

hannah arendt and self-forgiveness: in search of a magic spell

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While the subject of forgiveness, especially in the wake of the work of Hannah Arendt and Jacques Derrida, has received a great deal of philosophical attention, self-forgiveness remains *relatively* neglected, although the literature has begun to grow in recent years. This neglect may be in part due to Arendt's famous argument in *The Human Condition* that self-forgiveness is not possible.¹ My paper proposes to revisit Arendt's arguments to investigate their import and explore how dismissals of self-forgiveness, including those that take Arendt's arguments seriously, could have been too hasty.

Self-forgiveness raises special puzzles of self-relation. Arendt argues that forgiving, like promising, depends on plurality, others being with us and acting: "For no-one can forgive himself ... forgiving and promising enacted in solitude or isolation remain without reality and can signify no more than a role played before oneself."² She believes that we need to be forgiven by others in order to escape the consequences of our deeds. Rather dramatically, she suggests that we are like "the sorcerer's apprentice" without the incantation to break a magic spell, most likely a reference to the 1797 Goethe poem of that name.³ While the master is away, the apprentice casts a spell that makes a broom carry water and nothing he does, including splitting the broom in two, can stop it from filling the house with water. Only the master, on his return, can tell the magic word that will send the broom back into the cupboard. In order to be forgiven, we must await the magic

word from another.

To be more specific, Arendt believes that we cannot forgive ourselves as we cannot be both the subject and object of experience. Furthermore, she argues that the most profound reason that we cannot forgive ourselves is that “we are dependent on others, to whom we appear in a distinctness that we ourselves are unable to perceive. Closed within ourselves, we would never be able to forgive ourselves any failing or transgression because we would lack the experience of the person for the sake of whom one can forgive.”⁴ On this view, we are dependent on others to forgive us, as we do not appear to ourselves as we appear to others.

While Arendt’s discussion is often taken to concern personal forgiveness in general, a great deal of light can be shed on her views by reminding ourselves that the forgiveness she is describing is political, not personal. In her account of forgiveness, Arendt is writing about the public sphere, where relations with others are paramount, and they “determine the extent and modes in which one may be able to forgive himself.”⁵

There are a number of ways that focusing on the political perspective alters our understanding of Arendt’s claims. First, it could be argued that while we cannot forgive ourselves, we can come to some sort of accommodation with ourselves. She refers to a similar idea in her discussion of the two-in-one dialogue in which we need to live with ourselves, where she is focusing on personal morality, as I will discuss below. The other openings left by Arendt are in her hints that forgiveness of self is determined and dependent on the forgiveness of others in its extent and modes. I argue that it may be possible for perpetrators to develop their own moral response to their acts, in some respects, which may include self-forgiveness or at least an attempt to come to terms with their past actions, so I examine the nature of the self in self-forgiveness, its relation to the forgiveness of others, and the phenomenology and psychology of self-forgiveness. Furthermore, I explore the implications of the possibility of self-forgiveness for the ethics of self-forgiveness in terms of the kind and extremity of wrongs we can forgive ourselves, and our reasons for doing so.

1. POLITICAL AND PERSONAL FORGIVENESS

Arendt’s examples of forgiveness are of legal and political notions of sparing the vanquished or commuting a sentence, actions that clearly cannot be applied

to the self. The possibility of self-pardon has been considered by several US Presidents, such as Richard Nixon, George Bush (Senior) and Bill Clinton, but none have done it so far, and the idea is understandably controversial.⁶ Rather a judge or state leader makes these kinds of decisions as a parallel to personal forgiveness. Thus her argument looks more like the claim that self-forgiveness is dependent on political or state forgiveness. It is notable in these examples that it is not the victim who forgives and so suggests that the nature of the forgiveness is different from interpersonal forgiveness. This characterisation of forgiveness in the political context is the first clue to how personal self-forgiveness might be possible, even on Arendt's account. While a person cannot decide their own sentence for a crime, they might be able to consider whether their action was forgivable.

Thus, we need to clarify the difference between forgiving the self and pardoning the self, for pardoning is closer in meaning to political forgiveness. First, how can we distinguish between forgiving and pardoning in general? For Paul M. Hughes, pardoning involves releasing the wrongdoer from the consequences of their actions and so is incompatible with punishment and compatible with condoning the wrong, whereas forgiveness is compatible with punishment and not with condoning.⁷ However, this way of distinguishing the two is not quite correct as pardoning may occur after some form of punishment, and be made for other reasons, such as the perpetrator has served enough time, the punishment seemed inappropriate, they are found to be innocent, legal anomalies and so on. An example of formal pardon in Australia when the accused or convicted is found innocent is the case of Lindy Chamberlain.⁸ Pardoning, in English (unlike in French), is generally associated with "an official acting on behalf of the society or the state,"⁹ although in everyday speech we might use "pardoning" to refer to interpersonal relations. The other aspect of Hughes' claim is right, in that pardoning could be compatible with condoning, since it might be judged that the person had not really done anything wrong and forgiving could never (correctly) mean that. When we forgive we do so in the knowledge of the original transgression. In any case, this way of looking at the question does not help us to interpret Arendt's ideas, since her concern is with political forgiveness, a kind of pardon that is compatible with punishment, as I said.¹⁰ She stresses that even pardon is for the person, saying "no pardon pardons murder or theft but only the murderer or the thief."¹¹

So let's look at self-forgiving and self-pardoning. Given that Arendt's view of forgiveness in the political realm is a kind of mercy or pardoning, self-forgiveness

here would consist in pardoning oneself for a crime one has committed against others. It is easy to see why she does not believe this is possible, as it is not part of any past or existing system of law or politics and is unlikely to ever be. Judgements about crimes in this sense are made by others.¹² Another possibility, although Arendt does not consider this idea, is that a political leader might forgive themselves, and do so in a public way. To understand how that could happen, we need to shift the ground from the political and public to the private and personal and ask if self-forgiveness is possible then. One of the hurdles Arendt puts up against self-forgiveness is that we do not have the right kind of relation to ourselves. We can concede that we cannot pardon ourselves of crimes as if we were a judge or state power, but is it true that we do not experience ourselves or appear to ourselves in the right way to forgive ourselves? Or in other words, what kind of a self must we be to forgive ourselves?

Let's think of a recent, fictional example in order to understand the structure of self-forgiveness in general—from *The Wire*.¹³ Roland “Prez” Prysbylewski (played by Jim True-Frost) is a police officer who retires and becomes a public schoolteacher after the fatal accidental shooting of a plainclothes colleague who is African-American. (The character and events are based on the real-life experiences of Ed Burns, producer and writer for *The Wire*.) Immediately after the shooting he is desperate and has to be kept in a cell on suicide watch. We see him much later, calm, and dedicating himself to his work as a teacher. He takes special interest in a poor boy, Duquan “Dukie” Weems, even washing his clothes so he will have clean clothes for school. Although his efforts to protect this particular child are ultimately unsuccessful after the boy is put in a group home, we can think of Prez as a person who has truly acknowledged his wrong, has tried to make amends, and as someone who may be able to forgive himself. I raise this example so that we have a sense of a person who has forgiven themselves and how they might go about it before we consider some of the questions concerning self-forgiveness.

