I will argue, is at best hasty or imprudent—and, at worst, morally vicious.

While this paper is partially meant as a defense of anger and an articulation of its benefits, my project can be more accurately understood as an attempt to contribute to the philosophical literature on anger’s antithesis: forgiveness.<sup>2</sup> I begin in §2 by providing an account of what I understand forgiveness to be and discussing a relevant debate in this domain that centers around whether or not genuine forgiveness can have conditions attached to its

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<sup>1</sup> Calhoun (1992), Garrard & McNaughton, (2003), Holmgren, (2012); Twambley (1976) to name a few.

<sup>2</sup> There are obviously other ways for us to rid ourselves of anger (e.g. excusing, justifying, etc.) that I will touch on briefly in §2, but they are not my focus here. For the current project, I will understand anger and forgiveness as being opposite attitudes that one may adopt and/or endorse.

implementation (e.g. a change of heart by the wrongdoer). Proponents of so-called ‘unconditional forgiveness’ argue that cases of genuine or aspirational forgiveness cannot involve conditions being placed on the wrongdoer or the situation itself. According to their view, forgiveness is a beneficial or positive thing to spread whenever one is able. On the other hand, defenders of ‘conditional forgiveness’ argue that there are instances where unconditionally forgiving an unrepentant or unpunished wrongdoer would be inappropriate or impermissible. As I will note, one piece often missing from the work of philosophers arguing from this position is a defense of the anger that remains when one withholds forgiveness. It is my contention that any view endorsing conditional forgiveness must provide good reasons for remaining angry (or at least refusing to forgive). This account aims to do just that.

To motivate my project, I will focus in §3 on Martha Nussbaum’s recent charge that anger is normatively detrimental and ought to be rid from our moral space. This criticism is largely made on the assumption that anger *necessarily* involves a desire for retribution. However, I will demonstrate that this assumption, while tempting, is far too strong of a claim in reality. Further, I will show that even if Nussbaum’s claim turns out to be true, this does not provide a decisive reason for writing off or rejecting the value of anger itself. As I will argue, the imposition of costs brought about by anger can be justified in certain instances.

In §4 I will develop an account of virtuous anger, thereby demonstrating its value in our moral discourse. In doing so, I will contrast this type of anger with its alternative: vicious forgiveness. Essentially, I will argue that there are cases in which forgiving (or otherwise extinguishing one’s anger) would amount to a failure to adequately respect either one’s self, the

wrongdoer, or the moral community at large.<sup>3</sup> In such instances, I will argue that the anger felt will be obligatory in its maintenance and endorsement by the agent feeling it.

## **2 – Setting the Stage: Anger & Forgiveness**

Before delving into the question of how we ought to evaluate reactions to wrongdoing, it would be helpful to first explain how I aim to employ the terms ‘anger’ and ‘forgiveness’ for this essay. To begin with, I am using ‘anger’ as an umbrella term that will include things like resentment, indignation, and at least some instances of hatred. In addition, I will understand the anger I am concerned with as being a so-called ‘reactive attitude’ that necessarily involves a cognitive component (e.g. a judgment that the act was wrong, etc.).<sup>4</sup> What I specifically have in mind when discussing anger largely comes from Glen Pettigrove’s definition of what he calls the “hostile reactive attitudes” which means that I am understanding anger as an attitude elicited by instances of wrongdoing that is “other-directed” and “oppositional” in nature and includes some cognitive component.<sup>5</sup>

What is important about the above definition is that the anger I am concerned with is generally elicited when another member of the moral community violates an expectation or demand placed upon them by another party (ourselves, society as a whole, etc.). In most instances, it does seem as though something like resentment will generally arise in response to specifically moral expectations or demands, but not necessarily so. However, even if resentment can arise from extra-moral violations, it is unlikely that said resentment would be able to qualify as virtuous or morally worthy, so I will restrict my interest largely to moral transgressions. In my

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<sup>3</sup> I will elucidate this much more clearly in §4, but the type of respect I am concerned with here is essentially Stephen Darwall’s (1977) notion of ‘recognition respect’ (e.g. respect for an individual’s basic status as an agent).

<sup>4</sup> See Strawson (1962) for a discussion of the reactive attitudes.

<sup>5</sup> Pettigrove (2012), p. 7.

anger, I judge that there has been a moral wrong committed, that the wrongdoer is responsible, and that the victim of the wrong deserves to be treated better than they have been.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the anger I am after will also be different from anger directed toward non-agents such as the weather or one's computer.

Now while anger is somewhat easy to outline, forgiveness is a much trickier concept to get a handle on. Given that the philosophical community's sustained interest in this phenomenon is relatively new, very little consensus has yet been reached as to how we should understand forgiveness (e.g. what necessary features it has, etc.). As mentioned at the outset of this paper, this project can be seen as an attempt to clarify one of these features: whether or not conditions may be placed on genuine instances of forgiveness. That said, however, there are numerous other aspects that cannot be given the space they most certainly deserve. However, it would be helpful before proceeding to outline what I take forgiveness to be.

The first disagreement that often arises when philosophers discuss forgiveness is determining precisely what forgiveness itself actually *does*. For instance, Bishop Joseph Butler famously proposed forgiveness as the overcoming of resentment,<sup>7</sup> a stance that many contemporary philosophers have also embraced (although generally with some additional content).<sup>8</sup> However, philosophers such as Pettigrove have argued that forgiveness need not necessarily mean the overcoming of *all* angry attitudes in perpetuity. For instance, it seems one could forgive their offender, realize that they were actually still holding some levels of resentment, and still maintain their forgiveness was genuine so long as they remain committed to

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<sup>6</sup> Hieronymi (2001), p. 530.

<sup>7</sup> Butler (Sermons VIII & IX).

<sup>8</sup> For instance, Jeffrie Murphy adds in the idea that forgiveness is overcoming resentment "on moral grounds" (1988 p. 23-24 & 2003 p. 13).

riding themselves of their anger.<sup>9</sup> David Owens, while noting that forgiveness is likely a process, argues that forgiveness is not so much the overcoming of anger, but instead is a “transformation that renders blame inapt.”<sup>10</sup> Essentially, Owens sees it as the overcoming of blame rather than resentment itself.<sup>11</sup>

Somewhat obviously, however, there are numerous ways for someone to rid themselves of anger or blame that we would not consider an instance of forgiveness. The philosophical literature on forgiveness will often address excusing, justifying, showing mercy, or forgetting the wrong as methods of overcoming one’s negative reactions that should be kept separate from our conception of forgiveness. For instance when I excuse or justify a wrong, I will present some evidence that either shows that the wrongdoer had no other option or is otherwise not responsible, or I will use this evidence to suggest that what they did was actually acceptable regardless of it appearing to be a wrong at first blush. Likewise, if forgetting were sufficient for forgiving, then my taking a magic pill that erases my memory would count as my forgiving the wrongdoer. Such a result is obviously one philosophers would be keen to avoid. So overcoming resentment or blame alone is not sufficient to qualify for forgiveness.

