Deconstructed Black Forest Cake: ‘The elements of Black Forest Cake—chocolate cake and pudding, cherries, whipped cream, and kirsch—are reimagined as sensuous, separate bites and sips’ – www.epicurious.com

Explaining Forgiveness

The philosophical literature on forgiveness displays a broad division between those who conceive of forgiveness as essentially earned, normally through remorse or apology, and those who conceive of it as fundamentally non-earned or ‘elective’—a gift.¹ I shall label the forms of forgiveness so conceived as ‘Moral Justice Forgiveness’ and ‘Gifted Forgiveness’ respectively. Psychologically speaking these two different models are poles apart. The first involves a stance of significant moral demand, while the second precisely does not—it’s non-demandingness is its distinctive psychological feature. There are also pluralists, who take their cues from the diversity in actual moral practices, duly acknowledging that forgiveness comes in at least the two broad forms I have labelled above.² I shall argue for a view that is internally pluralist, but which integrates the different forms of forgiveness into an explanatory order, so that one kind is represented as the basic paradigm case, in relation to which others are to be explained as derived cultural iterations. Though admittedly ambitious given appearances, I believe that some such ordered pluralism is achievable, and can deliver an integrated and philosophically satisfying account—one with the advantage of any pluralism, namely that it begins from a stance of everyday truthfulness about the manifestly diverse forms of forgiveness that are practised here and now, let alone elsewhere and at other times, but which also has the advantage that it has more explanatory musculature than any mere acknowledgement of plurality could hope to build.

¹ For the former view, see for instance Hampton and Murphy (1998), and Griswold (2007). For the latter view, see for instance Garrard and McNaughton (2004), Pettigrove (2012), and Allais (2013).
² For pluralist positions, see Walker (2006). Bennett (2003) also argues there are at least two kinds of forgiveness, though the ‘personal forgiveness’ he discusses over and above ‘redemptive forgiveness’ is not a kind of gifted forgiveness.
To preview: In the first section I shall explain my method of paradigm based explanation, representing it as a more straightforward and transparent way of achieving the very same explanatory pay-off that certain well-disciplined State of Nature stories are designed to achieve. In section 2 I shall hypothesise Moral Justice Forgiveness as the paradigm case of forgiveness—not merely in the sense of being a canonical case of forgiveness but also the *explanatorily basic* case. In section 3, and now standing back from the interpersonal psychology of forgiveness, I will propose a conception of the underlying point and purpose of Moral Justice Forgiveness; after which I will go on in section 4 to ‘test’ the hypothesis of its explanatory primacy by seeing how far the practice of Gifted Forgiveness—apparently a very different moral formation—can be convincingly represented as a contingent cultural iteration of Moral Justice Forgiveness, our candidate paradigm case. On the face of it, this would be most surprising, given that the two kinds of forgiveness appear as polar opposites. But I believe that the proposed paradigm based method will prove capable of revealing the second as a special variation on the first—as will become clear once we grasp their very different ways of serving the same underlying point and purpose in moral life.

In the broad, my hope is that the resulting account will achieve two main things. It will explain something puzzling, namely, how it is that the apparently drastically disunified formations of forgiveness represented by Moral Justice Forgiveness and Gifted Forgiveness respectively are in fact fundamentally unified. Moreover it will do this in a manner that preserves a desirable pluralism at the level of interpersonal moral psychology regarding the nature of our actual practices of forgiveness. And, second, it will show that certain key values that are clearly served by forgiveness—and which are therefore quite rightly focused on in much of the philosophical literature—can only be so served in virtue of the fact that all kinds of forgiveness operate in the service of an underlying point and purpose. I shall postpone stating what that most basic point and purpose is until I have been able to set the scene a little.
1. Paradigm Based Explanation

A philosophical method that is expressly designed to reveal the point or social role of a given concept or practice is State of Nature story telling. Such story telling is a species of genealogy—it is the kind of genealogy that posits ‘origins’, as opposed to the kind that aims to show that there are none, on the grounds that all is history and contingency. Foucault claims ‘History is the concrete body of a development…; and only a metaphysicist would seek its soul in the distant ideality of the origin’ (Foucault, 1984; p. 80). But that is not true. It is not only a ‘metaphysicist’ who might seek for necessity in the idea of an origin, for there are other kinds of necessity besides metaphysical necessity. She who posits origins need only believe there are some basic features of our practices that are (more or less) a direct expression of human nature—a direct upshot of human needs perhaps, or alternatively, a manifestation of primary patterns of human emotion. There is nothing of Foucault’s ‘metaphysician’ at work, for instance, in either of the two State of Nature explanations from which I take my initial inspiration: Edward Craig’s Knowledge and the State of Nature, and Bernard Williams’ Truth and Truthfulness. However, there are of course other worries besides Foucault’s. Anyone might justifiably raise an eyebrow, after all, at the proposition that a creative fiction of a social setting that never existed, albeit reassuringly laced with a few realistic evolutionary pressures, should issue in a philosophical explanation of one of our actual conceptual or moral practices. I think there is plenty to say that would lower the eyebrow; but it is not the task of this paper to say it. Rather than defending State of Nature explanation per se, my purpose is to show that there is a closely related alternative method, which can deliver what Craig calls ‘practical explication’ somewhat more transparently than a tale from the State of Nature, as it can do so without the fictionalising that puts some critics off. Thus paradigm based explanation.4

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3 Craig (1990); Williams (2002).
4 For the same methodological proposal in respect of blame, see Fricker (2014). For another, closely related, methodological approach to forgiveness, see Warmke and McKenna (2013), though they are not focused on the point and purpose of forgiveness but rather on identifying ‘exemplar’ cases which they regard as enjoying ‘explanatory privilege’ in the sense that they are the key to understanding other cases (see esp. p. 203).
In order to present paradigm based explanation, we must first achieve an explicit account of how the State of Nature method is supposed to work. Only then will it become evident that we can achieve the same explanatory result by other, more transparent means. The key is to see that in this kind of State of Nature story (the kind employed by both Craig and Williams) what is claimed about the State of Nature—for instance, that it contains a concept or practice with such and such features—is really a claim about what is basic (or ‘core’) in our actual concept or practice.\(^5\) The narrative dimension of the fiction tends to mislead in this regard, because it encourages one to mistake a deliberately fictional (or part-fictional) genealogy of X for a flippant or half-hearted attempt at a real history of X.\(^6\) More precisely, what tends to mislead us is that such a story can seem as if it purports to tell us how we actually came to have a practice of X with this or that feature, when really it is an attempt to do something quite different: it is an effort to substantiate a philosophical claim about which features of our actual practice are necessary and which features are increasingly contingent. The ones posited as necessary are thereby posited as actually present in the practice, though possibly in radically altered or concealed form.\(^7\)