2. WHAT KIND OF SELF IS PRESUPPOSED FOR SELF-FORGIVENESS?

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt argues that we cannot appear to ourselves as we appear to others, and it seems that we cannot appear *in the same way*, in that others see us as we appear in the public, political space. But could we appear to ourselves enough to forgive ourselves? We could reflect on our own actions and understand the depth of the harm we have done to others and possibly ourselves.

Are we really a what rather than a who for ourselves?¹⁴ Could we recognise our own individuality? Do we see it reflected back by the view of others? I have thought that at the very least Arendt's position would allow for some kind of accommodation with the self, yet it seems that there is a distinction between reconciling with the self and forgiving oneself. However, it is not obvious that reconciliation or accommodation with the self is any easier to make sense of than forgiveness of the self, at least in so far as they raise similar issues of self-relationship. So I will see if there are threads in Arendt's work that enable us to reconsider this question.

In a later lecture, "Thinking and moral considerations," Arendt discusses the idea that we can have a two-in-one dialogue where we need to learn to live with ourselves in a harmonious state, saying "in a sense I also am for myself though I hardly appear to me."¹⁵ We should bear in mind that in this discussion Arendt is focusing on thinking rather than acting. In this focus she comes closer to the question of personal forgiveness; at the same time she moves away from the consequences of actions, an issue I will return to when considering what kinds of wrongs we can forgive ourselves. For her, this inner dialogue is what we call consciousness, and she takes the point further, suggesting that "I am not only for others but for myself, and in this latter case, I clearly am not just one. A difference is inserted into my Oneness."¹⁶ Although Arendt believes we primarily appear to others, for ourselves we are two-in-one in "Being-conscious-of-myself." This two in one can have an inner dialogue and be both in harmony and out of harmony with itself, a concept that she associates with Socrates' dictum that we need to be in harmony with ourselves.¹⁷ Thus there seems to be some room in her overall thinking for some kind of self-relationship.

We have to be able to refer to ourselves in self-forgiveness, and create a certain unity of past, present, and future in the self.¹⁸ I would argue that we can distinguish these aspects without being committed to a self of distinct components. In contrast, Kathryn Norlock, considering forgiveness from a feminist perspective, suggests that forgiveness is a commitment to "the set of relationships between one's past, current, and future selves."¹⁹ Yet this idea seems to differentiate between parts of the self and suggest that a concept of a split self is required.²⁰ She contends that we need to conceptualise a fragmented self to make sense of self-forgiveness. For her, the ordinary self is fragmented, yet the traumatised self, often the self in need of forgiveness, is even more so. What Norlock means is that we are structurally and socially fragmented in our identities as well as unstable.²¹ However, there are different kinds and degrees of fragmentation, and it is not

incompatible with projects of unity and integrity. Susan Brison, a philosopher who survived a serious assault, sees the traumatised person who has been abused or suffers from eating disorders, for instance, as having conflicting self-concepts, some of which can be seen as separate. Self-deception also plays an important role in distancing connections within the self.

Norlock argues against Arendt's idea that we only appear to others thus: "In accounts of those who have been both victims and perpetrators of evils, sometimes the gray agent has the most information about the wrongs done and their magnitude."²² The "gray" agent is the person who has been forced or pressured to harm others. For example, only Primo Levi knew the choices he made in the concentration camp until he chose to share them. The basis of her argument is that others' knowledge of us, especially our ethical lives, is incomplete. This approach may miss part of Arendt's argument, in that Arendt is not so much discussing the *amount* of knowledge others have of us compared to our own, but discussing the different stance and relation others have to us. Yet I believe that Norlock's point is relevant to the examples of personal rather than political forgiveness. From her starting perspective, we are all split in multiple ways, both synchronically and diachronically and what we need to do in self-forgiveness is create a narrative unity, but not necessarily a narrative unity that removes or covers over all sense of fragmentation. Her view ties in with Arendt's, suggesting that in some ways we take an external perspective on ourselves in order to forgive, and also implying that forgiveness of self is related to the forgiveness of others in that we take that perspective. Thinking of self-forgiveness like this to some extent vindicates Arendt's claim that "the extent and modes of self-forgiveness is dependent on the forgiveness of others."²³ This claim itself requires further explanation, to understand the similarities and differences between the two kinds of forgiveness, so I will consider that question next.

3. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-FORGIVENESS AND FORGIVENESS OF OTHERS?

Arendt's assertion is that the only way that we can understand self-forgiveness is through forgiveness of others, so let's first see the connections. For the purposes of this discussion I am only considering self-forgiveness for wrongs that affect others. I will turn to the question of harms to ourselves further on.

The two kinds of forgiveness have to be connected in their overall conception of forgiveness, and be distinct from other ideas such as condoning or legal pardon.²⁴ A psychologist writing on the issue, Robert Enright, appears to address Arendt's argument against self-forgiveness although he does not refer to her work. Self-forgiveness might be dismissed on the grounds that we cannot be both our own defendant and judge. However, he says, "This argument confuses legal pardon and forgiveness. In the latter, we are not reducing a deserved punishment, as in legal pardon, but instead are welcoming ourselves back into the human community."²⁵ This is an important point, in distinguishing personal self-forgiveness from legal or political punishment, just as interpersonal forgiveness can be distinguished from legal pardon, as I have argued. Nevertheless, we could consider whether we can continue to punish ourselves in an attenuated sense and to forgive ourselves, as is possible in the case of forgiveness of others. This problem can be addressed by taking it that, as in interpersonal forgiveness, we can forgive, but will still have some hard feelings, and we might think that we cannot trust ourselves in certain areas of our lives.

Another connection between forgiveness of others and self-forgiveness is that they both can be ethically generous to others. We forgive others partly so that they can transform their lives, and sometimes we forgive ourselves so that we can contribute to the lives of others.²⁶ In other words, as we respect ourselves more, we are more likely to extend that respect to others. Instead of being wrapped up in our own self-flagellation, we are able to open to others on a grounding of respect. Also, unforgiving of ourselves, we may be unforgiving of others. Oedipus' curse on his sons Polynices and Eteocles, that they will kill each other, suggest that he cannot forgive himself, although he protests his banishment.²⁷ Joseph Conrad's Lord Jim is an excellent example of the dangers involved in not forgiving oneself. As Robin Dillon notes in her account of self-forgiveness and self-respect, Jim cannot forgive himself for being the sort of person he thinks he is, that is, a coward.²⁸ When the *Patna*, the ship on which Jim is chief mate, appears to be about to sink, he jumps into a lifeboat with other crew members, leaving the 800 passengers to their fate. Luckily, the ship does not sink and all the passengers survive, but Jim is tried and stripped of his seamen's license. His mistake in the past colours all his relationships, his judgement of himself, and his capacity to act, ultimately leading him to give up the love of his life, Jewel, and his own life in refusing to defend himself. He seems to have accepted his father's claim that "who once gives way to temptation, in the very instant hazards his total depravity and everlasting ruin."²⁹ We could ask whether the former captain of the sunken Costa

Concordia, Francesco Schettino, is going through similar tortures, but his recent (August 2014) lecture to a Roman university on emergency procedures would suggest otherwise.³⁰ This argument that we need to forgive ourselves in order to protect those we love provides self-forgiveness with a crucial ethical implication for others that overcomes Arendt's sense of our being shut up within ourselves. We need to forgive ourselves precisely in order not to be shut away from others, to open ourselves to them.