Attempting to build on this, Eve Garrard and David McNaughton write that forgiveness is the overcoming of resentment coupled with the fostering of “an attitude of good will (or even

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<sup>9</sup> Specifically, Pettigrove writes that the forgiveness we wish for ourselves includes the absence of all hostile attitudes the other previously held toward us. However, he correctly notes the recalcitrant nature of human sentiments and ultimately adds that should any resentment or hostility turn out to still be present (unbeknownst to the forgiver at the time they forgave), ought to be rejected as much as possible if we are to say that they have genuinely forgiven the wrongdoer. Pettigrove also notes (contentiously) that forgiveness may be possible without resentment or any anger/blame emerging in the first place. While I would certainly like to investigate this claim, it is sadly beyond the scope of this current project; Pettigrove (2012), p. 1-19.

<sup>10</sup> Owens (2012), pg. 54-57.

<sup>11</sup> I will not dedicate an abundance of space to Owens view here as it is not my primary concern. What I will say is that I am somewhat unsure of his move as it seems like if blame is associated with responsibility, then my forgiveness would or could still include my blaming the wrongdoer and holding them responsible. Again, however, it is not something I feel needs to be discussed any further in this project.

love) towards the wrongdoer.”<sup>12</sup> This may be a plausible way to understand forgiveness – anger or resentment being replaced by good-will or positive regard – however, it does seem plausible that we could forgive someone without holding any positive regard toward them. Oddly, the authors add a few pages after the above cited text that “Forgiving your enemies may even be compatible with engaging in a just war against them.”<sup>13</sup> Engaging in a war with someone seems to be the very definition of holding ill-will toward another party, or at least is one of the more prominent examples. Despite arguing that forgiveness necessarily involves good-will, their example of forgiving one’s enemies while continuing to fight against them seems to only to help undermine their argument by showing a potential case of genuine forgiveness that does not involve good-will or positive regard at any level.

Jean Hampton goes down a similar road in arguing that forgiveness is “a *process* involving, not only certain psychological preparations (mainly the overcoming of various forms of anger) but, more positively, a change of heart towards the wrongdoer...which is normally accompanied by an offer of reconciliation.”<sup>14</sup> Hampton’s solution seems more plausible so long as we avoid saying that forgiveness *always* involves reconciliation as it most certainly does not. But the idea that the person forgiving overcomes or attempts to overcome hostile attitudes while also opting to see the wrongdoer as somehow removed from the act seems a plausible alternative to the picture Garrard and McNaughton provided.

To show why I believe this is the best way to construe what occurs when we forgive, we need to begin with an element of my account that potentially deviates from others found in the literature. Essentially, this boils down to a distinction I want to make between the process of

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<sup>12</sup> Garrard & McNaughton (2003), p. 44.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>14</sup> Hampton (1988), p. 42.

forgiving and of holding a ‘forgiving attitude’. As I understand it, these two are almost always bound together. But the distinction I am identifying here is between engaging in forgiveness – the process of coming to terms with the wrong, re-evaluating one’s relationship with the wrongdoer, and often ultimately expressing one’s forgiveness to the offender (when possible) – and holding a forgiving attitude – the cognitive component that commits one’s self to forswearing anger. As I see it, the act of forgiving is an incredibly complex practice that could have a multitude of facets and necessary or sufficient features. On the other hand, I am understanding one’s holding a forgiving attitude as the victim making a commitment to withdraw their anger as much as possible and divorce the wrongdoer from the wrong to some degree. Moving forward, I will largely refer only to forgiveness as I take it that all genuine cases of the phenomenon will involve adopting a forgiving attitude. However, as my goal is ultimately to compare the endorsing or maintaining one’s forgiving or angry attitudes in certain situations, it is important to make this distinction now as I will argue in §4 that simply holding a forgiving attitude rather than an angry one is sufficient for vice in certain cases.<sup>15</sup>

This idea of separating the wrong from the wrongdoer has a particularly distinguished history within the philosophical literature in this domain. Numerous philosophers will call on St. Augustine’s notion of “hate the sin but not the sinner” when discussing how plausible a notion of this sort would be.<sup>16</sup> Following in this vein, some contemporary philosophers argue that forgiveness necessarily involves ‘wiping the slate clean’ and opting to deal with the wrongdoer moving forward as if the wrong had never occurred. While there may be some intuitive pull to such an idea, I do not believe that this is a necessary component of holding a forgiving attitude or

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<sup>15</sup> I deem it important as it seems like we sometimes may not be able to complete the process of forgiveness, but I want to argue later that the mere adoption of the forgiving attitude with its insistence on resisting anger can be morally pernicious in particular cases.

<sup>16</sup> See Jeffrie Murphy (1988) for further discussion of this idea.

engaging in the process of forgiveness. That said, it does seem as if genuine forgiveness will necessarily leave the act in the past at least to some minimal degree. For instance, I could seemingly forgive you for harming me and refuse to allow your transgressions to impact my moral appraisals of you moving forward (e.g. I could still think of you as an overall morally good person). However, I may yet take practical measures to avoid finding myself in the same situation in the future. Let's say, for example, that a close friend of mine took some of my property without permission while housesitting. If I forgive this friend, it seems like I could cut out his immoral behavior from my appraisal of his character while simultaneously refusing to let him watch my house while I am out of town in the future. Now I will not push this issue any further in this essay, but numerous philosophers seem to agree with the line of thought I have in mind here as they often argue that forgiveness does not necessarily mean reconciliation between the victim and wrongdoer.<sup>17</sup> As truly 'wiping the slate' would seemingly include a return to the previously held relationship, allowing that forgiveness need not involve reconciliation seems an obvious allowance of our taking the wrong into consideration at some level moving forward while also divorcing the wrongdoer from their act to some degree.

## **2.1 – Unconditional Forgiveness**

Having sketched out the picture of forgiveness and anger that I am operating with, we are now able to begin discussing the feature of forgiveness that this essay is most concerned with. As mentioned at the outset, my primary focus for this paper is an attempt to contribute to the literature on the debate between conditional and unconditional accounts of forgiveness. Put simply, this dispute centers around whether or not the victim can or ought to place conditions on

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<sup>17</sup> For example, Holmgren (2012), Garrard & McNaughton (2003), Pettigrove (2012), & Griswold (2007).

the wrongdoer or situation itself before opting to engage in forgiveness. Many philosophers advancing an unconditional view of forgiveness insist that the attitude can be understood as a supererogatory act one may choose to freely perform, often in an effort to make the world a better place.<sup>18</sup> Like other supererogatory acts, defenders of these views argue that it is always acceptable and/or always beneficial to spread them. Furthermore, the person arguing in such a way will also insist that conditions cannot be placed on supererogatory acts without thereby undermining their inherent value—thus, the same goes for forgiveness: it *must* be unconditional in its employment.

