Columbia University

To Err is Human; to Forgive... Also Human:
An Exploration of How We Can Forgive the Unrepentant Non-Apologist

By Won Joon Kang
wk2339@columbia.edu
201-881-6652

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Francey Russell
Department of Philosophy

March 31, 2022

Acknowledgements

Foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Francey Russell for her dedication to this thesis from the very beginning. Without her, this thesis would not have been possible. Professor Russell's pedagogical approach is equal parts enlightening, motivating, and supportive. I'm grateful to have been a part of her ethics course several semesters ago and to have spent the past few months in an independent study with her for this thesis. Professor Russell's guidance consistently clarified the readings and motivated me to write as clearly as possible. Every conversation we had, whether it was about forgiveness or films (or forgiveness in films!), helped to turn this thesis into what it is now from a collection of jottings and highlighted notes. I am forever indebted to her mentorship. Thank you for everything.

Additionally, I am deeply grateful to the Philosophy department. Every professor and course has undoubtably helped to shape the path of my studies. The professors, members of the administration, and graduate students have always been supportive in helping me become a better student of philosophy every day for the past several years. Thank you for all that you do.

Lastly, I would like to thank everyone who put up with me over the past several months while I spoke incessantly about the thesis. Every opinion and comment contributed to this thesis in some shape or form. Thank you being the best support system possible.

Introduction

The unfortunate truth about the human condition is that we are often wronged by others. Regardless of the magnitude of the wrongdoing, once we have been wronged, we find ourselves in the position of needing to respond to our mistreatment. Depending on our situation, we may invoke legal retribution, seek counsel with those who empathize with us, or hope for karmic justice. Yet, one seemingly universal response that may cross our minds is to forgive our wrongdoers for what they've done to us.

We may be able to easily recall instances when we forgave our wrongdoers for their wrongdoings. These experiences will be helpful in clarifying the concept of forgiveness as we explore its seemingly enigmatic properties throughout this paper. We can also turn to art. Films in particular give us the opportunity to vicariously live through, empathize with, and relate to the characters' experiences while also allowing us to become intimately aware of the complex nature of their circumstances. Although their experiences may be nothing like our own, analyses of various scenes may allow for us to better understand why certain characters might forgive (or not forgive) their wrongdoer given their own unique set of circumstances. We may also find ourselves agreeing or disagreeing with an act of forgiveness, and this may help us reflect on how we conceive of forgiveness as a concept. For these reasons, I will make references to Barry Jenkin's 2016 film, *Moonlight*, throughout this paper, to illustrate the various features and accounts of forgiveness.

Moonlight is a coming-of-age film which presents the narrative of the main character, Chiron, through three stages in his life: his childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. Throughout the film, we experience Chiron's suffering in the forms of physical abuse by his bullies and emotional abuse by his mother, Paula—all the while he attempts to better understand

his sexuality as a gay man, and construct his sense of identity. We are given a series of different ways by which Chiron repairs his relationships with his wrongdoers. The circumstances of Chiron's mistreatment may not exactly mirror our own, but we can all understand what it is like to have been the victims of wrongdoings that we think we did not deserve. Additionally, just like Chiron, we also often seek to repair the damage done by the wrongdoer and the wrongdoing—possibly, with an act of forgiveness. In other words, as the victims of wrongdoings, we often engage in the work of moral repair.[1]

There are three instances that exemplify Chiron's attempts at (some semblance of) moral repair when he is wronged by somebody. In the first instance, Terrel, the school bully, and his friends beat Chiron in the schoolyard. Throughout Chiron's childhood and adolescence, we see Terrel and his friends verbally harass and attempt to physically harm Chiron on numerous occasions. After the brutal attack, Chiron responds by slamming a chair over Terrel's head at the start of class the following day, severely injuring him.

In the second instance, before Terrel and his friends attack Chiron, Terrel forces Chiron's childhood friend, Kevin, to fight him. Chiron (who fantasized about Kevin before) spent the previous night having his first sexual experience on the beach with Kevin. Despite their intimate moment, Kevin begrudgingly punches Chiron and stands by idly as Terrel and his friends attack Chiron. Although Chiron is given the opportunity to reveal the identities of his attackers to the principal, he refuses to do so. Ultimately, as Chiron is taken away into the police cruiser, Kevin gives him a remorseful glance.

[1] I will adopt the definition given by Margaret Walker in *Moral Repair* with a notable modification. Walker defines moral repair as "the process of moving from the situation of loss and damage to a situation where some degree of stability in moral relations is regained" (p. 6). However, I will exclude the "in moral relations" portion from Walker's definition. I will elucidate my reasoning for why I believe moral repair is self-directed *and* other-directed going forwards.

In the third instance, Chiron's mother, Paula, berates him for going to Teresa's home and accepting money from her, even though she is the only adult who cares for him. She then forces him to give her the money and scolds him for treating Teresa as if she is his mother. (Paula's emotional abuse and her crack cocaine addiction continue to worsen throughout Chiron's childhood and adolescence.) When Chiron grows older, Paula regularly calls him, asking him to visit her at the drug treatment center. Later in the film when the two share a conversation about Chiron's upbringing, Paula apologizes for not loving him when he needed her to love him the most—telling him that she loves him, even if she does not love her back—and for her past actions. Chiron responds by embracing her.

These examples show that Chiron's ability to engage in the work of moral repair—working to move from a damaged situation to one where some degree of stability[2] can be regained for himself and for others—is particularly dependent on how the wrongdoer addresses his or her own wrongdoing. Terrel does not communicate any recognition of his attack as a wrongdoing and does not apologize to Chiron for it. Comparatively, Kevin's remorseful glance towards Chiron signals that he recognizes his action as wrong, but he doesn't explicitly apologize for his wrongdoing. Separately, Paula recognizes her mistreatment of Chiron and apologizes to him for her past actions.

Looking at these three cases, it might seem intuitive that when we seek moral repair by forgiving our wrongdoer, the process of forgiveness should begin with an apology by the wrongdoer, or at least with some recognition of the wrongdoing. Therefore, many might consider the case of Terrel to be a non-starter in the process of forgiveness. Some might even consider Kevin's lack of an apology to similarly be a non-starter. If the wrongdoer does not recognize his

---

[2] By "stability" I mean a state in which we accept the fact that we were wronged, even though we feel as though we deserved better, and in turn, are able to recognize our own self-worth in light of what we suffered.

action as wrong and in turn, will not apologize—like Terrel—or does recognize the action as wrong, but still will not apologize—like Kevin—then does it make any sense to forgive him? To put it another way: how can we forgive the unrepentant non-apologist?

In this paper, I will explore this problem of apology and its relation to forgiveness with a particular focus on the unrepentant non-apologizer. In Part I, I will attempt to clarify the fundamental features of forgiveness by analyzing the cases from *Moonlight*, with reference to Glen Pettigrove's *Forgiveness and Love* and P.F. Strawson's discussion of the reactive attitudes. I will also explain how forgiveness is different from other, neighboring responses we may have against our wrongdoers, such as excuse. By the conclusion of Part I, we will hopefully have a better understanding of what forgiveness is, in part through clarifying what it is *not*.