Of course, there are important differences between self and other forgiveness as well, but these are surprisingly difficult to pin down. One idea, suggested by Enright, is that “[u]nlike interpersonal forgiveness, which is philosophically distinct from reconciliation, self-forgiveness and reconciliation with self are always linked.”³¹ There is a point to this claim in that the processes of self-forgiveness and reconciliation will be connected in that we cannot escape the self in the same way we can avoid the other; nevertheless they are still philosophically distinct processes.³² The process of self-forgiveness, according to Lin Bauer et.al., involves a growing sense of ease with oneself that includes taking responsibility for one's mistakes and feeling at home in the world. They conclude that self-forgiveness ultimately means becoming part of the human community again.³³ In this account, reconciliation is the outcome of forgiveness, and suggests that if we are able to reconcile ourselves without forgiving ourselves, a sense of unease should remain, although that may not be so.

We can see that in the case of Judah Rosenthal in Woody Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanours*,³⁴ who becomes reconciled with himself but does not forgive himself. Rosenthal hires a killer to murder his girlfriend after she threatens to expose their affair. It seems to me that he does not forgive himself because he fails to properly acknowledge his wrong. Rosenthal appears to acknowledge the crime when he is first troubled by what he has done, but ultimately rather than doing so he moves on and forgets it, partly because no-one else finds out about it and he is able to go on living very similarly to how he lived before the murder. He enjoys his relationship with his partner, family, friends, and patients; in short, all of his life. Thus the claim of a tight connection between self-reconciliation and self-forgiveness, in contrast to interpersonal forgiveness, is not borne out.

It is sometimes true that not forgiving the self is even more painful than not forgiving others. Enright sees lacking forgiveness as necessarily negative and painful, but we may not experience this suffering, particularly if we forget what others have

done to us. However, in our own case, we may continue to find it painful because we continue to punish ourselves in some way and hold hard feelings towards ourselves.³⁵ This point implies that there is more of a psychological imperative to forgive oneself than to forgive others.

Another possibility is that there is a proper order between self-forgiveness and forgiveness, with one or the other coming first and enabling the second. Philosopher and psychoanalyst Jon K. Mills suggests that self-forgiveness come first, and enables forgiveness of the other. His argument is that “If we do not initiate the process of self-forgiveness prior to interpersonal forgiveness, then we are placing responsibility on the other and refusing to accept radical responsibility for our ontological obligation.”³⁶ His point here can be challenged, as although we should not avoid responsibility, when we have wronged another we have in some way made ourselves dependent on them. That cannot reasonably be denied. What can be taken from Mills’ argument, nonetheless, is that we do need to *begin* the process of self-forgiveness for that is a full acknowledgement of the wrong and this acknowledgement is also necessary for the forgiveness of the other.³⁷

Could it be the case then that others have to forgive first from an ethical perspective, before self-forgiveness is possible? While this view may have some *prima facie* appeal, it encounters problems in being too dependent on victims’ good will, which appears unjust. For example, Margaret R. Holmgren argues that the victim does not have to forgive the offender before they forgive themselves, although the offender must acknowledge their crime, take responsibility, and apologise or otherwise make amends to the victim.³⁸ (This view takes into account that victims may unreasonably withhold their forgiveness, as I will discuss later on.) These conciliatory gestures towards victims facilitate self-forgiveness.³⁹ It makes sense that the steps taken of acknowledgement and conciliation also concern our own possibility of self-forgiveness. So what we can take from this discussion is that while steps should be taken to enable the forgiveness of others, it is not *necessarily* prior to self-forgiveness.⁴⁰

However, there are other experiential, phenomenological concerns that mean the forgiveness of others comes first, or a link to others is essential. Without a connection with others, or some level of care, we stay locked in a cycle of self-recrimination. As Dillon observes, self-forgiveness is connected to that of others, which “can be useful, even necessary.”⁴¹ This point is one that links with Arendt’s declaration that only others can forgive.⁴² The weaker version here is that we need

the help of others to forgive the self.⁴³ If we go back to the example of Prez, the trust of the children, the feeling of doing good for others, of making something valuable in his life through others, is what made him able to forgive himself. These ideas show there is truth in Arendt's claim that the extent to which we can forgive ourselves is dependent on others. The problem she points to suggests that we cannot forgive ourselves if we are entirely alone and shut up within ourselves, so others have to play some role in our self-forgiveness, even if it is a memory of others' love in the past or an imagining of their forgiveness. In *Three Colours: Blue* it is the small pleasures of life, and feeling compassion for her neighbour that start to bring Julie back to life and perhaps to self-forgiveness, if she has somehow reproached herself after the death of her husband and daughter.⁴⁴ Our relation to others can bring us to self-forgiveness. Arne Johan Vetlesen further notes that self-forgiveness can also serve as an example to others. Citing Hitler's secretary Traudl Junge's statement of self-forgiveness in a documentary about her life, Vetlesen suggests that because she has gone through a "critical self-examination" and accepted blame and not excuses for her blindness about Hitler and his actions, her process of self-forgiveness could be worthy of emulation, and is at least the beginning of a process of forgiveness by others.⁴⁵ We need the concern and trust of others to help us with the spell we need to go through that process, and our self-forgiveness can be of relevance to others in similar situations. So how do we forgive ourselves? What is the phenomenology of self-forgiveness?

4. HOW DO WE FORGIVE OURSELVES?

The phenomenology and psychology of forgiveness, in contrast to the ethics of forgiveness, is important here to explain the work of self-forgiveness. Derrida contends that we shift or oscillate between self-forgiveness and non-self-forgiveness, writing "There is in me someone who is always ready to forgive and another who is absolutely merciless, and we are constantly fighting. Sometimes I can sleep, sometimes I cannot."⁴⁶ For Derrida, it is the conflict within the self that prevents forgiveness, rather than the lack of being able to see ourselves, as Arendt maintains. Yet we appear to be able to make sense of not forgiving ourselves and if that's so, then surely we must be able to make sense of forgiving ourselves?⁴⁷

One of the first difficulties with comprehending exactly how we can forgive ourselves is recognising what kind of responses we can have to our own actions. For one, is it intelligible that we resent ourselves or be angry with ourselves or any of the other negative emotions associated with forgiveness that need

to be overcome? Hughes claims that “notwithstanding the fact that people may be angry with themselves, experience self-directed loathing, and struggle to overcome such negative emotional attitudes, it is not clear that the idea of *resenting* oneself is coherent and, thus, whether forgiveness as overcoming self-referential resentment is possible.”⁴⁸ If correct, this impossibility would render self-forgiveness distinctly different from forgiveness of others on that ground alone. His argument is that the view that one and the same person can be both subject and object and victim and wrongdoer “is incompatible with the idea that resentment is necessarily directed against other people.”⁴⁹

The problem with Hughes’ argument is that it begs the question against those who argue that we can resent on behalf of others and resent ourselves. I believe we can resent ourselves, feeling that we have failed our own standards and the standards of others and have behaved in a way that could be considered unjust to both ourselves and others.⁵⁰ We then look on ourselves as if we were looking at another. Norlock adds the point that we often closely identify and empathise with others such that it makes sense to call our feelings resentment, and this can be the case where we have harmed someone else, and so we can resent ourselves.⁵¹ It seems to me that we can and do resent ourselves, and so self-forgiveness will be in part a process of overcoming or transforming that resentment.