Whether or not the connection with supererogatory acts is directly made, the most important aspect of unconditional accounts is their insistence on not demanding a change of heart on the part of the wrongdoer. Margaret Holmgren writes that, provided the victim has appropriately addressed the wrongdoing itself and their moral standing in regards to the offender, “it is always morally appropriate and desirable for her to forgive, regardless of whether the offender repents and regardless of what he has done or suffered...forgiveness can be viewed as both unconditional and unilateral.”<sup>19</sup> Eve Garrard and David McNaughton write that “to forgive involves not requiring either apology or penance. To insist on an apology is to insist that the wrongdoer humble himself before one, and this implies that there is still some residual resentment.”<sup>20</sup> Finally, Jean Hampton makes the following claim as to how we should understand the best instances of forgiveness:

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<sup>18</sup> Martha Nussbaum (2016) pushes this even further and argues that all forgiveness is transactional in nature. This leaves her unsatisfied and so she advocates for a position of unconditional love. That said, I do believe that lumping her in with the unconditional forgiveness camp is not being entirely uncharitable. Others who use “better place” type language include Calhoun (1992), Twambley (1976), and Garrard/McNaughton (2003).

<sup>19</sup> Holmgren (2012), p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> Garrard and McNaughton’s idea that demanding an apology implies ‘residual resentment’ seems odd as it is an inherent aspect of forgiveness that one resents (or maybe could have resented) the wrongdoer. A better way to phrase it may be that forcing the offender to humble themselves implies a lack of character or something along those lines; Garrard & McNaughton (2003), p. 47.

the forgiver does not wait for the wrongdoer to prove himself to be morally reborn in order to reassociate with him. Instead, the forgiver *trusts* that, although he has undergone no rebirth, he is still “good enough” despite what he has done. Forgiveness is thus the decision to see a wrongdoer in a new, more favorable light.<sup>21</sup>

What all of these philosophers argue is that unconditionally forgiving a wrongdoer does not condone the act in question. By unconditionally forgiving the unrepentant offender, I still am protesting the act by maintaining its wrongness and do not compromise my own evaluation of my self-worth. In addition, these thinkers argue that insisting on repentance only serves to harm the wrongdoer (by the unpleasantness of humbling ourselves before another) which implies a failure of character on the part of the one withholding forgiveness.

When it comes to the anger that one is overcoming or forswearing when engaging in forgiveness, defenders of the unconditional side of the debate often have two assertions underlying their accounts: (a) that anger inflicts unjust harms or is conceptually incoherent; or (b) that anger is often a fitting and normatively appropriate response to wrongdoing – just a morally inferior one when compared to forgiveness. While many proponents of unconditional forgiveness will accept anger as a *fitting* response to wrongdoing, these two concerns illustrate that their arguments are based on challenging either its *appropriateness* or its *moral worth*.<sup>22</sup> In other words, (a) accepts the fittingness of anger while denying its appropriateness in our moral discourse, and (b) acknowledges the fit, allows the appropriateness (at least at times), but denies that anger can embody virtue to the same degree as forgiveness. What is important to note is that a defender of conditional forgiveness must be able to address *both* of these charges if there is any hope of their argument gaining traction. The account I provide here seeks to do just this.

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<sup>21</sup> Hampton (1988), p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> For a further discussion of the concepts of ‘fitting’ and ‘appropriate’ attitudes, see D’Arms & Jacobson (2000).

### 3 – Martha Nussbaum’s Critique of Anger

#### 3.1 – Anger and the Desire for Payback

Having laid out the claims presented against anger, it is now time to answer them. This section will serve to defend anger from an objection proposed by Martha Nussbaum in her recent book, *Anger and Forgiveness*, thereby demonstrating anger’s permissibility as a response to wrongdoing.<sup>23</sup> Nussbaum’s critique of anger begins with the assertion that “the idea of payback or retribution—in some form, however subtle—is a conceptual part of anger.” She notes that this does not have to mean violent revenge, but accepts that “anger involves, conceptually, a wish for things to go badly, somehow, for the offender, in a way envisaged, somehow, however vaguely, as a payback for the offense. They get what they deserve.”<sup>24</sup> In wishing for some type of payback, Nussbaum repeatedly insists that the person feeling anger is guilty of a form of “magical thinking.” Essentially, Nussbaum argues that desiring retribution for a wrong can be construed as an attempt to assuage or compensate the victim’s pain over the act in question.<sup>25</sup> She states that many of us have “metaphysical ideas of cosmic balance...that may be part of our evolutionary endowment.”<sup>26</sup> Finally, she notes that our apparent obsession with obtaining payback is “backward-looking”<sup>27</sup> and “incoherent”<sup>28</sup> as it is “magical thinking, which is normatively objectionable...since we all want to make sense to ourselves and to be rational.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> While Nussbaum actually brings two main objections against anger, I will be focused primarily on the first of these – that it necessarily involves a desire for payback – as it is the only one that she takes to be a conceptual piece of angry attitudes. The other objection raised by Nussbaum is anger as a petty concern for one’s standing relative to the wrongdoer. She notes that such a worry is not present in all cases of anger, however, so my focus will remain on the desire for payback.

<sup>24</sup> Nussbaum (2016), p. 22-23.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 24.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 24.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>29</sup> I will not deal with the charge of anger as “backward-looking” due to space concerns. However, I believe many readers would agree that anger past wrongs fairly often involves a concern that the offender’s willingness to harm us may reveal a troublesome character trait that may result in future injuries; Ibid. 29.

Put simply, Nussbaum argues that a desire for payback or retribution is a conceptual, necessarily feature of anger itself. While certain readers may be apt to reject her assertion out of hand, there is undoubtedly some plausibility to such an idea. Likely all of us can think of times when the idea of someone who wronged us “getting what they deserve” has been front and center in our imagination: we do sometimes want our wrongdoers to suffer for harming us, even to the most minor degree. Even the idea that we have internalized a certain sense of cosmic balance is entirely plausible as we are often prone to saying of wrongdoers we read about in the newspaper who are punished that they deserve it, are suffering the consequences of their actions, or that they must “answer” for their crimes. This talk of wrongdoers we personally do not know can plausibly be seen as deriving its motivation from some internalized sense of justice that is rarely (if ever) front and center in our minds.