In Part II, I will narrow the focus of the project specifically upon forgiving the unrepentant non-apologist, and look at two competing accounts of forgiving an unrepentant wrongdoer: Cheshire Calhoun's "Changing One's Heart" and Pamela Hieronymi's "Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness." The comparison between these two accounts will clarify what each author means for an account of forgiveness to be considered *genuine*, where genuine forgiveness involves the victim revising her judgment of the wrongdoer. I will also explore how genuine forgiveness relates to the concept of moral repair. The debate will help us understand whether forgiving the unrepentant non-apologist should be considered an elective gift by the victim or an impossible task because forgiveness can only be a rational response to an apology.

Finally, in Part III, I will analyze how forgiving the unrepentant non-apologist contributes to the victims' own moral repair, in two respects: (1) we recognize the humanity of our wrongdoers—leading to greater appreciation for the human condition; and (2) we are more capable of restoring our self-respect. I will consider the most prominent objection to my

argument—namely, that forgiving an unrepentant non-apologist *undermines* one's self-respect. I argue that forgiving an unrepentant non-apologist can actually *contribute* to the work of rebuilding their self-respect. Crucially, victims must recognize that they cannot change or control the behavior of their wrongdoers, even if they believe they deserved better treatment from them, which is central to the concept of restoring our self-respect. I will conclude by noting that when the victims of wrongdoing internalize this notion, they are able to "move on" or "let go" through moral transformation.

Part I: The Fundamental Features of Forgiveness

Before we can answer the question of how we can forgive the unrepentant non-apologist, we must first understand the fundamental features of forgiveness. To achieve this aim, let us begin by returning to the example from *Moonlight* that is seemingly the least controversial with regards to what many might consider to be the "standard" process of forgiveness, namely, when the wrongdoer acknowledges the wrongdoing *and* apologies for it before being forgiven. During Chiron's early adulthood, Paula asks him to visit her at the drug treatment center. Chiron remains silent throughout the majority of their meeting until Paula begins to sob and apologizes for not loving him when he needed her love the most. Chiron then begins to cry, lights a cigarette for Paula, wipes her tears off her cheek, and walks over to embrace her. In a brief, yet intensely emotional moment, Chiron seems to forgive Paula for her actions. In order to explore the idea that Chiron's response is one of forgiveness, we first need to ask: What is forgiveness?

By analyzing this scene and other philosophical accounts of forgiveness, we can identify five discernible features of forgiveness: (1) the wrongdoing; (2) forswearing *both* our reactive attitudes *and* the desire for revenge; (3) committing to the well-being of the wrongdoer at a similar level to before the wrongdoing; (4) considering wrongdoers to be fully morally responsible agents *and* fully morally blameworthy; and (5) the moral authority to unilaterally revise our judgment of the wrongdoer and the wrongdoing by rejecting the initial, constricting narrative.

The first fundamental feature is quite obvious: the wrongdoing itself. There must be some act of wrongdoing for which a wrongdoer can be forgiven. In this case, the wrongdoing is Paula's emotional abuse towards Chiron. Without wrongdoing there would be no wrongdoer, and

in turn, no one to forgiveness. However, simply stating that "forgiveness presupposes a wrongdoing" would be too simplistic. Glen Pettigrove argues that

> two qualifications are required in order to ensure that this way of putting the matter is not misleading… First, 'wrongdoing' should be taken to include both (a) particular, morally blameworthy acts and (b) more general, morally blameworthy traits of character… Second… it will be sufficient that the act or character trait is deemed blameworthy within the moral community of which the forgiver and the forgiven are a part."[3]

The first qualification explains that the wrongdoing is inclusive of both a specific and identifiable action that the wrongdoer is culpable of committing, and morally culpable aspects of his own identity. The second qualification expands on the first qualification with regards to who is identifying the action as morally culpable. Those who are members of the community in which the victim and the wrongdoer are within decide in a normative sense as to whether the wrongdoing is a culpable action and is reflective of a culpable aspect of the wrongdoer's identity.

Paula's mistreatment of Chiron clearly meets these qualifications of a wrongdoing. First, Paula's emotional abuse of Chiron throughout his childhood and adolescence can show a series of a specific, morally blameworthy act. Sadly, we see several instances of Paula's emotional abuse towards Chiron, and these are self-evidently morally culpable acts. Second, her emotional abuse arguably reveals a morally blameworthy trait of her character—namely, Paula not properly taking care of Chiron throughout his upbringing. Finally, her wrongdoing is a blameworthy act within the moral community, which is evident by the scene in which Juan, her drug dealer and Chiron's mentor, berates her for failing to take care of Chiron. Clearly those in her community recognize her behavior Chiron as some kind of moral wrong. By fulfilling these qualifications, we have specified in what sense forgiveness presupposes a wrongdoing.

---

[3] *Forgiveness and Love.* Pettigrove, Glen. p. 5.

The second fundamental feature of forgiveness is: forgiveness involves a change in how we feel about the wrongdoer in light of the wrongdoing. In a colloquial manner, we may phrase this as "having a change of heart" from negative attitudes to a generally more positive attitude about what happened to us. During his childhood, Chiron tells Juan and Teresa that he hates his mother. Later, during his adolescence, when his mother aggressively forces him to give her the money that Teresa gave him and chastises him for treating Teresa as if she is his mother, we see an expression from Chiron that appears to be a blend of loathing, sadness, and resentment. In comparison to these two instances, Chiron's actions during Paula's apology—particularly, when he wipes the tears off her cheek and embraces her—appear to indicate that he has overcome (or least had a reduction of) these previously held feelings of blame or resentment about his mother's emotionally abusive behavior.

By this point, we may want to conclusively state that a fundamental feature of forgiveness is the overcoming (or reduction) of generally negative emotions, such as loathing and resentment. However, if we focus on a specific negative emotion such as sadness, then this feature no longer seems to hold true. Chiron is clearly sad in each act of the film, even as he forgives his mother. Personally, we may feel that we have overcome (or reduced) some negative emotions when we forgive our wrongdoers, but we may still feel upset about the wrongdoing that we suffered when we forgive them. In this regard, the general conception of "negative emotions" appears to be too broad.

To rectify this concern, I will adopt Pettigrove's conception of the relevant emotions as those that are "hostile, in the sense of being oppositional."[4] He explains that these are "other-directed emotions… [that] are not just negative"[5]—or more concretely, "We may be sad *about*

[4] *Ibid*. p. 7.
[5] *Ibid.* p. 7.

something but we are not sad *at* or *towards* something or someone in the way that we are angry *at* and resentful *toward* another."[6] Pettigrove's concept usefully establishes the scope of negative emotions we overcome when we forgive our wrongdoer. He develops his account from Peter Strawson's concept of reactive attitudes (creating the concept of "hostile reactive attitudes"). Consequently, before we can adopt Pettigrove's concept, we must understand the idea of reactive attitudes.