Hughes notes that self-forgiveness needs to be distinguished from self-condoning.⁵² This distinction is separate from the distinction I made earlier between personal forgiveness and self-forgiveness, and legal pardon. A number of authors refer to pseudo self-forgiveness, premature, or non-genuine self-forgiveness to set that apart from true self-forgiveness.⁵³ What they have in mind is forgetting or overlooking the transgression altogether or forgiving oneself without taking responsibility for what one has done, or trying to make amends.⁵⁴ However, proper or genuine self-forgiveness entails an acknowledgement of the wrong one has done and acceptance of responsibility for it. If that’s so, it indicates that self-forgiveness requires a recognition of the wrong done in order to qualify as self-forgiveness from an ethical point of view. Otherwise it would be more like self-condoning, as in the example of Judah Rosenthal in *Crimes and Misdemeanours*.

From the experiential perspective, self-deception and rationalisation can enable the achievement of pseudo self-forgiveness.⁵⁵ At the very least, we would like to believe that Judah Rosenthal does not have the sense of wholeness and harmony that someone remorseful and atoning could have. These considerations clear

the ground, as it were, for thinking about the affective and intellectual changes we might need to go through to forgive ourselves.⁵⁶ In her account of political forgiveness, Arendt stresses only the action aspect, the forgoing of revenge, but these other elements are necessary for interpersonal and intrapersonal forgiveness.⁵⁷

Giving up resentment, as I have already stated, but not all hard feelings, is necessary for us to forgive ourselves. We could also forgive ourselves but still remain angry with ourselves, although without those feelings dominating more positive ones, as Dillon notes.⁵⁸ Furthermore, self-forgiveness may involve overcoming feelings other than forgiving others, such as “embarrassment, disappointment, shame, or guilt.”⁵⁹ We might also feel contempt or even disgust for ourselves. To some extent we can overcome remorse and regret and other ethical responses to our actions, although not entirely.⁶⁰ We have to accept that there will be a certain level of remorse and self-blame that does not go away after we have forgiven ourselves, but which may be brought under control, thereby making it possible to live with ourselves.

So far I have been discussing self-forgiveness without looking at a significant question concerning what types of offenses we are able to forgive ourselves. I turn to that question now.

5. WHAT KINDS OF WRONGS CAN WE FORGIVE OURSELVES?

The question of the type of harms we can forgive ourselves, is distinct from the question of what extremity of wrongs can be forgiven, which I will consider in the following section. There are three possibilities: wrongs done to ourselves, wrongs done to others, and wrongs done to ourselves through our wrongs to others, and there is controversy over which of these make sense as objects of self-forgiveness. It may seem inappropriate to forgive ourselves for wrongs done to others—if only the victim of harms can forgive, we would be unethically substituting ourselves for the victim. As Derrida states, only the victim can forgive, “The survivor is not ready to substitute herself, abusively, for the dead.”⁶¹ In other words, we do not have the ethical standing to forgive ourselves for what we have done to others. This stricture would apply to both self-forgiveness and third-party forgiveness by bystanders or others.

However, first and most obviously and literally, if the victim is dead or otherwise not possible to contact, how could self-forgiveness even be possible?⁶² Griswold⁶³ and Hagberg⁶⁴ claim that in general if the victim is present, then the other has to forgive us before we forgive ourselves. This point appears problematic, nonetheless; for instance, what if the victim is a heartless and cruel non-forgiver—should we be chained for the rest of our lives to their whims?⁶⁵ That possibility has to be taken into account, and then the person has to consider what they have done from an impartial perspective and reflect on the concerns of the victim.

Second, there may be deeper reasons for turning to self-forgiveness. To demonstrate this point, Goldie argues that there are cases where self-forgiveness for wrongs to others is necessary because there are moral reasons preventing the victim forgiving us, for example, if we have disloyal thoughts or have done something disloyal behind a person's back.⁶⁶ Should we go and announce what we have done in order to gain their forgiveness? Norlock makes the even more profound point that as part of the process of becoming a more ethical person, we may need to begin to forgive ourselves even when the victim cannot.⁶⁷ She believes it may be imperfect, but that's what we have. We should not leave ourselves outside the pale, ashamed, perhaps humiliated, and too desperate to improve. There is a certain level of disbelief in the possibility of forgiving ourselves for what we have done to others.⁶⁸ As Norlock points out, self-forgiveness has a similar structure to what she calls third-party forgiveness, or forgiveness on behalf of the victim. Nevertheless, there are a range of situations where self-forgiveness even for what we have done to others is ethically demanded.

There are a variety of ways in which we can harm or injure ourselves and may need to at least consider forgiving ourselves.⁶⁹ Norlock, for example, defines as moral harms that may require self-forgiveness those practices that “demean us, damage our capacities, or limit the opportunities of our future selves.”⁷⁰ For self-forgiveness to be in play, there has to be a weighing of the sense in which people bear some responsibility even when they are suffering from an illness or being oppressed by others. Take the example of an eating disorder, Norlock suggests, where although we might not be culpable for having the disorder, we could be culpable for hiding it from our loved ones.