As I see it, Nussbaum is certainly right that a good number of the cases of anger *do* involve this desire for retribution, however vaguely it is cognized. Yet, it is clear to me that not *all* instances of anger necessarily have this feature. Because Nussbaum so firmly argues for payback as a necessary component of anger (and thereby rendering it normatively problematic), identifying instances where the element of payback is absent would be sufficient for vindicating this attitude from her charge that it is always morally inappropriate.<sup>30</sup>

In order to pursue such counterexamples, examining cases of wrongdoing by those we love seems the most likely to produce the results we are after. As I see it, it is entirely plausible that I could feel anger toward someone close to me (e.g. a significant other or a family member)

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<sup>30</sup> When interpreting Nussbaum’s argument, it appears that there are two ways to understand this desire for payback: either as a *pro tanto* desire that can be overridden by other more powerful desires, or as the desire that does the overriding and necessarily *must* be utilized/endorsed. As I see it, this drive for payback being simply one desire among many would not be enough to label it as problematic. As such, I take Nussbaum’s claim to be the much stronger line: that the desire for payback always (or at least most often) is the one that motivates agents’ behavior moving forward.

while avoiding a desire to have them “get what’s coming them.” In fact, it seems like in certain cases of anger directed toward loved ones, we are often motivated by a desire for them *to learn and become better agents*. Without this concern for them, we likely would only adopt a Strawsonian “objective attitude” toward them, instead of the “participant attitude” that anger certainly is.<sup>31</sup>

Even if my anger that is directed at a loved one does not come from such a benevolent place, it is unclear why I cannot simply wish to communicate my appraisal of wrongdoing while focusing on bettering the relationship. Why I would *necessarily* also hold some vindictive hope that the target will grovel before me or suffer some vague detrimental side effect is puzzling to say the least.

To illustrate this point, it would be helpful to consider a brief example. Let us say that my partner returns home from a long day at work only to pick a fight the minute she walks through the door. My contention is that it is entirely possible for me to experience true anger at her taking a bad day out on me while continuing to feel the same degree of love and concern I had previously held for her. More to the point, it seems odd to claim that I would always be motivated to inflict some sort of punishment on her for her poor conduct. Even if I were to have a *pro tanto* desire to take my day out on her tomorrow, it is unclear why my general desire to see her happy would not be able to override this wish. In fact, any attempt on my part to enact payback (e.g. by taking my day out on her the following evening) would seem to leave me open to judgments of my character as we generally do not wish to endorse pettiness or vindictiveness

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<sup>31</sup> To take an objective attitude toward another agent on Strawson’s account is to see them as an object of public policy rather than an agent one could share an interpersonal relationship with. As he notes, the best examples of taking an objective attitude toward another are when dealing with children or any other person who cannot distinguish right from wrong. Participant attitudes, then, are for those agents we deem to not be excluded from our moral community and who are subject to its norms and the responsibility therein; Strawson (1982), p. 24-26.

between loved ones. It is entirely plausible in this case that my anger could be motivated by a desire simply to express my appraisal of the situation to my partner. In fact, it seems like we do this sort of thing all of the time!

### **3.2 – Payback as Ill-Will**

One way to construe Nussbaum's claim is to say that anger necessarily involves some degree of ill-will toward the target of the attitude. More specifically, we could take Nussbaum's retribution feature to be as weak as a simple willingness to let the target be subjected to the uncomfortable—often painful—feelings that accompany being blamed. Given the connection between anger and blame, coupled with the a broadly shared view that blame necessarily involves some degree of ill-will, such a construal will be a serious worry for my account.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, such a framework would seem either more plausible or probable than the one Nussbaum specifically provides in her account.

This move has some backing by the case presented just above. For instance, it seems in my attempt to communicate my appraisal of the wrong committed by my partner, I am attempting to elicit the uncomfortable feeling of guilt in her. This, it seems, could be reasonably construed as a desire for her to “get what's coming” to some degree. Further, one could rationally conclude that my desire or willingness to subject her to the pains associated with guilt demonstrates some degree of ill-will that I now feel toward her. What remains to be determined, however, is the degree to which this ill-will undermines the angry attitude it accompanies.

In her account of blame, Susan Wolf articulates a concept she calls “angry blame.” Essentially, this is the blame associated with the attitudes of resentment, indignation, and other

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<sup>32</sup> See Watson (2004), Sher (2005), and Strawson (1982) for more on this connection.

forms of anger: it is the judgment that the act was wrong and the wrongdoer was responsible.<sup>33</sup> While Wolf acknowledges that blame may involve some degree of ill-will (by attempting to arouse guilt), she argues that there is a difference between holding ill-will in a particular instance and holding ill-will toward the target in general. As she notes, it would be odd to equate the moment-to-moment interactions with someone with the overall quality of the relationship we share with them.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, holding the ill-will associated with blame, Wolf writes, is not equivalent to a withdrawal of our general good-will toward the target.<sup>35</sup> In the example above of my partner taking her bad day out on me, Wolf's account allows us to say that I am angry at her, wish her to feel the sting of being one who is blamed, and still hold general levels of positive regard for her. My momentary ill-will does nothing to threaten my overall good-will and concern for the her.<sup>36</sup>

Wolf's conception of "angry blame" is particularly helpful when we ask whether or not the ill-will that is part of anger is enough for its rejection from the moral sphere. As she demonstrates, the imposition of certain sanctions on the wrongdoer is wholly consistent with maintaining overall levels of good-will toward the target. While I may be angry with you and thus wish this minimal form of ill-will upon you, that does not mean that I cannot retain my original levels of positive regard toward you. Reframing this with Nussbaum's original worry, if we say that anger conceptually involves the ill-will associated with angry blame, then it is unclear where the ground remains for a total rejection of the attitude's appropriateness. So long as I am able to hold general levels of good-will toward you, it seems like there is no reason to

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<sup>33</sup> Wolf (2011), p. 336.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.

<sup>36</sup> Of course, our relationship could become threatened if she continued to wrong me or I continued to hold unhealthy levels of ill-will toward her. I am assuming in this remark that the anger and ill-will are relatively isolated incidences.

deem any ill-will aroused as normatively problematic, particularly when it is temporally constrained and will not threaten our relationship in general. So long as the costs inflicted are not disproportionate to the wrong itself and are not imposed *simpliciter*, then it appears that there is no reason to dismiss the emotion out of hand. Simply implying that an emotion involves ill-will toward another person is not enough to categorically dismiss the value of the attitude *tout court*.