In his seminal work, *Freedom and Resentment*, Strawson analyzes our practices of moral responsibility by way of the attitudes and emotions we feel towards one another as moral agents. Rather than focusing on the practices and attitudes that are detached from the actions or agents (such as punishment), Strawson focuses on the "non-detached attitudes and reactions of people directly involved in transactions with each other"[7] (such as gratitude, resentment, forgiveness, love, and hurt feelings). Strawson places great importance on these non-detached attitudes and reactions because of how ingrained they are in the interactions we have with others we regard as responsible moral agents. For Strawson, it is almost inconceivable to imagine human interactions not animated by these attitudes. As he writes, it is practically impossible to consider our lives (and the practices we utilize in our lives) without considering:

> how much we actually mind, how much it matters to us, whether actions of other people—and particularly of *some* other people—reflect attitudes towards us of goodwill, affection, or esteem on the one hand or contempt, indifference, malevolence on the other.[8]

[6] *Ibid.* p. 7.
[7] "Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays". Strawson, P.F. p. 5.
[8] *Ibid.* p. 6.

For Strawson, the *kind* of interpersonal relationships we have with others reflects the relevant significance we place upon their attitudes towards us. Strawson denotes this concept as *participant reactive attitudes*.

Strawson argues that we are prone to these attitudes because we expect others to meet the basic demand of "some degree of goodwill or regard"[9] in our interpersonal relationships with them. For instance, when walking down the street, we expect others to give us space to walk and not purposefully block our path. Our reactive attitudes, therefore, are not automatic reflexes, but are rather responsive to our interpretation of the presence or absence of goodwill (or regard) in the actions of others. For example, we interpret someone's act of goodwill as expressive of her goodwill and in turn, are grateful for her action; or conversely, when Paula is emotionally abusive towards Chiron, Chiron interprets her action as a failure to meet the basic demand of goodwill, perhaps sometime as an expression of ill will. In both cases, we regard the individual as responsible agents.

When we bring Strawson's concept of reactive attitudes together with Pettigrove's concept of hostile (with regards to being oppositional) emotions, we can adopt Pettigrove's concept of "hostile reactive attitudes." Therefore, we can conclude that the second fundamental feature of forgiveness involves overcoming our hostile reactive attitudes that arise from a wrongdoing. However, when we forgive our wrongdoer, are we *only* overcoming our hostile reactive attitudes? When we express that we have overcome our hostile reactive attitudes in our act of forgiveness, we also seem to be conveying an additional, more explicit guarantee: "I will not exact my revenge on you."

[9] *Ibid*. p. 7.

Let's return to the case of Kevin and make a few provisional modifications to the scenario. In the film, Terrel pressures Kevin into fighting Chiron as a hazing ritual. Kevin seemingly recognizes his actions as a wrong—as evident by the remorseful glance he gives Chiron when he's being taken away in the police cruiser—but he does not apologize for his action. Chiron is given the option of revealing who attacked him to their principal, but he instead chooses to not disclose who attacked him; presumably because of how much he cares for Kevin. However, let us modify the scenario by making it so that Chiron *did* reveal who attacked him to their principal and sought to forgive Kevin for hurting him. Imagine that Kevin is brought into the principal's office and apologizes to Chiron. Upon hearing his apology, it would *not* seem to be an act of forgiveness if Chiron said, "I'm no longer resentful about what you did to me, but what you've done gives me the right to do unto you what you've done to me." There is clearly a disconnect between Chiron's response and saying "I forgive you." This disconnect can seemingly be remedied if Chiron does not say the latter half of that statement and instead, ensures Kevin that he will not seek vengeance against him. However, it would also not seem to be an act of forgiveness if Chiron simply said, "Kevin, I won't take revenge on you for what you've done to me." Evidently, overcoming (or to use more accurate language—forswearing) *both* our hostile reactive attitudes *and* our desire for revenge is necessary if we seek to fully meet the basic demand of goodwill in our acts of forgiveness. It would sound more like an act of forgiveness if Chiron said, "Kevin, I'm no longer resentful about what you did and I won't take revenge for what happened." (For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to this second feature of forgiveness as "forswearing.")

Notice this doesn't require committing to a level of goodwill that surpasses the typical limits of our previous interpersonal commitments *status quo ante*. It would seem odd if we

became significantly more concerned about the well-being of our wrongdoers and treated them with much more goodwill than before the wrongdoing occurred. Therefore, I conceive of the third feature of forgiveness in the following manner: when we forgive our wrongdoer, we are effectively committing to the well-being of the wrongdoer at a level that is *similar* to our commitments *status quo ante*. (For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to this feature as "committing.")

Thus far, we have identified (and narrowed the concepts of) three fundamental features of forgiveness, viz., (1) it is a response to the wrongdoing, (2) it requires forswearing *both* our hostile reactive attitudes *and* our desire for revenge ("forswearing"), and (3) it requires committing to the well-being of the wrongdoer at a level that is similar to our commitments before the wrongdoing occurred ("committing"). These three features of forgiveness align with Pettigrove's account of forgiveness, which itself is a refined version of various other accounts in the literature of forgiveness.[10] I will call these three fundamental features (and any others that may be derived later) the "positive" features of forgiveness. With these three "positive" fundamental features of forgiveness established, I will now move to the second portion of Part I by assessing how forgiveness differs from other responses that we may invoke against our wrongdoers, such as excusing their actions. By identifying what forgiveness is *not*, we will also be able to develop a better understanding of what forgiveness *is* by comparison.

First, forgiveness is not the same as either excusing a wrongdoer for their wrongdoing. When our wrongdoers commit a morally objectionable action against us, we often blame them for what they've done. In the Strawsonian sense, we recognize that they have failed to uphold the

[10] The only reason that I privilege Pettigrove's account over other notable authors' accounts of forgiveness such as those of Bishop Butler, Hannah Arendt, Charles Griswold, Nick Smith, Margaret Walker, Linda Radzik, and several others is because Pettigrove critiques the major flaws in nearly all of these accounts and also incorporates the most redeemable aspects of these accounts into his own throughout *Love and Forgiveness*.

basic demand of goodwill and in turn, we consider them to be morally culpable for their wrongdoing. However, Strawson in Part 4 of *Freedom and Resentment* Strawson outlines conditions that modify our reactive attitudes such that we either excuse those who seemed to wrong us.