It is important to appreciate that ‘necessary’ here does not mean metaphysically necessary (Foucault’s mistake). Rather it means necessary in one of a range of qualified senses that should be made explicit by whoever is telling the story. In Craig

\(^5\) Craig was entirely clear about this in the 1990 book, but a particularly explicit subsequent comment is nonetheless helpful: ‘I had to maintain that the circumstances that favour the formation of the concept of knowledge still exist, or did until very recently, since otherwise I would have had no convincing answer to the obvious question why it should have remained in use, nor any support for my thesis that the method reveals the core of the concept as it is to be found now’ (Craig, 2007; p. 191). Williams too—whose approach was more historical in emphasis—was committed to the idea that there was something necessary at the core of what had been shaped and re-shaped by different moments of history. In his account the object of these contingent re-shappenings was the human value of truthfulness, and at its core are the proto virtues of Accuracy and Sincerity, as created by basic social pressures in the State of Nature.

\(^6\) We must resist exaggerating, however, the difference between a scholarly real-historical account and a historical genealogy, for, as Philip Kitcher observes, even the most disciplined real-historical account will have to present itself as a ‘how-possibly’ rather than a ‘how-actually’ explanation, given that parts of the story are so remote that we have too little evidence to go on (Kitcher 2011; pp. 11-12).

\(^7\) As Williams makes clear, there can also be purely historical genealogies, which, I take it, would not be committed to any kind of necessity. But most genealogies are curious hybrids of ‘historical’ and ‘imaginary’. (See Williams, 2002; ch. 2.)
and Williams it means ‘practically’ necessary in the manner of basic survival needs plus some further social pressures that grow directly out of them; but it might equally be closer to a claim about human emotional nature—something conceived as ‘humanly necessary’. That is how P. F. Strawson conceives the status of our natural ‘reactive attitudes and feelings’ towards each other when we feel, among other things, disapprobation or indignation for a wrong done, or indeed forgiveness for one repented.\(^8\) (Such a ‘humanly necessary’ kind of necessity is the one I shall go on to exploit here for purposes of explaining forgiveness, though not in relation to a State of Nature.) How shall we dispense with the State of Nature itself? The trick is to be transparent about the claim of necessity, and unabashed at its being hostage to empirical fortune—we might be quite happy to settle for nearly humanly necessary after all.\(^9\) Instead of telling a tale of origins, then, one can simply try out an explicit hypothesis as to what particular form of the practice is humanly necessary. (At least if we try out our best candidate and it ends up looking unconvincing, then we will have learned something—perhaps that our diverse practices of X are just that, fundamentally diverse, with no particular formation being necessary after all.)

Furthermore, such a hypothesis causes us to be entirely explicit about something that can sometimes be only implicit in State of Nature stories: that the contrast between what is allegedly necessary and what is contingent is also, and more importantly, one between the formation of a practice that is explanatory basic and other formations of the practice which can be explained as derivative—as contingent cultural iterations of the basic paradigm. (Necessity in the State of Nature; contingency in History. Necessity in the explanatory basic form of the practice; contingency in the particular cultural variations of it.\(^10\)) Genealogical priority is a metaphor for explanatory priority.

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\(^8\) The phrase ‘humanly necessary’ is from a paper that predate ‘Freedom and Resentment’, however. (See Strawson, 1961.)

\(^9\) Strawson was entirely aware that the fact of moral diversity should make one ‘chary’ of advancing any features of moral psychology as essential or universal, and allowed that his own depiction of the moral reactive attitudes might unwittingly carry some contingent cultural inflection (see Strawson 1974; p. 24). But I understand him as committed to the idea that some genuinely universal description could be given.

\(^10\) Often a contingent cultural iteration of a basic human practice will be more complex, and will have historically grown out of the simpler, more basic practice. So it might be with highly decorous forms of civility, for instance, such as elaborate rituals of apology, and so on. But that need not always be so. It is possible that some cultural developments might be able to simplify a practice that starts out more
priority. The hoped for philosophical pay-off, therefore, will always be of the generic form ‘the fact that we have a practice of X with this or that feature is explained by these features being present in, or derived from, the practice of X that human beings have in the State of Nature’. This claim of explanatory priority is the lynchpin of the more transparent version of the method I want to offer, a method designed to deliver the explanatory pay-off but without the fictionalising. Here is the proposal. We present a hypothesis about what the paradigm practice of X is like—i.e. the form of the practice that we hypothesise as displaying its most basic point and purpose—and we then test out the hypothesis by seeing if we can plausibly represent other, non-paradigm forms of the practice as derivative. They may, for instance, display the same distinctive point and purpose—play the same underlying moral role—but in a different, perhaps thoroughly obscured form.

In other work I have employed this paradigm based method in relation to blame, and I argued that the paradigm case of blame is Communicative Blame—where you wrong me and I react by communicating that you are at fault, and I do so with some kind of blame-feeling. We then ask what the point or role of the paradigm case is: what’s the point of Communicative Blame? And the answer given is that Communicative Blame aims to inspire remorse understood as pained understanding of the wrong one has done. Since I must here merely impose this conception of blame’s basic point as a hefty premise to what follows, let me alleviate its weight a little by pointing out, first, that its substance is a version of a commonly accepted conception; but also that, in accepting it, we are historically in good company, as it is the view taken by Adam Smith:

The object…which resentment is chiefly intent upon, is not so much to make our enemy feel pain in his turn, as to make him conscious that he feels it upon account of his past conduct, to make him repent of that conduct, and to make complex, perhaps through suppression of some psychological complexities found in human nature. Perhaps the institution of marriage (‘husband and wife’) is an attempt to simplify some naturally more complex ways of relating—indeed increasingly so as things progress (‘husband and husband’, ‘wife and wife’). In any case, assuming there are such cases, then the most theoretically elegant thing to say is that the complexities are still present (as anything necessary would be), only in suppressed or socially sculpted form.