Dillon adds that we can be hurt by our own feelings, thoughts, and desires, such as racist thoughts and fears or being excited by violence, and these can damage our self-respect.⁷¹ For instance, Karl Ove Knausgaard in *A Man in Love* cannot forgive

himself for knocking on a woman's door in the middle of the night, even though she did not let him in and he agrees it was nothing.⁷² I would like to take this issue further and consider the way we can wrong ourselves in wronging others, say by undermining our own character.⁷³ When we harm or injure others we harm ourselves in a range of ways, by letting ourselves down, or by making ourselves a lesser person. This feature links to Lisa Tessman's worry about burdened virtues under circumstances of oppression, an aspect of self-forgiveness that Dillon does not consider.⁷⁴ Oppression could structure our lives in ways that make it more likely that we do things for which we struggle to forgive ourselves. Oppression could also be even worse in the sense that by limiting our options, we may have to continue to do such things without hope of transforming ourselves. For instance, we could corrupt our own character by being so angry about class injustice, by telling lies to oppressors, or by manipulating others, but cannot see or have any other way to live. Some of the examples Norlock gives—such as women suffering abuse—are relevant here. She notes that victims of abuse feel or are implicated in the situation of abuse, and may make some choices and have some sense of responsibility for those choices, such as how they deal with children in that situation.⁷⁵ These are complicated cases, since as Enright argues, victims of abuse have nothing for which to forgive themselves.⁷⁶

Yet victims in these cases often feel implicated in the abuse and feel the need for self-forgiveness so the idea of responsibility is tied to the bad moral luck of being a victim.⁷⁷ Dillon observes that we often find it difficult to forgive ourselves in these cases, and we risk being overly rationalistic if we do not take these feelings seriously.⁷⁸ In other words, we should not draw too sharp a line between acts that call for self-forgiveness and acts that are not “objectively” wrong; rather we should consider the experience of the person who feels guilt, regret, and remorse as the most crucial factor. The person who cannot forgive themselves feels angry, bitter, cynical, and “beats themselves up” a common expression used to indicate the notion of punishment of the self. Another way to describe the phenomenon is self-destructive behaviour, which can be manifested in thoughts and feelings or even in physical self-abuse. Their own lack of self-forgiveness is something that itself calls for self-forgiveness. Thus we should not forget that situations of oppression may make self-forgiveness difficult and even impossible if the person cannot see a way to change. In general, I argue that we can forgive ourselves for wrongs done to others in some circumstances without the victim forgiving us, for wrongs done to ourselves, and for wrongs done to ourselves through what we do to others. There is still the different question, however, as to whether we can

forgive ourselves in extreme cases.

6. SHOULD WE FORGIVE OURSELVES? FOR WHAT EXTREMITY OF WRONGS?

Arendt may be correct that we cannot see ourselves as others see us. Nevertheless, as I have argued so far, we may be able to see ourselves sufficiently to find the basis for self-forgiveness. The answer to the question of the ethics of self-forgiveness—whether we should forgive ourselves—is going to depend to some extent on the extremity of the wrong and thus there may be wrongs to self and others, and to the self through wrongs to others, that cannot be forgiven. In the context of action, Arendt sees forgiveness as being “released from the consequences of what we have done.”⁷⁹ However, there are some crimes and “willed evil” that are unforgivable on her account.⁸⁰ In the context of self-forgiveness, we cannot release ourselves from all the consequences of our actions. We may rely on others to do that in the case of crimes, but even when there has not been a crime as such, our actions could be unforgivable.

Forgiveness of the self can include forgiveness for trivial faults, or “trespassing,” or acting unknowingly, as Arendt calls it.⁸¹ One example here is Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, who could probably fairly easily forgive herself for her prejudices against Darcy.⁸² I have argued, following Immanuel Kant, that forgiveness is an imperfect duty, or duty of sympathy.⁸³ In other words, forgiveness is not generally strictly obligatory. However, as in the case of forgiveness of others, if the wrong is very slight, and we have made it up to ourselves, forgiveness could become a kind of obligation. For example, if we were to do something very trivial, like complain about the coffee somewhere or forget to go to someone’s birthday party, incidents that are probably quickly forgotten by others, then we should forgive ourselves for them.⁸⁴ Furthermore, we should aim to be generally forgiving of ourselves as of others, since non-forgivingness of faults, particularly trivial ones, is suggestive of a character flaw or at least of some psychological problem, in being too harsh on ourselves or too proud. So forgiveness for these lesser faults should be something we aim for, along with what Dillon calls preservative self-forgiveness, a future-oriented self-forgivingness and acceptance of ourselves as worthwhile human beings who sometimes make mistakes.

Forgiveness for extreme crimes raise special puzzles, especially when we consider it is often difficult and/ or unethical for victims to forgive extreme wrongdoing

like rape, murder, torture, or genocide. Raskolnikov's self-forgiveness after being imprisoned for murder in *Crime and Punishment*, if that's what it is, happens mysteriously through a religious conversion that begins a rebirth, a "gradual regeneration, of his gradual passing from one world to another, of his acquaintance with a new and hitherto unknown reality."⁸⁵ In extreme cases, one could consider that it is possible to live with oneself, or reconcile, without forgiving oneself, as I suggested earlier.⁸⁶ Life could become just tolerable without a person entirely giving up on resentment or anger against oneself.⁸⁷ Forgiveness is not always possible even though it could be possible in principle, if the offender were able to take responsibility and atone for what they have done. Self-forgiveness may depend on whether the victim is able to forgive and if they are present to consider forgiving.⁸⁸ Many views that consider self-forgiveness always appropriate are focused on acts, where we might look back on them and believe we have changed in fundamental ways since committing them. However, if we consider the problem of a serious fault—such as realising that one has a racist character that we are unable to transform—then it may be appropriate to remain angry with oneself. Also, some acts may be so extreme that they are judged unforgivable, either by others or ourselves. If we are to understand self-forgiveness in any of these cases, we need to examine what reasons we might have for forgiving ourselves or not doing so.

7. WHY SHOULD WE FORGIVE OURSELVES?

In the literature, there are two main approaches to the grounds for forgiveness, one that focuses on respect, and the other that stresses love in certain forms. In the case of self-forgiveness, is self-respect sufficient to ground self-forgiveness or do we need self-love in the form of compassion and empathy for ourselves? Dillon argues that we can forgive ourselves, although we should not always do so, and sometimes we are appropriately left with self-reproaches.⁸⁹ She centres on "transformative" self-forgiveness, concerned with our past acts, (as opposed to preservative self-forgiveness) and how it can be compatible with evaluative self-respect (in contrast to recognition and basal self-respect) if we go through the appropriate processes.⁹⁰ Although we might still feel self-reproach, it does not have such a powerful hold on us.⁹¹ Herman Melville leaves it unclear whether Captain Vere forgives himself for ensuring the hanging of Billy Budd for accidentally killing the man who brings false charges against him, but since he dies with Billy's name on his lips, we can be sure that he was disturbed.⁹² We cannot necessarily overcome every aspect of what we have done wrong through self-forgiveness. Our

self-respect tells us that we have worth in spite of the wrong we have done as human beings, and many ethical theories will tell us that we all have worth. But does our worth mean that we should be forgiven?

Dillon believes self-respect is enough for self-forgiveness, but do not we need self-love in the form of empathy and compassion as well?⁹³ While I accept self-respect is necessary, I am inclined to believe that love in some form will foster forgiveness and is also necessary to a healthy sense of self. Arendt notes that love is sufficient for forgiveness in the private sphere.⁹⁴ However, we may need both respect and love for forgiveness of self or other. Then we can forgive ourselves, in some way modelled on what Norlock calls third-party forgiveness, by feeling empathy for ourselves, or an aspect of ourselves.⁹⁵ What we need to do is have empathy for our own past and present selves, and be able to see ourselves as “both agents and victims.”⁹⁶ She argues that self-forgiveness is part of a project of regaining moral integrity, taking responsibility, living up to our moral ideals, and developing hope and trust.⁹⁷ We could also distinguish between empathy and compassion here. Do we feel compassion towards the self?⁹⁸ The character of Briony in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement* can be seen as someone who has had to exercise a compassionate and imaginative response to her own wrongdoing, especially since the people she has wronged are not alive to do this for her.⁹⁹ We have to have some kind of feeling or attitude that looks on our own actions with imaginative understanding and sees that we are not fully defined by them and may be worthy of forgiveness. Then we can enter into the action of self-forgiveness, which will enable us to lead a better kind of life.