When we excuse others, we still consider them to fully morally *responsible* agents who should have met the basic demand of goodwill, but we do *not* consider them to be fully morally *culpable* for their specific wrongdoing—perhaps they were ignorant of the impact their action would cause for us or they were coerced into committing the action. For example, Kevin reluctantly fights Chiron because he is pushed by Terrel to do so. Chiron knows Kevin's action is not one that he is fully culpable for, but he also recognizes that Kevin punched him as someone who is aware that he shouldn't have done that (or in the Strawsonian sense: as someone who knows that he should have met the basic demand of goodwill). Chiron may go so far as to tell Kevin, "I know you had to fight me," (which is an excuse) but that is evidently different from saying, "I forgive you for fighting me." Therefore, a fourth "positive" feature of forgiveness that we can derive from this point is that if we seek to not (accidentally) excuse our wrongdoers, we should consider our wrongdoer to be fully morally responsible agents *and* fully morally blameworthy for their wrongdoing. This would make it so that Kevin is *not* fully morally blameworthy for hitting Chiron and so he cannot be forgiven.

Second, forgiveness is not the same as exempting a wrongdoer for their wrongdoing. Strawson states that an agent could be temporarily or permanently exempted from fulfilling the basic demands for goodwill because he may be psychologically abnormal or morally underdeveloped. It would not make sense to expect our typical moral demands from this agent to be met; thus, our reactive attitudes would not seem reasonable as a consequence. Strawson notes

that in these instances, we adopt the *objective attitude* rather than continuing to hold our participant reactive attitude. With the objective attitude, we see the agent as "an object of social policy"[11]—as someone that we do not consider to be a moral participant, but rather someone to be studied, treated, managed, or trained. Although there is no evident example of someone who may be permanently exempted from meeting the basic demands for goodwill in *Moonlight*, we can consider the case of Paula to be an example of someone who may be temporarily exempted due to her drug addiction. There is a scene in Part II of the film when we see Paula directly from the point of view of Chiron. In the scene, there are several abrupt cuts that emphasize Paula's pathological behavior (ranging from pacing, clawing at her body, and screaming throughout her house.) When she is behaving in this manner, we may no longer consider her to be an agent who is subject to the basic demand for goodwill because she is temporarily incapacitated from behaving in a typical manner. Paula alludes to this notion during her apology to Chiron by stating, "I fucked it all up, I know that… lord knows I didn't have love for you when you need it, I know that." In her sober state, she not only assumes full moral responsibility, but expresses full moral culpability for her actions during her period of temporary incapacitation. Consequently, we can see how the fourth "positive" feature of forgiveness (considering our wrongdoer to be fully morally responsible agents *and* fully morally blameworthy for their wrongdoing) holds true.

Third, forgiveness is not simply the cancellation of a debt that is owed to the victim.[12] Proponents of this concept may analogize a moral debt to a financial debt. When someone incurs

[11] *Ibid*. p. 9.
[12] Linda Radzik explores the concept of moral debt further in *Making Amends: Atonement in Morality, Law, and Politics*. She focuses on retribution and restitution with regards to atonement and retributive justice, but the scope of this paper will not cover these principles and topics. The moral debt argument that I am briefly responding to here is from the beginning of Chapter Two.

a financial debt, his creditor can cancel his debt upon full payment or simply out of grace. In a similar manner, the victim of a wrongdoing may cancel the moral debt—what is incurred by committing a wrong[13]—of her wrongdoer. However, we may not want to regard forgiveness as simply transactional because this view distorts how we realistically operate in our relationships with others. It would seem practically cartoonish to utilize a points-based system to mark the debts and credits of those we interact with, and then modify our interactions to reflect a corresponding action to the status of their moral debt. If we operated in this manner, then we would seemingly be treating others as merely "things" that should be handled or avoided based on the amount of their moral debts or credits. In effect, we would be operating with the objective attitude for anyone, which we clearly do not do in our daily international relationships.

Even if we were to manage this moral ledger system and respond with the corresponding types of behaviors (without alienating everyone who comes in contact with us), the analogy still fails to hold. Financial debts are clear cut: a specific amount of debt is owed, the debt is paid, and both parties owe each other nothing more once the payment is made. However, when a wrongdoer asks, "What can I do to make up for what I've done?" we often do not seem to readily have an answer—other than, perhaps, wishing that they had not committed the wrong in the first place. Apart from a directly reciprocal measure of justice, i.e., "an eye for an eye," we cannot easily (if at all) ascribe an action of moral debt that can be repaid in an exact action of moral credit. Additionally, incurring a moral debt also often entails a sense of responsibility—or what we might consider as *guilt*—for the wrongdoer (if he recognizes that his action was, in fact, a wrongdoing). Guilt may remain even if one is forgiven. In the final lines of her apology, Paula

---

[13] *Making Amends: Atonement in Morality, Law, and Politics*. Radzik, Linda, p. 25.

whispers between sobs, "One step at a time, baby. One step at a time."[14] She recognizes that she cannot make up for her actions through one grand gesture that would cancel her moral debt. Even after Chiron's forgiveness, her guilt remains; and Paula does not seek to simply erase a debt, but rather aspires to make up for her wrongdoing and continue this work into the future. In these regards, neither forgiveness, nor her apology seem to merely be the cancellation of moral debts.

Fourth, forgiveness need not involve the restoration of previous moral relations between the victim and the wrongdoer. In fact, an act of forgiveness need not (and should not[15]) require an exchange between the wrongdoer and the victim at all. Here I adopt Michele Moody-Adams' concept of unilateral forgiveness, which is explained in "The Enigma of Forgiveness." Unilateral forgiveness is a critical feature of how I will construct the definition of forgiveness. It will serve as a central element in why I will argue to adopt one account of forgiveness over another in Part II, and will serve to ground my argument for moral transformation in Part III.

Moody-Adams argues that the task of forgiveness possesses two parts: "(1) rejecting constricting narratives of injury and loss which victims of wrongdoing inevitably construct and then (2) releasing resentment and desires for revenge which the constricting narratives might have produced."[16] I will primarily focus on the concept of creating the new narrative. She explains that when we suffer a wrongdoing, we often construct a narrative that defines us and the wrongdoer "*in terms of the wrong.*"[17] We believe that we, as the victims, and the wrongdoer will be defined by the act in perpetuity. The cogency of these initial narratives become more

[14] This portion of the dialogue is inaudible in the film because there is a musical track that plays over the end of this scene, but these lines are in the finalized script of the film.
[15] The notion of whether we should not engage with our wrongdoer will be explored in detail in Part II.
[16] "The Enigma of Forgiveness." Moody-Adams, Michele, p. 163.
[17] *Ibid.* p. 163.

embedded in ourselves and are commonly expressed as anger and resentment. These deep-rooted feelings "reshape a victim's values and motives, with disastrous consequences for the cognitive, emotional, and moral domains of life."[18] Moody-Adams puts forth the argument that the rejection of the initial narrative is possible by replacing it with a hopeful narrative. These new hopeful narratives must "simultaneously acknowledge both the human capacity for wrongdoing *and* the human capacity for change and moral renewal."[19] By embracing these two aspects, we can establish a balance between our own humanity and the humanity of our wrongdoers. Consequently, we can hope for and strive to create a better future for ourselves, our wrongdoers, and others through forgiveness.