11 See Fricker (2014).
him sensible, that the person whom he injured did not deserve to be treated in that manner… To bring him back to a more just sense of what is due to other people, to make him sensible of what he owes us, and of the wrong that he has done to us, is frequently the principal end proposed in our revenge, which is always imperfect when it cannot accomplish this (Smith, 2009 [1759]; Part II, Section III, Chapter I; p. 115).

Blame may take many forms, and some of them we would be better off without, but for argument’s sake let us agree that the role played by Communicative Blame in our moral relations is to bring the wrongdoer and the blamer into an aligned moral understanding of what has gone on between them. Communicative Blame is thus seen to be driven by a morally constructive energy whose purpose is shared moral understanding.

With this claim about the basic point of blame now on the page as a premise to what follows, we are equipped to apply the method of paradigm based explanation to forgiveness.

2. Moral Justice Forgiveness—the candidate paradigm case of forgiveness

Let us begin with the ‘humanly necessary’—the ‘reactive attitude and feeling’ of forgiveness:

Besides resentment and gratitude, I mentioned just now forgiveness… To ask to be forgiven is in part to acknowledge that the attitude displayed in our actions was such as might properly be resented and in part to repudiate that attitude for the future…; and to forgive is to accept the repudiation and to forswear the resentment.12

If we accept that this is a description of a humanly necessary reactive attitude of forgiveness, then we should accept it (or something very close to it) as a prime

12 Strawson (1974); p.6, italics added.
candidate for an explanatorily basic form of forgiveness—our candidate paradigm case. But claims of necessity, even human necessity, are not to be made lightly. We must press the question whether every aspect is plausibly built in to human nature. There are two aspects of Strawson’s description that are worth questioning.

First, casting the repudiation in terms of an attitude towards not only the past deed but also towards future conduct seems something of an optional extra, which introduces a suspicion of contingency. Must the repudiator also be making a guarantee as regards future conduct in order to be forgiven in this basic manner? Of course some such firm intention to reform is always hoped for, assuming the two parties are to remain in each other’s lives; but I think we need not build it in to the picture of what is being claimed as a humanly necessary moral reactive attitude. And if we need not, then we should not.

Second, we should pause to reflect on the normative dimension to Strawson’s description. Are we sure it is necessary? The notion he uses is the forsaking of resentment as a response to the wrongdoer’s repudiating what she did, and that is a more normatively loaded construction than the alternative, apparently more plainly descriptive construction that would simply emphasise an observed tendency to relinquish resentment as a response to the repudiation. Would this less explicitly normative construal be the better candidate for our paradigm case? In order to answer this question, we need only scrutinize the tendency to relinquish resentment towards a wrongdoer who now repudiates what she has done. We find that our very tendency is explained by a normative fact—the fact that the repudiation justifies the relinquishing of the resentment. And so we discover that the normativity is built in to the tendency from the start. Therefore there is no simpler, ‘merely descriptive’ construal that is not already normatively structured, and it perhaps makes little odds whether in describing the reactive attitude of forgiveness we use an explicitly normative word such as ‘forswear’ or a merely descriptive word such as ‘relinquish’. The normativity is already built in.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{13} For a fully elaborated account of the normative aspects of reactive attitudes, see Darwall (2006). Although his focus is not on forgiveness, there is a brief discussion of its second-personal character at pp. 72-73.
However there is an outstanding reason to favour an explicitly normative term, for it strikes a note of self-discipline which rightly flags up the fact that even in the most basic psychological formation there is an ever-present risk that the blame-feelings of those who are morally wounded (I shall generally talk of ‘blame-feeling’ rather than the more problematic ‘resentment’\textsuperscript{14}) will over-reach themselves in some way, perhaps by lingering beyond the time when they are justified, or by being more intense than is justified by the wrong. Perhaps part of the explanation why blame-feeling tends towards excess if left unchecked is, as Jean Hampton suggests, it is pleasurable: ‘I suspect that we enjoy it not only because we enjoy asserting what we wish our own worth to be, but also because the emotion encourages the belief that the wrongdoer is “morally worse” than his victim’ (Hampton 1988, p. 60). This proneness of blame-feeling to over-reach itself means that even in the basic case there is a self-discipline operative in our blaming moral responses, and hence a self-discipline in the effort of relinquishing such feelings when they are no longer justified—the effort of so relinquishing them is well described as ‘forswearing’. What Strawson’s use of the term implies is that while it is natural to let resentment go when the wrong is repudiated, it is equally only natural for a morally wounded party to recognise that continued blame-feeling is unjustified and yet fail to let go of the feeling. The normativity that permeates blame-feeling is what makes it the case that a wrongdoer earns forgiveness through their remorse: other things equal, their remorse justifies (provides a permissive reason for) the forsaking of blame-feeling. What we find thus encoded in our moral human nature is the entirely familiar normative structure that is definitive of Moral Justice Forgiveness. Our reactive attitudes, then, are already attitudes of a simple interpersonal moral justice. I therefore propose the simplest kind of Moral Justice Forgiveness as our candidate paradigm case of forgiveness—the explanatorily basic case, as delivered in (a slightly trimmed version of) Strawson’s description of the reactive attitude.