Finally, another question: is it hard to forgive ourselves or too easy? Dillon, for example, argues that forgiving ourselves is more difficult than forgiving others.¹⁰⁰ This idea is in contrast to Griswold’s view that people sometimes forgive themselves with “lightning speed.”¹⁰¹ Here what we see is that the more ethically concerned a person is, the less likely they are to forgive themselves, whereas the less ethically concerned they are, the more likely they are to forgive themselves, thus leading to extremes in both types of cases. It is not clear that we can make either generalisation, just that we will tend to see these extremes as they are self-reinforcing. So we need to take particular care to note which way we might be tending.

CONCLUSION

From my discussion of the phenomenon of self-forgiveness, it appears to be possible, at least in the personal rather than political sense. Furthermore, such forgiveness of the self could be compatible with Arendt's view of forgiveness, as outlined in *The Human Condition*, if we separate political forgiveness from personal forgiveness, and focus on personal forgiveness of the self. What Arendt rules out is self-forgiveness as self-pardon for crimes, a rare and controversial phenomenon sometimes considered by heads of state since only they appear to have such a power. Nevertheless, what we can take from Arendt's idea of self-forgiveness being dependent on the forgiveness of others is the reality that others generally play a role in self-forgiveness: we cannot forgive ourselves really 'shut up within ourselves.' We usually need the support and comfort of others to be able to forgive ourselves. It is very difficult, sometimes more difficult than forgiving others, and there may be times when we should not forgive ourselves. Yet self-forgiveness, just as Arendt says of forgiveness of the other, can allow the possibility of starting something new. It is a kind of magic spell that shares the miraculous quality of forgiveness and promising others.¹⁰²

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NOTES

1. Philosophers who explicitly claim that Arendt takes this view include Charles Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 122; Kathryn Norlock, *Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 144; and Peter Goldie, “self-forgiveness and the Narrative Sense of Self,” in *The Ethics of Forgiveness: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Christel Fricke. (London: Routledge, 2011), 93.
2. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 237. See my article for a discussion of the relation between forgiveness and promises in Arendt: “Promising and Forgiveness,” *Hannah Arendt: Key Concepts*, ed. Patrick Hayden (Durham: Acumen, 2014), 209-21.
3. Joann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe: The Lyrist*, trans. Edwin H Zeydel (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977).
4. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 243.
5. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 238.
6. See Brian C. Kalt, “Pardon Me: The Constitutional Case against Presidential Self-Pardons,” *Yale Law Journal* 106, 3 (1996-7): 779-809, for a discussion of the legal issues involved.
7. Paul M. Hughes, “On Forgiving Oneself: A Reply to Snow,” *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 28,4 (1994): 559.
8. See Linda Ross Meyer, “The Merciful State” for a detailed discussion of different reasons for legal pardons, in Austin Sarat and Nasser Hussain, eds., *Forgiveness, Mercy, and Clemency* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 63-116.
9. Meir Dan-Cohen, “Revising the Past: On the Metaphysics of Repentance, Forgiveness, and Pardon,” in Sarat and Hussain, *Forgiveness, Mercy, and Clemency*, 117.
10. Arendt does see political forgiveness as having a personal aspect, in addressing and concerning the individual, or the “who” in question. (*The Human Condition*, 241)
11. Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1983), 248.
12. Goldie argues that while self-forgiveness is possible, self-pardon is not. (“self-forgiveness and the Narrative Sense of Self,” 69). Nevertheless, he means something different again by pardon—that it is taking the person as not fully responsible for an action—something that we cannot (reasonably) do in our own case, although we can for others. (92)
13. *The Wire*, created and produced by David Simon (2002-2008; HBO Television).
14. See Arendt on the individuality of the person, which we see reflected in everything we do, in *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken, 2003), 13.
15. Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 183. This lecture was first published in *Social Research* 38,3 (1971): 417-47.
16. Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 184.
17. Arendt sees the “who” as expressed in the narrative of a person’s life, for example the narrative we have of Socrates. (*The Human Condition*, 186)
18. Some authors, such as Nancy E. Snow, have thought of self-forgiveness as restoring the self to wholeness. However, this idea does not imply splitting the self into higher and lower parts, just that the self is complex and can judge aspects of itself. Snow, “self-Forgiveness,” *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 27,1 (1993): 76.
19. Norlock, *Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective*, 151.
20. Garry L. Hagberg argues that self-forgiveness is self-constitutive, in that the self is changed by the process of self-forgiveness. “The Self Rewritten: The Case of Self-forgiveness,” in Fricke

- ed. *The Ethics of Forgiveness*, 69. For him, the self is not partitioned; instead a bifocal doubling bootstraps an increasing sense of self-worth through forgiveness. (75) Similarly, Goldie contends that in self-forgiveness we see ourselves from an external perspective but nevertheless it is first or second person rather than third-person or impersonally. ('self-forgiveness and the Narrative Sense of Self,' 89)
21. Norlock, *Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective*, 139.
 22. Norlock, *Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective*, 145.
 23. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 238.
 24. Enright distinguishes self-forgiveness from narcissism and self-esteem, in "Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad: On Forgiving, Receiving Forgiveness, and Self-forgiveness," *Counselling and Values* 40 (1996): 117. Hall and Fincham distinguish it from self-centredness as well. Julie H. Hall, and Frank D. Fincham, "Self-Forgiveness: The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research," *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 24.5 (2005): 626.
 25. Enright, "Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad," 117.
 26. For instance, Enright suggests that self-forgiveness may be an indirect gift to others since as we lose our self-resentment; we may be able to respect others more. ("Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad," 117) Snow sees self-forgiveness as potentially facilitating forgiveness of others as it may make us more empathetic to offenders. ("Self-Forgiveness," 77)
 27. Sophocles, *The Theban Plays*, trans. E. F. Watling (London: Penguin, 1947), 988-991. Goldie develops the idea further, comparing shame to grief, as things we must feel, but that we also must get over for the lives of others. ('self-forgiveness and the Narrative Sense of Self,' 84) If we feel shame about the sort of person we are, rather than guilt over a particular wrongdoing, that may really undermine our sense of self and poison our relationships with others. Hall and Fincham expect to find a negative relation between shame and self-forgiveness, more than is the case with guilt, as shame focuses on the self and its lack of worth. ("The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research," 631) In her work with substance abuse users in recovery, psychologist Marjorie Baker found that people had to self-forgive to overcome guilt and shame and that that helped them to avoid relapsing into drug use. Baker, 'self-forgiveness: An Empowering and Therapeutic Tool for Working with Women in Recovery,' in *Women's Reflections on the Complexities of Forgiveness*, ed. Wanda Malcolm, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 72.
 28. Robin S. Dillon, 'self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect,' *Ethics* 112.1 (2001): 64-5. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim: A Tale* (London: Penguin, 1957), Chap.7, 32-4. See also Goldie, 'self-forgiveness and the Narrative Sense of Self,' 89.
 29. Conrad, *Lord Jim*, 257.
 30. Schettino has been convicted of manslaughter, causing a shipwreck and abandoning ship, and has been sentenced to 16 years in jail, a sentence that he plans to appeal. (Gaia Pianigiani, "Captain of Ship that Capsized off Italy in '12 is Convicted," *The New York Times*, February 11, 2015, 11).
 31. Enright, "Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad," 116. See also Espen Gamlund, "Ethical Aspects of Self-forgiveness," *Sats* 15,2 (2014): 242. Norlock agrees with Baker that we have to reconcile with ourselves to forgive ourselves. (*Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective*, 151; Baker, 'self-forgiveness: An Empowering and Therapeutic Tool,' 64) The primary reason given is that we cannot avoid ourselves in the way we can live apart from others.
 32. H. J. N. Horsburgh, "Forgiveness," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 4.2 (1974): 278. Hall and Fincham ("The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research," 64) suggest that, typically, the consequences for the self of lack of forgiveness is more severe than lack of forgiving another, as we can avoid the perpetrator, but we cannot avoid ourselves. Self-alienation and self-destructiveness may be the