Unilateral forgiveness rules out two commonly held notions about forgiveness: (1) the "standard" account of forgiveness when wrongdoers acknowledge or apologize for their wrongdoing, and (2) that we must have a restoration of moral relations with our wrongdoers. The rejections of the initial narrative and the releases of resentment and desires for revenge do not require an interaction with the wrongdoer. Although in the "standard" process of forgiveness we may anticipate an acknowledgement or an apology, it is not a necessary step in forgiving our wrongdoers. We do not require anything beyond the existing moral standing of being wronged to forgive them for their mistreatment of us. Therefore, while in some cases, forgiveness may lead to the restoration of moral relations between the victim and the wrongdoer if the victim chooses to go beyond merely forgiving them, but forgiveness does not require this. In tandem with ruling out these two commonly held notions, Moody-Adams' argument also helps us understand that we, as victims, possess the warranted moral standing to forgive our wrongdoers without

[18] *Ibid.* p. 166.
[19] *Ibid.* p. 166.

mitigating the impact of the wrongdoing—even if they are unrepentant non-apologists who have committed serious misgivings.

Notably, Moody-Adams' conception of forgiveness is similar to the "forswearing" and "committing" features of forgiveness that I've identified so far. I've noted that these features are: forswearing *both* our hostile reactive attitudes *and* the desire for revenge, and committing to the well-being of the wrongdoer at a level that is similar to our commitments *status quo ante*. I argue that Moody-Adams' notion of "the rejection of the constricting narrative" provides a more nuanced explanation of what we are doing when we "forswear" and "commit" in acts of forgiveness. Therefore, I will add this concept to the list of the "positive" features of forgiveness and integrate it with the features of "forswearing" and "committing" when I construct the full definition of forgiveness.

We have identified what forgiveness is *not*. First, forgiveness is not the same as excusing our wrongdoers because this action removes their moral culpability. Second, forgiveness is not the same as exempting our wrongdoers because exemptions eliminate their agency. Third, forgiveness is not the cancellation of a moral debt because under scrutiny, this concept is not reflective of how we behave in our interpersonal relationships and also is elusive as a concept. Fourth, forgiveness need not involve a restoration of old moral relations between the victim and the wrongdoer because victims of wrongdoings possess a moral standing that does not require their wrongdoers to acknowledge or apologize for their actions. In effect, there is neither a need for any interaction between the victim and the wrongdoer, nor a need to restore the original moral relations of the relationship.

We've also identified five essential features of forgiveness. The first feature of forgiveness is that it entails a wrongdoing to have occurred. Wrongdoings must be taken to

include: (a) particular, morally blameworthy acts; (b) more general, morally blameworthy traits of character of the wrongdoer, and (c) be deemed blameworthy within the moral community of which the forgiver and the forgiven are a part. The second feature is that we must forswear *both* our hostile reactive attitudes *and* the desire for revenge. The third feature is that forgiveness entails the commitment to the well-being of the wrongdoer at a level that is similar to our commitments *status quo ante*. The fourth feature of forgiveness is that we should consider wrongdoers to be fully morally responsible agents *and* fully morally blameworthy for their wrongdoings. The fifth feature of forgiveness is that we possess the moral authority to unilaterally revise our judgment of the wrongdoer and the wrongdoing by rejecting the initial, constricting narrative.

In a more organized manner, I conclude by defining forgiveness as: a unilateral revision of judgment of the wrongdoer and the wrongdoing (which is inclusive of the three aforementioned elements) by which the victim rejects the initial, constricting narrative; commits to the well-being of the wrongdoer at a level that is similar to the commitments *status quo ante*; and forswears both hostile reactive attitudes and the desire for revenge. In the next part of this thesis, I will compare two accounts of forgiveness towards an unrepentant non-apologizer: one which supports the definition I've established by arguing that forgiveness is a nonobligatory gift and the other which rejects the definition (and the idea that we can forgive an unrepentant non-apologist at all) by arguing that only an apology can begin the process of forgiveness.

Part II: Questions of Desert, Rationality, and Moral Repair

The definition of forgiveness that I have laid out identifies what I consider to be the essential features of forgiveness and the features that forgiveness does *not* possess. I've noted that since we possess the moral authority to unilaterally revise our judgment of the wrongdoers and wrongdoings, we do not require an acknowledgement or an apology from our wrongdoers to forgive them. There is no need for either an acknowledgement or an apology because no one else can revise *our* judgments. However, when these expressions are absent, we may feel as though our wrongdoers do not *deserve* our forgiveness. Once the question of desert arises, some argue that the most *genuine* form of forgiveness *requires* an apology insofar as it gives us good reason to revise our judgment of the wrongdoers and wrongdoings. Others argue that an apology is unnecessary because we solely possess the ability to revise our judgment and bestow forgiveness like a gift to those who seem the most deserving, regardless of an apology.

There are two (broadly) opposing views of forgiveness in the philosophical literature, which either support or reject the notion that an apology is a necessary feature of forgiving our wrongdoers. I will compare two of these opposing accounts: one account by Cheshire Calhoun in "Changing One's Heart" who conceives of forgives as an elective "gift" that can be given to wrongdoers—even if they are unrepentant non-apologists, and the second account by Pamela Hieronymi in "Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness" who thinks forgiveness only makes sense if the wrongdoers apologize for their actions. I will provide the merits and drawbacks of each account, and keep the scope focused on the unrepentant non-apologist. At the end of Part II, I will argue in favor of adopting Calhoun's account of forgiveness and how it contributes to moral repair.

In "Changing One's Heart," Cheshire Calhoun begins her argument by raising the question of desert—namely, does our wrongdoer deserve our forgiveness? Calhoun states, "The distinction between deserved and undeserved forgiveness is ultimately a distinction between changes of emotional attitude that are warranted by their objects and ones that are not."[20] In other words, if we give up our sense of resentment (or other hostile reactive attitudes) after we discover our wrongdoers' acts were excusable, then we admit that they are not morally culpable for their wrongdoing and there was nothing to forgive. (I explained this concept previously when we covered the excuse condition in the Strawsonian account in Part I). Alternatively, if we stop holding our sense of resentment (or other hostile reactive attitudes) towards our wrongdoers once they have repented or when we consider them to have made up for their actions, then we are simply doing what is morally required of us. In each case, our wrongdoers deserve our forgiveness and so forgiveness becomes *obligatory*, or "non-elective." Forgiving on the basis that our wrongdoers deserve forgiveness because it is obligatory is what Calhoun denotes as the *minimalist* notion of forgiveness.