\textsuperscript{14} It is worth remembering that Strawson uses ‘resentment’ only in characterising the pre-moral attitude, and switches to ‘moral indignation’ or (more weakly) ‘disapprobation’ for the vicarious, moral analogue (Strawson, 1974; p. 14). For my part I am using the umbrella term ‘blame-feeling’ in order to stay neutral about exactly what emotion(s) constitute feelings of blame, what the relation might be to vengeance or retribution, and indeed whether there is in fact a diverse range of emotions, including plain sorrow or pity, that might play a proper affective role in blame, as I have argued in Fricker 2014. Jeffrey Blustein too has argued that the emotions that forgiveness overcomes need not be retributive (Blustein 2014; ch. 1).
Real contingent cultural formations of Moral Justice Forgiveness may vary considerably, emphasising different aspects, and/or relating them to other values and codes (such as honour, or conscience, or sin; proportionality, impartiality, or the paying of debts) in many different ways. We readily recognise, for example, a certain Old Testament punitive style of Moral Justice Forgiveness as it features in a critical genealogy of the whole practice of forgiveness, as recently advanced by Martha Nussbaum:

What our genealogy suggests…is that the forgiveness process itself is violent toward the self. Forgiveness is an elusive and usually quite temporary prize held out at the end of a traumatic and profoundly intrusive process of self-denigration. To engage in it with another person (playing, in effect, the role of the confessor) intrudes into that person’s inner world in a way that is both controlling and potentially prurient, and does potential violence to the other person’s self (Nussbaum, 2014; ms p. 109).

What should we make of this strident critique, designed to have us eschew not only one formation of forgiveness but forgiveness per se? Certainly forgiveness can take this aggressively moralistic form; but even Moral Justice Forgiveness need not be punitive, let alone demand self-denigration etc. from the wrongdoer. Every time we ask a child to say sorry for hitting a sibling instead of sharing nicely, we are inculcating her into a practice that constructs wrongs as inspiring justified blame-feeling, but blame-feeling whose justification will be extinguished if she repudiates the wrong—thus earning forgiveness. There need be no trauma, denigration, or prurience in the Moral Justice Forgiver (though we should, I believe, acknowledge an essential effort of control in the communication of blame that will normally precede the forgiveness).15

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15 I have argued that Communicative Blame is inter alia an operation of social power—an attempt to wield influence upon the wrongdoer’s moral understanding, at the very least (Fricker 2014). This acknowledgement enables us to see how Communicative Blame plays a literally constructive role in creating shared moral understandings—for good or ill.
What I am committing to, however, in the claim that Moral Justice Forgiveness is the paradigm case is that the minimal such formation—as given in the trimmed reactive attitude—is not only at the heart of all formations of Moral Justice Forgiveness (whether of the punitive ‘fire and brimstone’ variety or of the benign ‘say sorry nicely’ variety), but at the heart of all kinds of forgiveness. Specifically here the hypothesis is that Moral Justice Forgiveness is the basic paradigm in relation to which different formations of Gifted Forgiveness too may be explained. In order to substantiate this claim let me now make out my proposal as to the basic role that Moral Justice Forgiveness plays in our lives—the basic purpose it serves and which underpins the distinctive moral psychology involved in the demand for remorseful moral understanding. Once this is in view, we shall be able to see how far Gifted Forgiveness turns out to do essentially the same basic moral-social job, albeit in radically obscured ways, and of course with its own genuinely different interpersonal psychology.

3. The Underlying Point and Purpose of Moral Justice Forgiveness

Now that the hypothesis to be tested is on the table, namely that the explanatorily basic paradigm of forgiveness is Moral Justice Forgiveness, we can ask: what is the underlying point and purpose of that kind of forgiveness? Once we have an answer, we can look and see how far that basic role is discernable in the raison d’être of Gifted Forgiveness too, and thereby assess how far it is plausible to see gifted formations as contingent cultural iterations of the basic moral justice formation. In order to bring the point of Moral Justice Forgiveness into view, we need to go back a step so that we start from the point of Communicative Blame mentioned earlier. We accepted the premise that the point of Communicative Blame is to inspire remorse in the wrongdoer as a matter of aligning both parties’ moral understanding. Now this has a direct bearing on the point of Moral Justice Forgiveness, for once the point of blame is achieved, if it is achieved, then continued blame-feeling can serve no further moral purpose, but merely threatens to fester if it is left unreleased from the individual’s psychology, or indeed thereby left churning without movement in the moral social system. Once the communication of blame has achieved its point, then continued blame-feeling becomes redundant; and continuing to harbour blame-feeling that has
been made redundant in this way merely prolongs ill-feeling to no purpose, risking corrosive effects on both parties and possibly on other relationships into the bargain. All sides are better off without it, and the moment of redundancy cues Moral Justice Forgiveness. The forswearing of blame-feeling that has been made redundant by the wrongdoer’s remorse is Moral Justice Forgiveness. Thus, I propose, the underlying point of Moral Justice Forgiveness can be encapsulated as *liberation from redundant blame-feeling*.

The idea that we need liberation from our feelings of blame when they are morally redundant does not commit us to the puritanical idea that such redundant blame-feelings are *necessarily* bad or corrosive. I am ready to accept that some of us can frankly harbour quite a bit of blame-feeling with no intention of communicating it or expelling it in any other way, and it does us no harm at all.  

Perhaps some of the most generous-spirited individuals are best placed to contain such spikes of residual, unspent blame-feeling. An edge of unresolved resentments might make a person more interesting, or funny, more likeable even—a touch of defiant frailty worn on the sleeve might be decidedly preferable to the blandness of an unremittingly resolved psyche. What the thesis about the point of paradigm forgiveness does commit us to, however, is the view—which is hardly controversial—that on the whole blame that lingers without the catharsis of communicative interpersonal resolution tends to corrupt the relationship in question, perhaps other relationships too, and indeed the character and happiness of the blamer. Harbouring redundant blame is not always bad; but it does tend to be. And this fact explains why human beings need to cultivate their natural moral reactive attitudes so that on the whole we succeed in liberating ourselves from such potentially corrosive redundant blame-feelings. That, as Hannah Arendt sagely observes, is how we consign our moral injuries to the past.