#### **4 – Virtue and Viciousness in Anger & Forgiveness**

Taking a brief step back, we can say that the concerns in the previous section amount to worries about the appropriateness of allowing anger into our moral space. The defense I provided can be seen as a response to the first of the two charges I presented in §2: namely, that anger is either too damaging or too incoherent for it to be acceptable in our normative sphere. As I have demonstrated, anger is not necessarily tied to overt payback, and any harms associated it can be justified in certain circumstances. This fact gives us good reason to accept that anger *is* an appropriate response to wrongdoing in some cases. What stands, however, is the second objection raised: that anger may be fitting and appropriate, but fails to possess the moral benefits that forgiveness holds. While a defender of unconditional forgiveness who argues in such a way may be willing to say that anger is appropriate to some degree in cases of wrongdoing, their charge here would be that forgiveness is always the morally worthwhile attitude for one to endorse. Given that such an argument is intuitively plausible, I believe it is a quite serious worry for the account I wish to propose. In order to avoid this criticism, one would need to provide good reason for us to accept that there are situations in which anger can be seen as virtuous, while engaging in forgiveness would be morally vicious (or, at least, quite unsavory).

The key idea I am relying on with regard to what will make anger or forgiveness virtuous in cases of wrongdoing is what the motivation is behind the adaptation or endorsement of the attitude. Essentially, it is my contention that opting for either must be done for morally beneficial reasons.<sup>37</sup> On the face of it, it is clear that forgiveness appears to have a bit of an intuitive edge in this regard: it clearly seems like spreading good-will and positive regard whenever one has the opportunity is a beneficial thing to do. However, as I will argue, in certain instances of wrongdoing, choosing to adopt a forgiving attitude rather than continuing to endorse one's anger amounts to a failure to respect the dignity of those involved. In other words, my argument is that there are certain cases in which anger more effectively upholds morality by defending the victim's moral worth and marking the wrongdoer as one who ought not to have acted the way they did. While forgiveness may also appear capable of doing so, I will demonstrate that this is at times incorrect, particularly in cases of severe wrongs committed by unrepentant wrongdoers.

#### **4.1 – Evaluating the Virtue or Moral Worth of Attitudes**

Before delving into a discussion of whether or not anger can be seen as morally superior to forgiveness in certain cases, it would be helpful to make clear how I believe we should proceed with evaluating and appraising the attitudes of agents in the moral community. Throughout this paper I have used the term 'virtuous' often in conjunction with the phrase 'morally worthy', but I now would like to address why I specifically employ a word that carries centuries of philosophical baggage with it. My doing so can largely be seen as attempting to

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<sup>37</sup> While I am here arguing that it is the motivation behind the attitude that determines its moral worth, it should be noted that for the anger or forgiveness to qualify as virtuous it must also be fitting and appropriate with regard to its target, intensity, and any other relevant considerations. See D'Arms & Jacobson (2000) for more on these other considerations.

meet a prominent defender of unconditional forgiveness, Margaret Holmgren, on her own ground. In her book *Forgiveness and Retribution*, Holmgren adopts a virtue ethical approach to anger and forgiveness, ultimately arguing that forgiveness is always morally superior to anger regardless of whether or not both may be deemed appropriate. Furthermore, Holmgren argues that it is virtuous to actively develop a disposition toward unconditionally forgiving our wrongdoers in any and every instance.<sup>38</sup>

To cash out what this mean, Holmgren writes that virtues are “sufficiently ingrained, integrated attitudes that are morally worthy” while vices are “ingrained attitudes that are morally flawed in some significant respect.”<sup>39</sup> More specifically, she writes that an attitude is morally worthy if it “incorporates a correct cognitive recognition of the morally salient features of the situation in question” and ultimately leads to an appropriate motivation and/or affective reaction.<sup>40</sup> When evaluating the moral worth of anger or forgiveness, Holmgren believes we ought to assess them “in terms of whether they incorporate sufficient respect for the victims of wrongdoing, the requirements of morality, and the status of the offender as moral agent and sentient being.”<sup>41</sup> I will address why she believes that adopting an ingrained attitude of unconditional forgiveness is morally superior to endorsing anger below, but for now we simply need to say that I will follow her in saying that a virtuous attitude is largely synonymous with a morally worthy attitude insofar as it appropriately assess the morally salient features of the situation, is in line with the requirements of morality, respects the dignity of all agents involved,

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<sup>38</sup> Holmgren (2012), p. 56-58 & 277-278.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

and motivates morally beneficial conduct moving forward.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, for anger or forgiveness to be virtuous it must also be a fitting and appropriate response to the wrong in question as previously noted.

#### **4.2 – Respect for Dignity in Anger & Forgiveness**

Having addressed how Holmgren thinks we ought to evaluate attitudes of agents, I now am in a position to examine anger and forgiveness more closely to see how they align with the picture of virtue she provides us. What I will demonstrate in this subsection is that anger is (at least sometimes) better at upholding our ethical norms by more effectively respecting the dignity of moral agents. This seemingly vague statement can be better elucidated by understanding that I am cashing out ‘respect for dignity’ as following in Stephen Darwall’s concept of “recognition respect.” Essentially, this can be understood as the idea that one ought to respect other persons and themselves as agents *qua* agents. As he notes, “To have recognition respect for someone as a person is to give appropriate weight to the fact that he or she is a person by being willing to constrain one’s behavior in ways required by that fact.”<sup>43</sup> When acting, if I fail to afford an agent the proper recognition respect, according to Darwall, my act can automatically be marked as morally wrong.<sup>44</sup> Further, this variety of respect extends to one’s self as we can fail to afford the proper amount of respect for our own personhood when we willingly allow our dignity to be impugned.<sup>45</sup> Darwall’s notion of respect seems to fit nicely with Holmgren’s as she writes that

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<sup>42</sup> Regarding the idea of motivating morally beneficial conduct, I will follow Zac Cogley in arguing that for anger or forgiveness to be virtuous it will necessarily motivate praiseworthy behavior and will lead to appropriate communication. Cogley (2014), p. 199.

<sup>43</sup> Darwall (1977), p. 45.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47-48.

“Moral agency is simply the *capacity* for moral choice, growth, deliberation, and awareness...Respect for moral agency is then the recognition of the inherent worth of an individual possessing these basic moral capacities.”<sup>46</sup>

In cases of minor wrongs where the wrongdoer has sincerely repented, I take it for granted that the victim who forgives can be seen as holding the proper amount of recognition respect for the wrongdoer and for themselves; the wrongdoer's acceptance of the victim's appraisal of the situation suggests that they are showing both parties involved the proper recognition respect. Further, forgiving sufficiently apologetic wrongdoers for minor wrongs may be compatible with holding the proper amount of recognition respect for one's self, as there is nothing to suggest that the victim is compromising their own dignity. We can say, then, that forgiveness is rationally *required* in cases of minor wrongs in which the wrongdoer has offered a genuine apology. So, on the model provided to us by Holmgren, I am willing to concede that it would likely be morally praiseworthy for one to cultivate a disposition to unconditionally forgive sincerely repentant offenders who have committed relatively minor wrongs. However, it is my contention that forgiveness can often fail to accord either the victim, the wrongdoer, and/or other relevant agents the proper recognition respect when it comes to cases of unrepentant wrongdoers, especially in cases of severe transgressions. Given Darwall's insightful note that any failure of recognition respect is sufficient to deem an act morally wrong, there is sound reason for us to believe that there are cases in which anger is morally virtuous, while forgiveness would be morally vicious.