result. However, they note that this point has not been shown empirically.

33. Lin Bauer, et al. "Exploring Self-Forgiveness," *Journal of Religion and Health* 31.2 (1992): 160.
34. *Crimes and Misdemeanours*, directed by Woody Allen, (1989; Burbank, CA: 20th Century Fox, 2012), DVD.
35. Szablowinski takes that further and says that "the inability to forgive oneself or others not uncommonly results in the strongest and most negative psychological conditions that can arise in human experience." Zenon Szablowinski, 'self-Forgiveness and Forgiveness,' *The Heythrop Journal* 53.4 (2012): 678.
36. Jon K. Mills, "On Self-Forgiveness and Moral Self-Representation," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 29.3 (1995): 406.
37. Another philosopher who takes this idea further is Byron Williston, who argues that we are "morally required" to forgive ourselves first to deserve the forgiveness of others: "The Importance of Self-Forgiveness," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 49.1 (2012): 67. His reason for thinking this is necessary is that he identifies the steps towards self-forgiveness with the process necessary for forgiveness by others. (76)
38. Holmgren, 'self-Forgiveness and Responsible Moral Agency,' *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 32.1 (1998) 79-80.
39. Or so psychologists Julie H. Hall and Frank D. Fincham predict ("The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research," 632), given the evidence on this score is mixed.
40. A third possibility is that we need to forgive others for what they have done to us before we can forgive ourselves. Bauer et. al, stress that forgiveness of self can coincide with forgiving others as one realises that one also had a role to play in the wrongs suffered, for example in the relationship with a parent, and it can occur after a specific incident or arise over time. ("Exploring Self-Forgiveness," 154)
41. Dillon, 'self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect,' 81, n68.
42. Also, like Dillon, Bauer et.al. acknowledge the importance of others in aiding self-forgiveness through love and acceptance, "it may not be too strong a statement to say that 'self' forgiveness always takes place in the context of some variation of loving relationships with others." ("Exploring Self-Forgiveness," 155)
43. Norlock also acknowledges this relevance of Arendt's point—that we need to talk about what has happened to others as they help us to make a narrative of our lives. They can also affirm a sense of our being worthy of self-forgiveness. (*Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective*, 153)
44. *Three Colours Blue*, directed by Krzysztof Kieślowski (1993; Santa Monica, CA: Miramax, 2003), DVD.
45. Arne Johan Vetlesen, "Can Forgiveness be Morally Wrong?" in *The Ethics of Forgiveness*, ed. Fricke, 153.
46. John Caputo, et al. *Questioning God* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 61. Bauer et.al. also observe there is a great deal of vacillation between self-recrimination and self-forgiveness. ("Exploring Self-Forgiveness," 155)
47. Griswold makes the accurate point that we can reproach people for not forgiving themselves, being too hard-hearted with themselves, and too proud to forgive themselves, and that is as equally meaningful as criticising people for forgiving themselves too easily. (*Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*, 122)
48. Hughes, "Forgiveness." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified December 23, 2014, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/forgiveness>.
49. Hughes, "Forgiveness." Goldie also accepts we cannot feel resentment towards ourselves, but

we can feel blame, reproach, shame, and hatred ('self-forgiveness and the Narrative Sense of Self,' 83); likewise Jeffrie G. Murphy, 'Jean Hampton on Immorality, Self-Hatred, and Self-Forgiveness,' *Philosophical Studies*, 89.2-3 (1998): 217. Griswold says that we cannot feel resentment towards ourselves as well; rather we feel self-hatred (*Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*, 125) and Gamlund, ('Ethical Aspects of Self-forgiveness,' 240) agrees. Holmgren accepts that we can feel resentment, although in her later book she prefers to use the term 'self-condemnation' as an analogue for resentment felt toward others, in *Forgiveness and Retribution: Responding to Wrongdoing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 104-133.

50. As Hagberg maintains, when we enter into the plight of the person harmed, we "become able to feel warranted resentment against he who perpetrated the injury i.e. ourselves." ("The Self Rewritten," 73)

51. Norlock, *Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective*, 146. See my paper "Envy and Resentment," *Philosophical Explorations: An International Journal for the Philosophy of Mind and Action*, IV,1 (2001): 31-45, where I argue that we can feel resentment on behalf of others.

52. Hughes, "Forgiveness."

53. Hall and Fincham, "The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research," 621; Holmgren, 'Self-Forgiveness and Responsible Moral Agency,' 77; Holmgren, "Forgiveness and Self-forgiveness in Psychotherapy," in *Before Forgiving: Cautionary Views of Forgiveness in Psychotherapy*, ed. Sharon Lamb and Jeffrie G. Murphy. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 122; June Tangney, et al, "Forgiving the Self: Conceptual Issues and Empirical Findings," in *Handbook of Forgiveness*, ed. Everett L. Worthington, Jr. (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2005), 151-2.

54. Similarly, Hughes suggests that our own wrongdoings may not cause us psychological distress, ("On Forgiving Oneself," 558) although what he has in mind are trivialities, like accidentally stepping on someone's foot on the bus.

55. Holmgren, 'self-Forgiveness and Responsible Moral Agency,' 77. Hall and Fincham question whether it would have "the same emotional, psychological, and physical benefits as true self-forgiveness." ("The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research," 627)

56. Enright notes that forgiveness involves affect in giving up resentment, cognition in giving up condemning beliefs, and behaviour, in giving up revenge. ("Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad," 108)

57. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 240.