Somebody might now ask: if the disvalue of harbouring redundant blame-feeling, and the correlative value of getting rid of it, is sufficiently important to constitute the point and purpose of Moral Justice Forgiveness, is it not equally basically valuable to

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16 I thank Lucy Allais and John Greenwood for each making this point in discussion.  
17 Although Arendt makes the point by way of other notions I would not wish to make use of, such as men needing forgiveness in order to act freely, still the fundamental idea that without forgiveness we cannot truly *get past* wrongs done to us seems exactly right. See Arendt (1998/1958; pp. 238-43 [check edition]).
release the remorseful wrongdoer from that same blame-feeling? Why the exclusive focus on the subject rather than the object of blame-feeling? This would make the paradigm of forgiveness not so much plain Moral Justice Forgiveness but rather Communicative Moral Justice Forgiveness—the release of both parties from the ills of redundant blame-feeling. It would actually suit my overall integrated approach to blame and forgiveness very nicely to be able to say this, because it would allow me to say that both paradigms, of blame and of forgiveness alike, were communicative. But I do not see a principled way of doing so. Whereas blame can virtually serve no purpose at all without being communicated to the wrongdoer (which is why Communicative Blame is the paradigm), forgiveness clearly can. In privately forgiving I can succeed in freeing myself from blame-feeling that has been consuming me for years, and straining other relationships as a result, merely through my own change of heart towards the wrongdoer—who might after all be long gone. And I can do this without ever communicating it to him, without ever realising the value for him of their being so released. Of course if I am continuing to interact with him it is virtually inevitable that I communicate my forgiveness through the way I treat him, but that merely shows that the value to the wrongdoer of my forgiving him will tend to follow on closely from the fact of my change of heart towards him, and not that the value to him is part and parcel of forgiveness’s most basic rationale. If this is right, then while we can readily acknowledge that releasing the wrongdoer does tend to follow on from releasing oneself from the burden of blame-feeling—it will do so whenever the two parties are in an on-going relationship of some kind—still communicative forgiveness cannot quite be the basic paradigm case. The change of heart alone—the forsaking of blame-feeling towards the wrongdoer for what he did—is sufficient to constitute on its own a fundamental rationale for forgiveness, and so it would be an extravagance to claim necessity for anything further.\(^\text{18}\)

But there is an independent reason for not extending our conception of the point and purpose of basic Moral Justice Forgiveness to include the value to the wrongdoer of releasing her from redundant blame-feeling. And that is, very simply, that remorse is not the only thing that can make continued blame-feeling redundant. Entrenched brute

\(^{18}\text{In Craig’s terminology, such nearly-necessary features of a practice—those not strictly found in the State of Nature, but very likely to be found almost anywhere else—are not quite ‘core’ features but still ‘close to core’.}\)
moral recalcitrance can also do it; unflinching evil can do it; irremediable moral stupidity can do it. It is therefore somewhat in the wrongdoer’s power to make blame-feeling redundant, just by continuing not to care about what she’s done or who she’s hurt. It cannot therefore be any part of the primary point and purpose of our practices of forgiveness that we thereby release wrongdoers from being on the receiving end of redundant blame-feeling—for hard-nosed wrongdoers everywhere might generate self-interested reasons for others to forgive them, simply through the power of their personal moral inertia to render continued blame-feeling towards them redundant. The primary source of the value of releasing a culprit from blame-feeling, therefore, cannot be the interest of the wrongdoer in being so released, for that value is too contingent upon the specific reasons for redundancy. The most basic point of any forgiveness in such a case must derive instead from the value to the blamer/forgiver of her relinquishing the bad feelings and so enabling herself to put the moral injury behind her. (I shall come to such no-remorse cases properly in the next section, for these are ones in relation to which I shall argue that Gifted Forgiveness can be justified, despite appearing signally unjustified from a moral justice perspective.)

4. Gifted Forgiveness: Temporal and/or Social Remove

Earlier I said that the claim that Moral Justice Forgiveness is a paradigm case—the explanatorily basic case of forgiveness in general—depends upon our being able to convincingly represent other, non-paradigm, cases of forgiveness as derivative from it—as contingent and perhaps hard-to-recognize cultural iterations of the basic practice. I believe there are in fact many varieties of forgiveness, but I shall focus here exclusively on two formations of the broad kind I am calling Gifted Forgiveness. So our question now is: can one or other formation of Gifted Forgiveness be convincingly represented as such a cultural iteration of basic Moral Justice Forgiveness? I think the answer is yes, and in effect I am asking us to think of the ingredients of Moral Justice Forgiveness as being served up in one or other rearranged form, rather as a restaurant may sometimes serve ‘deconstructed’ dishes whose elements are not combined in the usual way, but instead arranged on the plate in unfamiliar order, perhaps with all elements separated, or, as it might also be, with a key element at one remove from the rest, so that had the diner not paid much attention
to the description on the menu, he might not initially recognize the cherries, kirsch and chocolate cake set out before him as a variation on Black Forest Gateau—and yet, after a few bites, it will surely dawn on him that these elements are meeting the same gustatory brief as that seventies classic. (‘Deconstructed Black Forest Cake’: ‘The elements of Black Forest Cake…are reimagined as sensuous, separate bites and sips’. 19)

I remain entirely neutral as to whether deconstructed Black Forest Cake tastes as good as the traditionally constructed original; but there is philosophical method in this gastronomic frivolity. The culinary innovation is just one of many possible examples of a deep and quite general creative tendency in human culture to innovate and rearrange, to invent variations on a theme, to achieve similar effects or utilities by different, sometimes more efficient, sometimes more elaborate means, and quite generally to allow the meanings inherent in a practice to play on each other and create a new way of doing things. This kind of cultural innovation is essentially what I am proposing as our explanatory conceit in relation to forgiveness: the non-paradigm formations, when looked at in the light of the basic point of the paradigm case, will reveal themselves as more or less rearranged modes of working to the same underlying moral brief—to free the wronged party from blame-feeling that can serve no moral purpose. I hope to show of two formations of Gifted Forgiveness that, contrary to appearances, when considered in abstraction from the distinctive interpersonal moral psychology of non-demand, we can discern at a deeper level of their functionality that they are cultural reinventions of Moral Justice Forgiveness—its key element of aligned moral understanding being repositioned at one remove in social space, or time, or both.