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<sup>46</sup> Holmgren (2012), p. 90.

Defenders of unconditional forgiveness often focus on the victim's attitudes and judgments when they argue that forgiveness ought to be freely given. Because the one forgiving maintains that the act in question was wrong, the wrongdoer was responsible, and that they are agents worthy of better treatment, the proponent of unconditional forgiveness will often argue that there is no compromising on the recognition respect of any party involved. However, this unilateral focus on the victim fails to tell the entire story. When a wrongdoer refuses to repent, they make one or more of the following claims: 1) the act was not truly wrong, 2) they are not responsible for the act, or 3) the victim is not one who deserves to be treated better than they were. A wrongdoer making such a claim clearly fails to sufficiently respect the dignity of either the victim or themselves. If the victim in this case chooses to forgive the wrongdoer, they seem to accept this failure to some degree.

Cases of severe wrongdoing most clearly demonstrate why this insistence on the proper level of respect from both parties is so necessary. In instances of rape, genocide, systemic sexism/racism, or anything that follows in a similar vein, there does not seem to be any moral reason one can appeal to for accepting the guilty party's refusal to acknowledge the dignity of those involved. In fact, defenders of unconditional forgiveness seem to worry about this very issue when they note that forgiving the unrepentant involves merely *hoping* that they will do better in the future. As noted earlier, Jean Hampton argues that forgiving without a sincere apology amounts to trusting that the wrongdoer is "still 'good enough' despite what he has done."<sup>47</sup> Likewise, Eve Garrard and David McNaughton write that a person unconditionally forgiving can "hope" the wrongdoer someday repents as part of wishing that person well.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Hampton (1988), p. 84.

<sup>48</sup> Garrard & McNaughton (2003), p. 48.

But taking such a flimsy approach to unrepentant wrongdoers who have committed heinous acts seems far too weak if our goal is to truly respect the dignity of all those involved. If, say, I forgive a rapist for their crime against someone close to me without their accepting of the wrongness of the act, it seems like I am accepting the possibility that it may happen again, either to my friend or another agent; the wrongdoer has refused to accept the situation as wrong, so it is unclear how my forgiveness is supposed to motivate him to change his ways moving forward. While defenders of unconditional forgiveness like to claim that their view does not dissolve into condonation because of the victim's continued respect for dignity, I argue that in their forgiving the wrongdoer without apology they also accept their offender's refusal to hold sufficient recognition respect for the victim. In doing so, they indirectly undermine their own dignity, thus ultimately failing to hold the proper recognition respect for themselves.<sup>49</sup>

While this point is certainly a contentious one, there is good reason for us to accept the idea that anger communicates more powerfully and more effectively the importance of respect for dignity than forgiveness does. For instance, some philosophers have argued that anger can be incredibly efficient at communicating the victim's appraisal as compared to other attitudes one may take.<sup>50</sup> Further, evidence from empirical psychological research backs up the idea that anger expressed in the proper manner can aid in communicating proper conduct regarding one's self which is a necessary step in fostering relationships with those around us.<sup>51</sup> While unconditional forgiveness does appear to maintain the correct judgments regarding the act in question, the

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<sup>49</sup> This notion seems to be what Jeffrie Murphy has in mind when he writes that forgiving the unrepentant essentially makes us "doormats" and involves an acceptance that the wrongdoer may behave in similarly immoral ways in the future; Jeffrie Murphy (1988), 17-18.

<sup>50</sup> For a further discussion on this point see Macalester Bell (2009), Audre Lorde (1997), and Zac Cogley (2014).

<sup>51</sup> Somewhat obviously, there is a plethora of literature on why having an angry *disposition* can be psychologically and physiologically damaging, but that is not what I am defending here. For further discussion of the psychological benefits of maintaining and releasing one's anger appropriately see Giovanni Frazzetto (2013) and John Lee & Bill Scott (1993).

weaker message it sends, combined with the acceptance of the unrepentant wrongdoer's refusal to adequately respect the dignity those involved, gives anger the moral edge in cases of severe wrongs committed by unrepentant wrongdoers.

#### **4.3 – The Communicative and Motivational Components of Anger & Forgiveness**

There are two other ways that I believe adopting, maintaining, and/or endorsing an angry attitude rather than a forgiving one can be seen as morally superior in the cases I am concerned with. These are anger's communicative and motivational components. Now, obviously, we can all think of clear examples in which anger has led to negative, detrimental, or violent motivations or messages that are communicated. That said, I take it as a given that these harmful instances are unlikely to produce the virtuous anger I am after.

When I express my forgiveness to you, I seem to make the following two statements: (i) what you have done is anger-worthy and cannot be repeated, and (ii) I am moving forward from your action and will no longer hold it as a mark against your character.<sup>52</sup> For instance, Cherish Calhoun provides us with the following example:

If I catch a neighborhood adolescent bashing my mailbox and forgive him, he might think me exceptionally nice or wimpish. He surely would not infer that bashing mailboxes is morally permissible, or will not be penalized, or that I am not his moral equal. Nor do I necessarily worsen his behavior, since by forgiving him, he may come to see that he is harming real people, people he might like.<sup>53</sup>

Essentially, Calhoun believes that communicating her forgiveness in a scenario such as this would be sufficient to get both judgments (i) and (ii) across to the wrongdoer. However, as I

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<sup>52</sup> As mentioned in §2, however, this second remark does not necessarily mean that we will have any sort of reconciliation or that I will refrain from guarding against a repeat offense.

<sup>53</sup> Calhoun (1992), p. 85.

have already noted, I am uncertain as to what would possibly motivate the wrongdoer in such a case to behave better in the future. Calhoun seems to only *hope* that he will be receive both of the messages she is attempting to communicate without doing very much in the way of actively protesting his poor conduct. It seems like anger in this situation would easily send a clearer, more straightforward message that would be much harder for the offender to miss or ignore.