Minimalist forgiveness is predicated on the notion that forgiveness is non-elective. But Calhoun raises worries about this conception. Consider that it does not seem as though Chiron is obligated to forgive Kevin. Kevin doesn't apologize, but Chiron might forgive him. (He seemingly *does* forgive Kevin in the final scene of the film when the two embrace one another and Chiron reveals how he has felt about their night at the beach when they were younger and how that moment impacted him.) Calhoun seeks to do justice to our sense that we can forgive even those who do not apologize with the notion of *aspirational* forgiveness. She states that aspirational forgiveness is predicated on the idea that the type of forgiveness that wrongdoers

[20] "Changing One's Heart." Cheshire, Calhoun, p. 79.

seek is "for the culpability that remains after all excuses, justifications, restitution, and repentant reforms have been made and accepted—a culpability that warrants our continuing to be resented."[21] In other words: we, as victims of wrongdoing, establish a clear narrative of our wrongdoer's moral culpability, which merits the continuation of our hard feelings (or other hostile reactive attitudes) towards them—and yet we still can *choose* to forgive them. For Calhoun, aspirational forgiveness is not a special or rare case but is exemplary of what forgiveness is, whereas minimalist forgiveness is, in virtue of being rationally obligatory, not true forgiveness.

Calhoun notes that the greatest obstacle to aspirational forgiveness is that when someone mistreats us, we often cannot make moral sense of their action. Why would someone choose evil and why would they inflict that evil upon us when they could've chosen not to commit the evil action? To answer this question, Calhoun turns to Strawson's conception of excusing and exempting our wrongdoers. She states, "Either one despairingly concludes that some (many) humans are not really persons (but malignant vitalities or psychologically stunted individuals) or one finds some different way of making sense of how they could mean to harm."[22] However, this once again, leads to forgiveness being nonelective. If someone is mentally impaired or a child, then they deserve forgiveness because they are not moral agents who are capable of correcting their behavior even if we insist that they do so.

Consequently, in order to achieve aspirational forgiveness, Calhoun argues that we must place the wrongdoing in the greater context of the wrongdoer's life. She explains in greater detail by stating:

---

[21] *Ibid.* p. 80.
[22] *Ibid.* p. 91.

> In living through time, normal persons need to make the sorts of choices that will add up to and sustain an integrated, rather than fragmented, biography. They need their actions to make sense within, or to make sense of, their past and projected future lives. What I will suggest is that aspirational forgiveness is achieved by seeing that, although an agent's wrongdoing fails to make moral sense, it does make biographical sense.[23]

Calhoun explains that we must recognize that everyone's life is unique. If we impose our system of morals upon our wrongdoers without accounting for the circumstances, challenges, and external responsibilities or demands they faced which led to them committing the wrongdoing, then we will fail to make sense of their action. We cannot be ignorant of their biography if we seek to achieve aspirational forgiveness.

Within the biographical context of the wrongdoer's life, we may be able to construct a clear narrative of our wrongdoer which we've previously described as a "hopeful narrative"—namely, that which, "simultaneously acknowledge[s] both the human capacity for wrongdoing *and* the human capacity for change and moral renewal."[24] In effect, aspirational forgiveness allows us to understand our wrongdoer's culpability by seeing how it fits into his biography, even if we can't understand it morally.

Here, we not only find a way to acknowledge the capacity for wrongdoing and for change and moral renewal, but also clearly *choose to* acknowledge our wrongdoer's perspective before imposing our own moral standards onto him. Ultimately, Calhoun concludes by stating that aspirational forgiveness essentially means "that one stops demanding that the person be different from what [s]he is."[25] We can only hope that others live up to the normal moral requirements that are shared within a moral community, but also in ways that adhere to the context of their lives.

---

[23] *Ibid.* p. 92.
[24] "The Enigma for Forgiveness." Moody-Adams, Michele, p. 166.
[25] "Changing One's Heart." Calhoun, Cheshire, p. 95.

Calhoun's account of forgiveness seemingly only further clarified our existing definition of forgiveness. Particularly, we have identified why a genuine form of forgiveness should be elective rather than morally obligatory. If we apply aspirational forgiveness to the case of Terrel, then it will be important for Chiron to contextualize Terrel's action within the scope of his life. We (as the audience) see Chiron's community, the circumstances of his upbringing, and his most significant life experiences. Therefore, it is much easier for us to place Chiron's actions into context and perceive Terrel's actions as unwarranted. However, we may be more understanding of Terrel's culpability if we also had the opportunity to see his story just as we see Chiron's story. Chiron will potentially even adopt a hopeful narrative once he makes sense of Terrel's life before he seeks to enforce his own set of moral standards onto him and *chooses* to forgive him.

But you might think that victims need a reason to change their minds about the wrongdoers and forgive. Let us now turn to Pamela Hieronymi's account of forgiveness. In "Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness," Hieronymi begins by noting that a victim's revision in judgment or a change in view is a necessary aspect of genuine forgiveness. She furthers this notion by stating, "Any account of genuine forgiveness must articulate the revision in judgment or change in view in a way that allows the forgiver to hold fixed the following three (interrelated) judgments: (1) The act in question was wrong; it was a serious offense, worthy of moral attention. (2) The wrongdoer is a legitimate member of the moral community who can be expected not to do such things. As such, she is someone to be held responsible and she is worth being upset by. (3) You, as the one wronged, ought not to be wronged."[26] We typically (ought to) respond to a wrongdoing with resentment (or other hostile reactive attitudes). Hieronymi conceives of resentment as protest—one that objects to the wrongdoing and in turn, affirms both

[26] "Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness." Hieronymi, Pamela, p. 530.

its wrongfulness and the moral significance of the victim and the wrongdoer. Ultimately, she concludes we must be able to articulate how we can maintain the aforementioned three judgments and yet also abandon the protest in a manner that is *uncompromising*; that is, forgive rather than resent.

Hieronymi gradually reaches a conclusion regarding how we can articulate an uncompromising forgiveness by refuting the missteps in the account of forgiveness that is established by David Novitz.[27] Foremost, she explains that Novitz talks about "judgment-sensitive attitudes"[28] (and other hostile reactive attitudes) as things to be manipulated. Although Hieronymi does not use the same terminology I have outlined thus far, this is essentially identical to the Strawsonian concept of participant reactive attitudes and objective attitudes. Hieronymi notes that our judgment-sensitive attitudes (our reactive attitudes) are sensitive to and dependent upon our judgments. When we change such attitudes, Hieronymi calls this "rational *revision*." She notes that an articulate account of forgiveness must take rational revision into account—namely, by "allow[ing] us to revise our resentment while maintaining the judgments that occasioned it."[29]

Additionally, she argues that Novitz provides two potential destabilizers for resentment: "the change to the offender's point of view and the compassion that is elicited (from the change)."[30] With regards to the first destabilizer, Novitz argues for an *empathetic* understanding of the offender's point of view. Hieronymi refutes the empathetic understanding because we can

---

[27] Hieronymi's states that Novitz' missteps are: "First… By treating emotions less as judgement-sensitive attitudes and more as forces to be managed… Instead of looking for the conditions under which one can revise one's emotions, Novitz looks for ways to destabilize them… Second misstep… Novitz misses a distinction that many others in this discussion also seem to miss, viz., the distinction between forgiveness and love, or compassion, or what might be called readiness-to-forgive" (p. 536-539).
[28] *Ibid.* p. 536.
[29] *Ibid.* p. 535.
[30] *Ibid.* p. 536.

seemingly empathize with our wrongdoer, yet still be angry with him for his wrongdoing. Additionally, as long as the victim retains her point of view, an empathetic understanding of the point of view does *not* effectively destabilize anger. Therefore, Hieronymi concludes that an empathic understanding is neither necessary, nor sufficient for an articulate account of forgiveness, and can only be used to elicit compassion.