Temporal remove—Proleptic Gifted Forgiveness:
The first formation of Gifted Forgiveness on which I shall focus is exemplified in the widely cited literary example from Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*. 20 The Bishop forgives Jean Valjean for betraying his trust and stealing the silver from the rectory, 19 From [http://www.epicurious.com/recipes/food/views/deconstructed-black-forest-cake-231450](http://www.epicurious.com/recipes/food/views/deconstructed-black-forest-cake-231450) The account of deconstructed recipes in general given there is TREND: Deconstructed desserts (breaking down a dish into its essential, components, then serving the parts as a whole’.
20 See, for instance, Griswold (2007); p. 121 n.5.
despite the fact that Valjean expresses no remorse and shows no other sign of appreciating the significance of his misdeed. This is an archetypal case of Gifted Forgiveness, but (here’s the point) we can only make sense of it as forgiveness by thinking of it as the Bishop’s giving Valjean something (namely a culprit’s freedom from the blame-feeling that his conduct would justify) which would normally need to be earned through remorseful moral understanding but on this occasion isn’t. Instead the Bishop moves swiftly to forgiveness (perhaps even bypassing blame altogether?—this seems entirely possible) as a matter of moral gratuity—something on this occasion given, startlingly, for free. Therein lies the genuinely distinctive moral meaning and value of Gifted Forgiveness—something for nothing—and it is clearly parasitic on the moral meaning and value of Moral Justice Forgiveness, which gives nothing for nothing as a matter of principle. That the notion of something gifted is parasitic on that of something paid for amounts to a conceptual dependence; but from this conceptual priority two further relations of priority flow, namely, the priority of the meaning of earned forgiveness in relation to gifted forgiveness, and the priority of the value of earned forgiveness in relation to gifted forgiveness. For these related reasons I think it is reasonable to claim that human moral culture could only develop a practice of gifted forgiveness as a variation on a prior practice of earned forgiveness. We might gather these relations of priority together and label them the generic derivativeness of Gifted Forgiveness: as with the notion of a gift quite generally, its meaning and value consist in the fact that something for which one must normally pay is, on this occasion, being gifted. That is what makes this kind of forgiveness extraordinary, and also what makes it on occasion so moving.

This generic derivativeness is true of both formations of Gifted Forgiveness that I shall discuss. But there is a further dimension of derivativeness to the kind exemplified by the Bishop–Valjean case, which leads me to label it Proleptic Gifted Forgiveness. For if we look closely at how such cases of forgiveness play out, and what renders them formations of forgiveness at all (something denied by Griswold, for instance21) rather than a mere failure to hold the culprit responsible, we see that the interpersonal mechanism is a proleptic one, and thus involves a certain curious displacement in time. If we stand back from the distinctive interpersonal psychology

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21 See Griswold 2007, p. 121.
of this kind of forgiveness to focus instead on what underlying moral purpose it serves, we can see that it is well designed to achieve the same point as Moral Justice Forgiveness, but in a temporally displaced manner. In order to see how, we must scrutinize how the prolepsis works.

The idea of a ‘proleptic mechanism’ is raised in connection with blame in some remarks of Bernard Williams’ about how blame may function productively even in cases where the wrongdoer does not respect the reason she is (at least in the blamer’s eyes) culpable for having failed to act upon.\(^{22}\) Blame may function proleptically in such cases so long as the wrongdoer has at least some residual respect or care for the blamer, so that she is moved by his protestations. What happens in proleptic blame is that the blamer treats the wrongdoer \textit{as if she already} acknowledged the reason in question, and then, in virtue of her residual respect or care for the blamer, she is caused in some measure to acknowledge the reason after the fact.\(^{23}\) How does this sort of temporal displacement work in the case of forgiveness? My suggestion is that here, in the example from \textit{Les Misérables}, we see a similarly temporally extended interpersonal mechanism played out to rearrange forgiveness in time. In forgiving the unremorseful Valjean, the Bishop effectively treats Valjean \textit{as if he were already} remorseful. And in so doing, given a basic residual respect for the Bishop on Valjean’s part so that he is moved by the Bishop’s act of forgiveness, the Bishop may thereby cause Valjean to come to feel some remorse after all. Here, then, my suggestion is that we see this classic case of Gifted Forgiveness as playing the same basic role as our paradigm, Moral Justice Forgiveness. For the Bishop is engaging in a practice that tends to produce the same end as Moral Justice Forgiveness—the wronged party’s freedom from redundant blame-feeling. So long as Gifted Forgiveness is prone to produce the same remorseful alignment of moral

\(^{22}\) Williams (1995); and I have tried to develop the idea in Fricker (2014).

\(^{23}\) Williams—who holds that a condition on possessing any practical reason is that it be related by a ‘sound deliberative route’ to some motivation that the subject either has or would have, absent errors of fact and of reasoning—naturally talks in terms not of ‘acknowledging’ the moral reason in question, but rather of \textit{having} it, or not, as the case may be. For him, very morally bad people really don’t have the moral reasons we wish they did—that is what makes them so morally bad. His view of moral reasons as ‘fundamentally first-personal’ and therefore quite often partial also implies that there will be times when morally all right people will not have the reasons we wish they had—that is what reveals their freedom.
understandings as Communicative Blame aims to produce, then to put it bluntly there is no need for the Bishop to actually experience the blame-feeling reaction at all, for the mutual awareness that it would be justified can do the same job—indeed in some cases, where the presence of blame-feeling would only entrench matters, it will do the job more reliably. From a moral economic point of view (if there is such a thing), I suppose one might say that Proleptic Gifted Forgiveness is a more efficient formation than Moral Justice Forgiveness—as indeed one might expect from a culturally created variation on a basic moral practice.

All this can make a Bishop’s blame-feeling redundant from the start (which is why we can accommodate the possibility that he bypasses blame-feeling altogether, moving directly to gifting forgiveness—a possibility which represents a complete freedom from redundant blame-feeling). Gifted Forgiveness that functions proleptically in this way is thus revealed as a temporally displaced rearrangement of the elements that compose the more basic practice of Moral Justice Forgiveness. Whereas Moral Justice Forgiveness demands the remorseful alignment of moral understanding before the release of forgiveness, Gifted Forgiveness hopes to inspire it after the fact. The element of remorseful understanding is deferred, and hoped for, rather than demanded in the now. One can imagine, furthermore, that once such a practice of Proleptic Gifted Forgiveness has got going and established itself as a familiar moral response to wrongdoing in a given moral culture, the hopeful attitude that it expresses might then sustain it as an intelligible response even in circumstances where there is precious little prospect of inspiring remorse. A hopeful practice may need fertile ground to first take root, but thereafter be able to spread itself even across a relatively barren landscape.