As far as the motivational component of anger is concerned, one can simply consider of protest movements to see how anger can motivate large groups of people and help unify them with a central focus. For instance, the Black Lives Matter movement arose out of extreme anger over apparent issues of systematic racism and numerous instances of police brutality towards minority citizens that were generally perpetrated by Caucasian police officers. In this case, I believe it to be somewhat clear that it is anger that motivates the participants to get involved, anger that fuels the messages they communicate, and anger that keeps them unified and focused on a particularly morally worthy goal.<sup>54</sup>

#### **4.4 – The Intuitive Argument for Anger**

The above point about anger motivating and communicating in particular ways that forgiveness is unable to is meant as an attempt to prime my reader for my final point. This is the intuitive idea that saying of a victim of rape, genocide, or any similar transgression that their failure to forgive amounts to a failure of character is intuitively bizarre, likely even morally wrong. If a proponent of unconditional forgiveness were to say of one of these victims that their

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<sup>54</sup> At this point, I could see a reader raising Martin Luther King, Jr. as a counterexample to my argument because of the loving message he routinely shared. That said, some philosophers (see Cogley 2014 for example) have argued that King can be construed as motivated by anger (at least in part). I take it that engaging in a debate on King's motivations would be largely unproductive, so I will not attempt to do so in this essay.

character was somehow weaker or ‘less-than’ that of another person in a similar situation who *did* manage to forgive their offender, I believe many of would be inclined to say that they have themselves committed an entirely new wrong. So long as the anger is fitting, appropriate, and holds the qualities of virtuous anger I have outlined, I believe that many of my readers will feel as if placing judgment on the victim’s character is completely unacceptable and serves to only kick them while they’re down. By claiming that they are lacking in character when they are simply experiencing a natural (possibly morally worthy) angry attitude is to add insult to their injury and, I believe, offend them in an entirely new way.<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore, insisting that victims of certain wrongs (e.g. systematic racism/sexism, etc.) forgive their wrongdoers could likely be seen as furthering their already oppressed state. By attempting to push them to forgive their wrongdoers, the proponent of unconditional forgiveness in this case would likely continue to marginalize whatever oppressed group or class is expressing their otherwise virtuous anger.<sup>56</sup> Put simply, I believe that most readers would intuitively agree that the anger felt by victims of rape, survivors of genocide, or those fighting against oppression should be seen as a morally beneficial thing rather than a failure of character on their part. To

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<sup>55</sup> One may be apt to say here that I have been somewhat slippery with my treatment of victims throughout this essay. For instance, I have criticized proponents of unconditional forgiveness for insisting that the victim forgive their wrongdoer while simultaneously arguing that, at least in certain cases, the victim would be in the wrong morally speaking were they to engage in forgiveness. Essentially, one may be inclined to say that I am being a bit hypocritical when I place moral judgments on those victims who forgive in the situations that I have outlined. It should be noted, however, that what differentiates my statements regarding victims from those of my interlocutors is that my judgment of the moral worth of their response says nothing about their character as an agent, something that defenders of unconditional forgiveness have historically done. As mentioned earlier in this essay, these philosophers will often argue that the victim who fails to forgive displays a weakness of character or something of the like. My discussion of victims is only meant to say that there are appropriate and inappropriate responses that one can have toward wrongdoing. Simply being a victim of a wrong does not open one up to responding in any way they choose. For instance, the victim of a mild wrong who responds by assaulting their offender would be open to judgments that their response was morally wrong. However, this does not mean that their character is necessarily flawed or weak. When I discuss victims and evaluate the responses open to them, I am simply arguing that there are rational restrictions on the responses people can opt for and that, at least at times, forgiveness can be seen as rationally forbidden. Failure to adhere would mean that the victim has responded in a morally unsavory way and nothing more.

<sup>56</sup> See Cherry (2017) for more on forgiveness and oppressed groups.

insinuate that such a person has an insufficient or lacking character only serves to harm them further and cannot be seen as morally beneficial, particularly when their anger can be seen as an attempting to uphold our ethical norms and protest severe wrongdoing. Even in situations where we disagree with or are opposed to the methods protest groups and the like use to display their anger, I believe that intuitively we can see that they are doing something *morally worthy* when they attempt to counter injustice.

#### **4.5 – Virtuous Anger**

At the beginning of this section, I provided Margaret Holmgren’s criteria for determining virtue and vice with regard to attitudes of anger and forgiveness. Essentially, I had noted that we would mark an attitude as excellent should it appropriately assess the morally salient features of the situation, remain in line with the requirements of morality, respect the dignity of all agents involved, and motivate morally beneficial conduct moving forward (my addition to Holmgren’s set). As I have demonstrated, sustained anger toward unrepentant perpetrators of severe wrongs more effectively respects the dignity of all agents involved. Furthermore, anger in such cases actively protests the wrong and better ensures the likelihood of the offender receiving the message inherently communicated. Given that morality is an incredibly important aspect of our society, adopting a forgiving attitude and engaging in the process of forgiveness would be, I have argued, to do too little to help ensure better conduct by all agents moving forward. If my argument is correct, then I believe I have given us reason to suspect that Holmgren’s criteria for virtue can be used against her advocating for unconditional forgiveness, thereby allowing room for the conditional account I wish to put forth.

## **5 – Possible Objections: Considering Other Emotions and the Elective Nature of Forgiveness**

### **5.1 – Other Responses as Equally Morally Worthy**

At this point, my reader could urge that I am presenting a false dichotomy in asserting that anger and forgiveness are the only possible responses to severe wrongdoing. For instance, one might be tempted to assert that sadness or grief could be morally worthy in a similar way to what I have sketched above. Such an argument could assert that an emotion of this kind would not fail to afford adequate recognition respect to all involved as it does take the wrong seriously enough, continues to hold the wrongdoer as responsible, and expresses that the victim ought not to have been treated in such a way. Essentially, there would be no violation of Darwall's respect and sadness or grief could therefore be seen as just as effective methods of responding as anger.

I take this move to be a serious consideration for the account I have here proposed. However, what separates forgiveness and anger from responses such as sadness and grief is in how these various attitudes facilitate the communication of the victim's appraisal and motivate future behavior by the person holding them. The first point essentially being that attitudes such as grief and sadness, while certainly appropriate in cases of severe wrongdoing, most often ultimately fail to be morally worthy as they tend to lead the person holding them to withdraw from the situation that elicited them. Whereas anger often leads us to confront our target, attitudes such as sadness and grief most often lead to our withdrawing from the situation and isolating ourselves from the wrongdoer. We certainly do express our sadness to our wrongdoers in many cases, but when it becomes impossible for us to do so, I argue that sadness and grief often have demoralizing effects that can lead to self-imposed isolation and a failure to adequately address the wrong doing.

This leads to the second point which, put simply, is that anger seems to have more motivational force for us than sadness and grief ever could. While my sadness over a particular situation may make me take strides to avoid being in a similar situation in the future, the fact that it often leads to this self-imposed isolation and a withdrawal from the situation/wrongdoer means that we often are left with little motivation to correct the original situation that elicited our attitude. On the other hand, anger absolutely does seem to have powerful motivating forces that often drive us to find some solution to the problem at hand. While sadness or grief in response to severe wrongdoing is most likely a very *appropriate* response to severe wrongdoing, it is my contention that their inherent lack of motivating force will ultimately fail to address the wrong in as strong of a way as anger would. This, then, leads me to argue that anger is more morally worthy in such a case, even if sadness or grief is a completely fitting and appropriate attitude for one to adopt.