Compassion reveals Novitz' second misstep: the failure of distinguishing forgiveness and compassion (or love, or the readiness-to-forgive). Hieronymi explains that "negative" reactive attitudes (or what we have denoted as hostile reactive attitudes) are "bad," and thus, a loving person (who presumably meets the basic demand for goodwill) will rid herself of "negative" reactive attitudes. However, a loving person can be angry or upset with someone she loves. She may be angry at someone she loves for his actions, but she does not intend to make him suffer for them. Predicated on this logic, Hieronymi concludes that anger and love are compatible, but anger and forgiveness are not. Ultimately, Hieronymi explains that "Instead of an articulate account of uncompromising forgiveness, [Novitz] proves a less-than-fully articulate account of compassion or pity."[31]

Based on Novitz' missteps and his assumption that the process of forgiveness *must* begin with an apology, Hieronymi argues that the difference between forgiveness and compassion is easiest to identify in the absence of forgiveness. She takes the position that an apology is an essential feature of forgiveness. She explains that we may be compassionate and empathetic to the situation of our wrongdoers, but "… no amount of compassion, empathy, or understanding will enable me to forgive."[32] We may feel compassion for Terrel or Paula, but we cannot forgive them because we don't have the standing to forgive. In the absence of apology, we must explain

[31] *Ibid.* p. 540.
[32] *Ibid.* p. 541.

why we should abandon our protest; otherwise, we would be unable to differentiate the ceasing of our hostile reactive attitudes and ceasing to simply care about the wrongdoer and the wrongdoing.

Hieronymi constructs an alternative account in which she argues that we cannot abandon our protest without apology. She argues that, "… resentment protests a past action that persists as a present threat."[33] She then explains that a past event is a threat because it carries the meaning from its source, who is capable of making moral statements with his actions. So long as the wrongdoer is neither excused nor exempted, and so long as they have not apologized, then the event persists as a claim that can be protested by one's resentment. (For example, the action says "This was justified," so long as the wrongdoer doesn't apologize.) Hieronymi concludes her argument by noting how the three aforementioned judgments imply a fourth judgment, which is that, "the event makes a threatening claim."[34] This judgment can be undermined by an apology because it changes the significance of the event by "cut[ting] it off from the source of its continued meaning."[35] The apology says, effectively, I cancel the threatening message of what I did; I do not think I was justified; it was the wrong thing to do.

For Hieronymi, only apology justifies forgiveness. In Hieronymi's account, Chiron could never forgive Terrel for his wrongdoing even if he fully recognized and empathized with Terrel's circumstances for committing the act. Additionally, Chiron does not possess the moral standing to forgive Terrel—Terrel is the only one capable of initiating the process of forgiveness for Chiron. Moreover, Chiron cannot *choose* to forgive Terrel because he cannot rationally revise his judgment of Terrel without an apology. The same is true for Kevin. Chiron will be incapable of

[33] *Ibid.* p. 546.
[34] *Ibid.* p. 548.
[35] *Ibid.* p. 548.

forgiving Kevin if he does not apologize first. Without Kevin's apology, Chiron will not have the ability to forgive because he will not have the moral authority and also will not have the ability to rationally revise his judgment of Kevin.

Ultimately, each account provides several merits and drawbacks. First, Calhoun's account supports the unilateral conception of forgiveness—making it so that forgiveness is non-obligatory. We seemingly *choose* to forgive our wrongdoers and grant them reprieve by doing so; rejecting this notion appears to reject the question of desert, which is a question that we seemingly ponder about the most when thinking about our response to a wrongdoing. Second, Calhoun provides more nuance with regards to *how* we can rationalize the evil actions of wrongdoers—namely, by viewing the wrongdoing within the context of the wrongdoer's biography. The nuance of Calhoun's account enhances the argument made by Moody-Adams about rejecting our initial, constricting narratives and turning them into hopeful ones. Third, by utilizing the Strawsonian framework of excusing and exempting, Calhoun shows how and why a *genuine* account of forgiveness can answer the question of desert. Our wrongdoers are never deserving of our forgiveness for what they've done; rather forgiveness is warranted by our own moral authority (if we do not simply excuse or exempt them) and so we can *choose* to forgive them regardless of the attitudes of the wrongdoer. The only clear drawback of Calhoun's account is that individuals often still feel as though they *deserve* an apology. However, we cannot control the actions of our wrongdoers and if we force them to apologize, then it would nullify the intent behind an apology. Therefore, although we desire an apology and often think we deserve one, in the absence of altering our wrongdoers' biography, we cannot do anything but rationalize the wrongdoing and gift them forgiveness if we choose to do so.

Hieronymi's view of forgiveness provides relief for supporters of the view that an apology is the necessary first step for us to forgive our wrongdoers. I argue that this is the only positive aspect of her account. In her view, appeals to compassion and empathy are not helpful because we may already be compassionate and empathetic, but we are justified in being angry (or holding other negative attitudes) towards the wrongdoer. Only an apology by the wrongdoer can ground the wrongdoing and cut off the source of threat that it displayed to us. Although Hieronymi's account rationalizes forgiveness in a clear manner, it suffers from several drawbacks. First, Hieronymi does not explain how we can epistemically guarantee that apologies are true in their intent. How can the victim be *certain* that the wrongdoer is providing an *authentic* apology that ensures that he has changed for the better? No matter how much we attempt to see things from the wrongdoer's point of view, there is no epistemic guarantee that shows us that his apology is true. Therefore, in her view, we must take all apologies to be sincere, which realistically is not always the case. Wrongdoers may seek to simply restore how they were treated before the wrongdoing in the easiest manner possible and apologize without the full force intent.

Second, if wrongdoers cannot apologize because they have passed away, Hieronymi's account implicitly asserts that we must harbor resentment against them forever. Since they cannot start the process, we cannot forgive. Yet, this does not seem to be true—we seem to be capable of forgiving the dead in the absence of apologies through some other means. Although many victims of wrongdoings may harbor resentment for actions committed by those who are no longer alive, it is also not uncommon to hear victims say that they have forgiven their wrongdoers who have passed. The victims may forgo resentment because harboring resentment against someone who is no longer on the receiving end may essentially feel like a useless task

that only serves to make them more unpleasant as time goes on. It would be difficult to warrant the notion that every single person who has suffered a minor transgression from someone who has passed still harbors resentment towards him for his actions, and will never be able to overcome this feeling.