Is the proposal that this Gifted Forgiveness serves the same underlying point as Moral Justice Forgiveness a reductive move? Does my argument entail that there isn’t really any such thing as Proleptic Gifted Forgiveness but only ultimately another formation of Moral Justice Forgiveness? No; for any Gifted Forgiveness is characterised by a distinctively open-hearted and hopeful psychological form—a stance of non-

24 Relatedly, Glen Pettigrove discusses the ‘transformative power’ of what he calls gracious forgiveness, which is forgiveness appropriately bestowed on someone who has however done nothing to ‘merit’ it (see Pettigrove 2012; p. 140).
demandingness, as I put it earlier—so that the practice of Gifted Forgiveness emerges from our explanatory scheme as a moral-cultural achievement, all the more precious for its historical contingency. Our moral culture, after all, might have developed in a way that did not contain such a practice. It might have stuck with formations of forgiveness that insisted it was earned before forgiveness could be justifiably forthcoming. But instead, a certain generous-spirited alternative to the moral accountancy of justice has developed for us to engage in as we may, diversifying our repertoire of moral responses to wrongdoing, and reminding us that active engagement in the economy of moral justice is not compulsory across the board—not even as regards the achievement of the same morally progressive effect.

It is, without question, of fundamental importance in moral life that we generally blame each other for bad things done and thereby hold each other in relations of moral demand, because moral justice is fundamentally important in personal life as in institutional practices. Without Communicative Blame we could not keep learning and re-learning what matters to each other, and what subtle forms of moral hurt we may be thoughtlessly, even innocently, engaged in. But it does seem to me a moral boon to have the option, at least in some contexts, of stepping back with a sense that all things considered, this time there is no need to ‘go there’. Or perhaps even, as it may have been with the Bishop and Valjean, to step back and self-consciously judge that the only thing that can save him is his own conscience pricked by the gratuitous generosity of others.\(^{25}\) As others have noted\(^{26}\), \textit{all} forgiveness is attended by hope, and manifestly Moral Justice Forgiveness already contains hope—hope that your moral demand will be met, that the wrongdoer will feel sorry and see things more from your point of view, and so on. But in proleptic forgiveness the hope element is far more exposed, because it is undefended by interpersonal moral demand of any

\(^{25}\) In cultures influenced by Christian thinking, the formations of Gifted Forgiveness are likely to be descended from the teachings of Jesus and the theological notion of Grace. But this is not the only source, for ancient traditions of mercy, and of what Pettigrove distinguishes as the ethical notion of grace, are also in the background: ‘This ethical notion which has received so little attention in contemporary philosophy was quite frequently discussed in Greek and Roman philosophy. Cicero, Seneca, and Chrysippus, for example, each devoted considerable attention to what the Greeks called \textit{charis} and the Romans \textit{gratia}. When we look at this older tradition, an important moral—as opposed to theological—quality emerges’ (Pettigrove 2012; p. 125).

\(^{26}\) See, in particular, Walker 2006.
kind. The armour of anger or indignation is never donned (or if it is, it is swiftly removed), which is why the gifting forgiver can appear bewilderingly vulnerable and passive, and why her stance can only look like condonation or some other failure of moral nerve to those who would insist on engaging moral justice in the face of every wrongdoing.

Charles Griswold talks briefly of what he sceptically labels ‘prospective forgiving’, dismissing it in enjoyably sardonic tones:

One could argue that an excellent way to encourage the offender to repent is precisely to forgive her even if she is unrepentant; bestowing this ‘gift’ opens a moral door for the offender and leads the way through it. Now, it is possible that the offender will see the light streaming in through that door, and that the conditions for true forgiveness will be enacted backwards, as it were. One can imagine conditions under which ‘prospective forgiving’ is based on a reasonable hunch about the person’s ability to change, if shown the way. My claim is that whatever it is that the injured party is doing proleptically, it is not forgiving, but something else that seeks to become forgiveness but has not yet crossed the threshold as defined’ (pp. 121-2).

But ‘the threshold as defined’ refers of course to his own definition which simply requires that the wrongdoer at least try to meet certain conditions of meriting forgiveness that involve, in one way or another, appreciating that he has done wrong. This completes the line of reasoning only to make a circle. If one defines forgiveness so as to require (something like) remorse, then there can be no Gifted Forgiveness of any kind; but so much the worse for the definition—it will have merely limited its own capacity to help us understand our actual practices of forgiveness, which plainly include cases of something normally called forgiveness in relation to wrongdoers who are not, or not yet, remotely sorry for what they have done.

Social Remove—Distributed Gifted Forgiveness:
What about the second kind of Gifted Forgiveness? Many authors discuss striking, indeed sometimes bewildering cases of Gifted Forgiveness in which someone forgives a horrifying wrong, such as the torture and murder of a loved one, regardless
of whether the culprit is likely ever to be remorseful, but where the forgiveness takes place in a social context of some significant moral solidarity. Lucy Allais has discussed cases of this kind, for instance, from the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa (Allais 2008). One may well wonder at how forgiveness in such a case is even possible. In order to render it less bewildering, and to bring its normative structure into view, we need to look once again at where the crucial hoped-for element of shared moral understanding has been displaced to. In proleptic cases we have seen that it is displaced in time and deferred as a hoped-for prospect in the future (perhaps all cases of Gifted Forgiveness will have a proleptic aspect of some kind, however slim the hope). But this element of shared moral understanding can also be displaced across social space—hence the label Distributed Gifted Forgiveness. This is evidenced in many of the cases discussed by philosophers as exemplars of Gifted Forgiveness, for they tend to involve a strong social, even institutionalised structure of solidarity and shared moral understanding from which the victim may draw strength and moral meaning. This is explicitly so, I take it, in the examples from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but of course it can be achieved more informally in any circumstances where the victim has her own moral community (friends, colleagues, family) from which to draw the moral affirmation she might otherwise primarily hope to source in the remorseful wrongdoer’s changed attitudes.