All of this said, it does seem to me that sadness or grief could be coupled with anger in certain cases without thereby undermining the motivating force that anger inherently has. For instance, a reaction to Donald Trump's 2016 presidential election could be to hold both angry and sad attitudes. In fact, it seems like in many cases we would be troubled by someone failing to be appropriately saddened by severe wrongs or situations such as this. That said, I argue here that my sadness would not be enough on its own to say that I am responding in a morally appropriate manner unless paired with the virtuous anger I have outlined. While sadness is likely to communicate my appraisal in a morally worthy manner, the motivational aspect will almost certainly be less than ideal.

## 5.2 – Preserving the Elective Nature of Forgiveness

On June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Dylann Roof murdered nine parishioners at the Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina. When Roof appeared in court, numerous family members of those slain expressed forgiving attitudes toward someone we would think it entirely appropriate for them to resent or even hate.<sup>57</sup> While the account I have provided clearly would argue that their forgiveness was morally questionable, many readers may wish to point out that only they have the relevant standing to decide whether or not they will extend forgiveness. In fact, I believe that most people assume forgiveness to be something that is wholly elective, contrary to the view I have provided.

Now the particulars of the Roof case may make the situation a bit more complex than it first appears. For instance, he had already been incarcerated and those speaking likely anticipated that he would never emerge from prison. So one could say that sufficient conditions were met in order to justify their choice of forgiving. What's important however, is simply the fact that one may wish to say that only the victim has the right to determine whether or not they will forgive.

As I see it, this is almost certainly the case for the variety of instances of wrongdoing. Thus far, I have only asserted that forgiveness is required in cases of minor wrongdoing committed by sufficiently repented wrongdoers and forbidden in instances of severe wrongdoing with unrepentant offenders. But most cases of wrongdoing do not fall into these two categories. And even when they do, certain conditions may obtain that may allow forgiveness to be seen as permissible (like in the Roof case). Whether it is a situation that falls into more of a gray area or where conditions have mitigated the risk posed by unrepentant wrongdoers of serious atrocities, I

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<sup>57</sup> Berman (2015) and Izadi (2015).

am willing to say that forgiveness *might* be found to be elective at times. However, it is not clear how one could argue that Roof would ever *deserve* to be forgiven (without, say, referencing religious principles or ideals).

Another way that one could argue for the potentially elective nature of forgiveness is discuss supererogatory acts as I mentioned in §2. Because supererogatory acts like mercy and charity are generally considered to be fully elective, philosophers making such a move will often argue that forgiveness is likewise entirely elective. One such proponent of unconditional forgiveness, Cheshire Calhoun, notes that:

Because forgiveness is an elective response to culpable wrongdoing, it is conceptually connected with supererogatory acts of generosity and charity. It is something we ask or hope, rather than demand, for ourselves and grant, rather than owe, to others. Forgiveness is a gift, not the paying of a debt...<sup>58</sup>

Likewise, P. Twambley writes that forgiveness and mercy are “not *demanded* of one; they are not *earned* by their recipients, nor are they acts to which one is *bound*. Rather, they are *gifts*, actions freely performed, sacrifices freely made.”<sup>59</sup> Essentially, philosophers advancing such a position make the intuitively plausible move to say that forgiveness is a gift that we can freely dispense. Thus, like other gifts, forgiveness cannot be rationally required or have conditions attached to it without thereby infringing on its inherent value. This notion runs counter to the account I have so far provided and must now be considered.

The main criticism to be raised against this line of argumentation is that there are clearly instances in which spreading mercy or charity is morally impermissible. At the very least, there are definite limits that could be imposed on either of these acts. For instance, I may show some

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<sup>58</sup> Calhoun (1992), p. 81.

<sup>59</sup> Twambley (1976), p. 90.

degree of mercy in sparing a genocidal dictator from death, but completely eschewing punishment does not seem to be a morally praiseworthy (let alone permissible) route to take. Likewise, giving generously to charity when able is obviously a laudable act, but giving to the point where one ends up needing charity themselves is certainly a questionable ideal.

This somewhat brief point is meant to show that any analogy between forgiveness and supererogatory acts proposed by defenders of unconditional forgiveness threatens to undermine their very position. Essentially, either the philosophers arguing in this way must drop their claim that forgiveness is *always* morally beneficial or must attempt to deny that there are limits to these other acts. The latter of these moves seems dubious, while the former would clearly work against their own framework and reduce their account to a more conditional view (e.g. because they would admit that there are certain cases in which forgiveness must not be offered). Whatever the case, if there are limits that can be placed on unconditional forgiveness, then this analogy would only address the middle ground cases I am largely attempting to avoid weighing in on. But it seems like there would still be instances in which forgiving would be irrational or morally impermissible.

## **6 – Conclusion**

In this essay, I have examined the nature of anger and forgiveness, arguing that anger is often an appropriate and even morally beneficial attitude for a victim of wrongdoing to endorse and maintain. I began by providing a sketch of how I view the phenomena of forgiveness itself before beginning my defense of anger as a species of reactive attitudes. I did this by focusing my attack on Martha Nussbaum's criticism of anger as 'normatively problematic' given its apparent connection with a desire for payback. I argued that such a claim was too strong of an assumption,

insisting that, at best, anger can only be construed as necessarily involving a desire to inflict the pains of being one who is blamed. This minimal level of ill-will, I have argued, can be justified in certain cases as it is completely compatible with holding general levels of good-will and concern for the target's well-being.

Next, I focused on what I take to be the key component for making anger or forgiveness virtuous: its respect for dignity. Essentially, I have argued that in order for either attitude to be morally worthy, the motivating force must be a desire to uphold the dignity of all relevant moral agents. In cases where this motivation is present (and the attitude is otherwise fitting and appropriate), I have argued that maintaining and endorsing the attitude is rationally required. I further appealed to our intuitions regarding heinous wrongdoing, arguing that calling the victim's character into question when they fail to forgive is morally vicious in itself.

Defenders of unconditional forgiveness will likely be unsatisfied with the account I have presented. There are two brief reasons that I can give as to why this does not concern me: (1) I believe my account accurately maps on to how we generally go about forgiving in the real world, thereby avoiding any revisionary elements; and (2) I believe that I have effectively shown that forgiveness is subject to many of the same considerations as anger, thereby rationally dictating that it cannot be given freely and sometimes is obligatory (while at other times being forbidden). While it is certainly the case that our world would be better off without much of the anger we see today, I have urged that remaining angry with those who commit heinous acts without repenting or feeling genuine remorse can better uphold our moral norms. This, I have argued, is what makes certain instances of anger morally beneficial in a way that forgiveness offered in the same scenario would be unable to match.

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