Third, if a wrongdoer apologizes, then we are *required* to forgive them because the threat is no longer present. The elective nature of forgiveness is absent in her account, so once the process is initiated by the wrongdoer, we cannot *choose* to not forgive them—we simply must. We also cannot really *choose* to forgive them. We are tethered to rationality and operate only to amend our moral relations with the wrongdoer. This is similar to the problems presented in the moral debt argument. Let us grant that an articulate account "articulates the reasons which call for (rationally require) forgiveness"[36] and this subsequently makes forgiveness non-elective. Then, the following scenario will hold true in each instance: if a wrongdoer committed a wrongdoing against several people in the exact same way and under the same circumstances, then all the individuals must be rationally obligated to forgive the wrongdoer. However, this is seemingly not reflective of how this plays out in real-life scenarios. Not all victims of immense tragedy react similarly to what happened to them—some victims may state that they will never forgive their wrongdoers, while others might be quick to forgive—even if they endured the experience together.

For these reasons, I maintain that Calhoun's account of forgiveness is a more *genuine* one than Hieronymi's account. Not only is Hieronymi's account limited in its conception of forgiveness, but it does not seem to accurately reflect how we forgive our wrongdoers. When we

[36] *Ibid.* p. 551.

are faced with the unrepentant non-apologist, we can evidently become morally repaired if we subscribe to Calhoun’s account of forgiveness. In Part III, I will explore how this is possible.

Part III: Moral Repair, Self-Respect, and Moral Transformation

In the introduction, I defined the concept of moral repair as "the process of moving from the situation of loss and damage to a situation where some degree of stability is regained." Based on the essential features of forgiveness that were established in Part I and by subscribing to Calhoun's account of aspirational forgiveness in Part II, I will explain how forgiving the unrepentant non-apologist contributes to the victims' moral repair in two regards: first, we recognize the humanity of our wrongdoers, which leads to greater appreciation for the human condition; and second, we are more capable restoring our self-respect.

Foremost, we have concluded that forgiveness is a unilateral, elective process. We need not require an apology from our wrongdoer. Given our moral standing, we possess the moral authority to forgive the unrepentant non-apologist for what he has done to us. When we forgive the unrepentant non-apologist, we are able to recognize his humanity by viewing the wrongdoing in the biographical context of his life. Even though we must accept that they may not change, we can still hope that they might. (Due to, perhaps, a strong moral community that surrounds them.) Once we acknowledge the human capacity for wrongdoing *and* the human capacity for change and moral renewal, we can formulate a balance between our own humanity and the humanity of the unrepentant non-apologist. Although the balancing act is an immensely difficult task, we hope for a better future for ourselves, the unrepentant non-apologist, and the rest of humanity in our endeavors. Ultimately, we can recognize that we are often wronged by others and yet, we do not demand that they become completely new people. We continue to hope that they live up to the moral requirements of the moral community and gradually change within a range that makes biographical sense. By the end of this process, it is difficult to see how we could not possess a greater sense of compassion for the human condition.

Additionally, we are more capable of restoring our own self-respect through forgiveness. To prove this claim, I will once again adopt an argument put forth by Michele Moody-Adams in "The Enigma of Forgiveness." She explains that since "… it is possible for a victim to affirm a wrongdoer's humanity, and go on to grant forgiveness, without adopting the wrongdoer's perspective on the wrong and without denying that the conduct under scrutiny actually involved in a wrong,"[37] it would be more dangerous to the victim's self-respect to *not* forgive the wrongdoer. There is a clear and present danger in having a cold heart. It is pivotal that the victim recognizes herself as a person worthy of self-respect in instances of forgiveness. As I mentioned several times previously: we must recognize that we deserve better when we are wronged. Moody-Adams' argument addresses the concern that forgiving (the unrepentant non-apologist) undermines the victim's self-respect. She explains that when victims conceive of the sympathetic point of view of the offender (which she denotes as the "situation and self" of the offender), "it undermines the victim's capacity to sustain a healthy sense of self-respect."[38] Therefore, victims must be careful to not adopt the wrongdoer's point of view of themselves. So long as they do not do so, but still continue to humanize the wrongdoer in tandem—without excusing his wrongdoing—their conception of worthiness is maintained, and the task of forgiveness ultimately *contributes* to the work of rebuilding their self-respect.

I will conclude by noting that when the victims of wrongdoing internalize this notion in its entirety, they are able to "move on" or "let go" through what I will call moral transformation. I conceive of moral transformation as involving the victim's re-assessing their wrongdoer's wrongdoing in the scope of his biographical context—recognizing the need to balance his

---

[37] "The Enigma for Forgiveness." Moody-Adams, Michele, p. 175.
[38] *Ibid.* p. 175.

humanity and the victim's own self-worth. Consequently, they rationally and genuinely *choose* to forgive the unrepentant non-apologist.

Like Chiron, we have all been wronged at some point in our lives. Perhaps not to the degree that Chiron has suffered, but in notably impactful ways. We rarely tend to take the project of forgiving our wrongdoers lightly—particularly if the wrongdoing severely impacted us. The greater the magnitude of the wrongdoing, the more intensely we seem to mull over how it affected our sense of self. We recognize that the utterance of the phrase, "I forgive you," is deeply cogent. Although these words provide immediate relief for wrongdoers; as the victims of wrongdoings, we often require some time to deliberate on whether to forgive our wrongdoers or not. For Chiron, it appears to be incredibly difficult to say the phrase because of the permanence it holds. Perhaps we do not need to explicitly state our apologies, but through moral transformation, we can most certainly forgive our unrepentant non-apologists and "let go" of the harmful feelings we harbor against ourselves because we have been unjustly wronged. The task of forgiveness should therefore not be focused on the unrepentant non-apologist, but more so on how we should treat ourselves going forward.

Bibliography

Calhoun, Cheshire. "Changing One's Heart." *Ethics* 103, no. 1 (1992): 76–96. https://doi.org/10.1086/293471.

Hieronymi, Pamela. "Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62, no. 3 (2001): 529–55. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2001.tb00073.x.

Moody-Adams, Michele. "The Enigma of Forgiveness." *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 49, no. 1-2 (2014): 161–80. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10790-014-9467-4.

Moonlight. Film. A24 · PASTEL · Plan B Entertainment, 2016.

Pettigrove, Glen. *Forgiveness and Love*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

Radzik, Linda. *Making Amends: Atonement in Morality, Law, and Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2011.

Strawson, P.F. "Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays," 2008. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203882566.

Walker, Margaret Urban. *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing*. Cambridge University, 2006.