58. Dillon, 'self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect,' 83.

59. Hughes, "Forgiveness."

60. Zenon Szablowinski modifies the point by suggesting that self-forgiveness involves not the elimination of these feelings, but their control and prevention from becoming "excessive, unwarranted, or malicious." (2012, 688)

61. Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, ed. Simon Critchley and Richard Kearney. (London: Routledge, 2001), 44.

62. Griswold mentions this possibility (*Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*, 123), as well as the idea of when the victim ought to forgive but will not.

63. Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*, 124.

64. Hagberg, "The Self Rewritten," 73.

65. Similarly, Snow argues that self-forgiveness is a second-best alternative when the forgiveness of the other is not possible, or when the offender unreasonably refuses to forgive. ("Self-Forgiveness," 79-80)

66. Goldie, 'self-forgiveness and the Narrative Sense of Self,' 85.

67. Norlock, *Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective*, 147.
68. Holmgren discusses this kind of self-forgiveness in the context of making amends, apologising and otherwise going through the process of trying to make up to the victim for what one has done. (“Self-Forgiveness and Responsible Moral Agency,” 78) See my discussion of forgiveness and apology in La Caze, *Wonder and Generosity: Their Role in Ethics and Politics*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 135-87.
69. As Hughes observes, we may need to forgive ourselves for self-directed wrongs such as not fostering our talents or not living according to our commitments or values. (Hughes, “Forgiveness.”) He argues that the only aspect of the wrongs done to others we can forgive ourselves for is the way we wrong ourselves in wronging others. Snow sees that we may need to forgive ourselves for character traits, attitudes, and dispositions. (“self-Forgiveness,” 78) As specific examples, psychologists Hall and Fincham mention academic and social failures, substance abuse and eating disorders, (“The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research,” 626) a group of problems that Norlock centres on.
70. Norlock, *Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective*, 149.
71. Dillon, ‘self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect,’ 59.
72. Knausgaard, *A Man in Love*, trans. Don Bartlett (London: Vintage, 2013), 433-4.
73. Hall and Fincham (“The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research,” 626) note that some wrongs may indicate a character flaw and so be harder to forgive.
74. Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
75. Norlock, *Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective*, 143.
76. Enright, “Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad,” 120.
77. After the death of others, particularly suicide, we are likely to blame ourselves for not having done something to prevent the death. It is an instance of survivor guilt. Hall and Fincham are aware of this possibility but argue that in these cases there is nothing to forgive. (“The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research,” 628) This way of seeing these circumstances is correct; what is needed is recovery from grief and that will involve giving up self-blame. However, it is unreasonable to expect this change to take place quickly or easily.
78. Dillon, ‘self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect,’ 60, n.18.
79. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 237.
80. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 240-1.
81. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 240.
82. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
83. *Wonder and Generosity*, 158-9.
84. Hughes (“On Forgiving Oneself,” 558) points out that we can easily forgive our own minor transgressions through an *act* of forgiveness.
85. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (London: Penguin, 1951), 559. Surprisingly, Snow suggests that self-forgiveness may be particularly important in such extreme cases, when it is not possible to atone for the wrong, as that is the only way one can go on living with oneself. (“self-Forgiveness,” 80) Yet there may be other ways to respond, through reconciliation, acceptance of the unforgivability of our actions but attempts to make amends, or through various kinds of repression.
86. Linda Radzik suggests that we may reconcile with ourselves without forgiving ourselves, by continuing to resent ourselves and feeling guilty even though we have redressed the wrong and become trustworthy: “Forgiveness, Self-Forgiveness, and Redemption,” *Making Amends: Atonement in Morality, Law, and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 139-40.

87. There are a range of different views about these extremes situations. Hughes observes that some wrongs are so heinous as to be unforgivable by self or other. ("On Forgiving Oneself," 559-60) Hall and Fincham consider whether self-forgiveness is appropriate for terrible crimes such as rape and murder, and accept that it might be possible, if the offender goes through a process of true self-forgiveness. ("The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research," 628)
88. Holmgren contends that forgiveness in extreme cases is possible and appropriate. She uses the example of serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer to argue that self-forgiveness is a better outcome for everyone than his breakdown due to self-contempt. (*Forgiveness and Retribution*, 125-6) Dahmer became a born again Christian and was killed by another prisoner in 1994. More broadly, she argues that there is no value in judging our past acts or our self as a whole; rather we should be focussed on improving ourselves. However, another alternative to self-forgiveness is living with what one has done. Moreover, we could improve ourselves without forgiving ourselves.
89. Dillon, 'self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect,' 83. John Lippitt argues that this kind of self-forgiveness that can allow for remaining hard feelings is consonant with Kierkegaard's view of self-love, in "Towards a More Positive Account of Self-Love II (Self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect)," *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self-Love* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 156-80.
90. Dillon sums up her complex distinctions between different forms of self-respect thus: "Whereas recognition self-respect expressed, "I matter because I am a person," and evaluative self-respect expressed, "I matter because I have merit," basal self-respect expresses simply, "I matter." ("self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect," 68)
91. Dillon, 'Self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect,' 83.
92. Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor and Other Stories* (London: Penguin, 1985), 406.
93. Enright argues we should forgive ourselves because although we acknowledge the wrong we have done, we still 'see the self as worthwhile.' ("Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad," 117) He defines self-forgiveness as "a willingness to abandon self-resentment in the face of one's own acknowledged objective wrong, while fostering compassion, generosity, and love toward oneself." ("Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad," 116) He accepts that these last attitudes are not duties, but like Dillon, finds self-respect necessary for this process.
94. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 242.
95. Norlock, *Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective*, 140.
96. Norlock, *Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective*, 150.
97. Norlock, *Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective*, 149.
98. Enright says we feel compassion towards ourselves as we become more aware of our own suffering. ("Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad," 118) Holmgren also sees compassion as necessary for self-forgiveness. ('self-Forgiveness and Responsible Moral Agency,' 79) Hagberg argues we need compassion, along with insight and understanding to see ourselves differently and so forgive. ("The Self Rewritten," 76)
99. Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London: Vintage, 2002). See Williston, ("The Importance of Self-Forgiveness" 71-72) for quite an interesting discussion of Briony and self-forgiveness, although he appears to believe that Briony was able to apologise to Cecilia and Robbie, rather than create a fiction where that occurs, as the novel describes.
100. Dillon, 'self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect,' 54. As Aurel Kolnai writes in his article on forgiveness 'so much is certain that in most of us a tendency to self-exculpation is operative and needs careful watching; the habit of easy self-absolution, even following an act of repentance, is always suspect of being more akin to condonation than to genuine forgiveness,' "Forgiveness," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 74 (1973): 106. He does add, however, that we need to have

patience with ourselves, as with others. Enright, who has worked with victims of incest, argues similarly that “our experience is that most people are harder on themselves than on others.” (“Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad,” 119)

101. Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*, 122. His example is members of the clergy found to be unfaithful.

102. I would like to thank the audiences at the SPEP and ASCP conferences for valuable questions and comments, and Richard Colledge for inviting me to speak at ASCP and his editorial advice.