That it isn’t the culprit who is feeling bad for the victim, and that the emotion cannot be remorse but rather some form of affirming sympathy, comes to be less important to the potential forgiver if she has this kind of support from third parties. Such multi-lateral third-party alignments of moral understanding can be a powerful collective proxy for the wrongdoer’s remorseful shared moral understanding. Not surprisingly, the power of solidarity of this kind is written about in different ways by various theorists. Margaret Urban Walker, for instance calls a lack of moral solidarity and alignment in one’s moral community ‘normative abandonment’:

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27 See, for instance, Eve Garrard and David McNaughton’s discussion of Gordon Wilson’s ‘unconditional’ forgiveness of the Enniskillen bombers (Garrard and McNaughton 2002); and Lucy Allais’ discussion of two cases of ‘elective’ forgiveness from the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Allais, 2008).

28 See, for instance, Walker (2006), and MacLachlan (2008).
This explains a common phenomenon in the testimonies of victims: they often experience as much or more rage, resentment, indignation, or humiliation in response to the failure of other people and institutions to come to their aid, acknowledge their injury, reaffirm standards, place blame appropriately on wrongdoers, and offer some forms of solace, safety, and relief, as they experience toward the original wrongdoer (Walker 2006; p. 20).

What we see, I suggest, in cases of Distributed Gifted Forgiveness is a rearrangement across social space of the crucial positive justificatory element in Moral Justice Forgiveness—namely the alignment of moral understandings. Whereas in cases of Moral Justice Forgiveness that alignment is required between victim and remorseful culprit, in cases of Gifted Forgiveness it can be achieved between victim and a moral community to which she belongs. This can do essentially the same job of affirming the victim’s moral status and so enabling her, if she wishes, and if she can, to forgive the unremorseful wrongdoer without collapsing into condonation or a mere failure to hold him responsible. She thus rids herself of redundant blame-feeling in a change of heart towards the wrongdoer for what he did, but sourcing the element of shared moral understanding from elsewhere.

What rational role is the redundancy of blame-feeling doing in a case like this, given that the redundancy is not caused by any successful completion of Communicative Blame’s point? My principle idea all along has been that the redundancy of blame-feeling is the core rationale for forgiving, where this redundancy is paradigmatically caused by the remorseful alignment of both parties’ moral understandings; but where it might also be caused by alignments of moral understanding that are displaced in time and/or social space. However, I should also come clean and say, I fear controversially, that I believe our paradigm based approach has also indicated that very often the sheer pointlessness of continued blame-feeling can on its own constitute a perfectly good reason to forgive, if you can, even without any outside alignments of moral understanding. As we observed near the outset, freedom from redundant blame-feeling is an important thing in life, given the corrosive tendency of blame-feeling that lingers unproductively, and sheer self-preservation, self-affirmation, or even irritation with the tedium of rancour seem to be the sorts of
reasonable motives that can lead to forgiveness—liberation from blame-feeling towards a wrongdoer for what she has done. Why not? Moral justice is important; but it does not have to be meted out at every opportunity, not least because sometimes little else rests on it.

Although this way of putting things deliberately points to possibilities of rather trivial everyday gifts of forgiveness through the simple acknowledgement that there’s just no point in wasting emotional energy on blame-feeling towards someone for a perceived slight or barbed joke, let me end on a more sombre note with an example of a morally serious kind, but which makes essentially the same normative point. I present it here in order to bring home the close alliance, so often erased by moralistic approaches, between the value of forgiveness and the value of self-care, which should warn us against too much focus on the demanding business of perpetually striving for moral justice in our dealings with each other. In a radio interview, Anne-Marie Cockburn, the mother of Martha Fernback who had died at the age of fifteen following cardiac arrest caused by a dose of excessively pure ecstasy that was circulating in her peer group at the time, said the following about her own forgiveness of the teenage friend of her daughter who unwittingly sold her the fatal drug:

I think forgiveness is really about…me being able to move on in my bereavement and to convalesce, and to find a peaceful way through it. I found in the early days that I was…immersed in loss and sadness…I didn’t have capacity for anger, and I think I’ve got a lot…to do in my life now and I don’t think anger is going to help me at all.29

Independently of the specific details of a situation in which a heart-broken mother might come to this resolution, the moral-emotional facts as they are related to us here seem to me to amount to excellent reasons to try to forgive, and to hope for success in freeing oneself from blame-feeling that can do no good.

It is obvious, and explicit, that this value of self-care (as I am framing it) depends crucially on the subject’s liberation from redundant blame-feeling. But there are three

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29 Transcribed from the Today programme, BBC Radio 4, 13th March 2014.
other values served by forgiveness which tend to be focused on by philosophers, as Walker reminds us: ‘three features of forgiveness that are commonly argued or assumed in philosophical discussions of forgiveness to be the “key” or “essential” elements. Philosophers speak of “overcoming resentment,” “restoring relationship,” and “setting a wrong to rest in the past” as essential marks of forgiveness’ (Walker 2006; p. 153). Indeed they do, and they are not wrong. But something I hope to have shown by applying the paradigm based method to forgiveness is that, like self-care, all three of these values can only be served in virtue of the fact that the underlying purpose in all formations of forgiveness is the liberation of the blamer from redundant blame-feeling. \textit{That} is what it is to achieve the relevant kind of ‘overcoming resentment’ (it is the overcoming of redundant blame-feeling—not the expulsion of bad feeling \textit{per se}, for it may still have a transformative moral role to play); \textit{that} is essentially what it is for relationships to be restored (they become restored when residual blame-feeling is successfully expunged from the ways of relating); and \textit{that} is what it is for a moral injury to be consigned to the past (the pointless blame-feelings are left behind because they are, or have become, morally redundant).

Thus the various good things that forgiveness may do for us are all to be explained in terms of the more basic point and purpose of both Moral Justice Forgiveness and, I have argued, the socially and temporally displaced formations of it that structure Moral Gifted Forgiveness. The resulting picture is, I hope, an explanatorily satisfying \textit{ordered pluralism}: two kinds of forgiveness—one cast as humanly necessary and explanatorily basic, the other cast as a cultural creation and contingent variation on the basic theme—each of which is respected as radically different from the other at the level of interpersonal psychology, and yet both of which are revealed as fundamentally playing the same moral role in regulating how we respond to wrongdoing: liberating us from redundant and potentially corrosive blame-feeling.

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