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**Beyond Our Conscience: A Proposal for an Improved Model
of Self-Forgiveness**

**Honors Thesis in Philosophy
by
Kelsey M. Park
Advisor: Professor Lydia Moland**

**Colby College
Waterville, ME
2014**



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Forgiveness does not relieve someone of responsibility for what they have done. Forgiveness does not erase accountability. It is not about turning a blind eye or even turning the other cheek. It is not about letting someone off the hook or saying it is okay to do something monstrous. Forgiveness is simply about understanding that every one of us is both inherently good and inherently flawed. Within every hopeless situation and every seemingly hopeless person lies the possibility of transformation.

-Desmond Tutu

Introduction

How do we heal after someone has seriously injured us? How do we move beyond blame and resentment and view the offender as a human being rather than a moral monster? Should we always do so, or is forgiveness sometimes inappropriate? How can we accept ourselves and mediate self-hatred after seriously injuring someone else? Part of being social creatures is harming others either intentionally or unintentionally. How we handle those situations impacts not only our relationships with others, but also our own well-being. Forgiveness has the power to facilitate reconciliation and personal healing. It calls the victim to forswear resentment and to understand that the offender is a human being who is more than his actions. It also requires that the offender recognize that he has wronged another and must try to make positive changes in order not to repeat his actions. Ultimately, forgiveness is the method that we have to rely on in order to maintain some form of peace despite our repeated mistreatment of one another.

The aim of this thesis is to explore these questions using an interdisciplinary approach. I will focus primarily on how the philosophy literature can help to tease out some of the complexities of these questions. I will also branch out beyond the field of philosophy and explore how case studies and the psychology literature might add to our understanding of forgiveness. My goal is to not only analyze the prominent philosophical theories of forgiveness, but to also see how philosophy could be used to facilitate genuine forgiveness in real life. I will begin this exploration with a brief introduction to some of the problems being addressed in forgiveness research.

Interpersonal forgiveness is currently the most researched form of forgiveness within the field of philosophy. This form of forgiveness takes place specifically when one person has harmed at least one other individual. The power of forgiveness is predominantly in the victim's

hands, which leaves the possibility that the offender could go unforgiven if the victim is unable to mediate her resentment and look favorably upon the offender. The offender is not by any means unimportant during the process, however. He must acknowledge his wrongdoing and at least indicate that he will try not to behave the same way in the future. If the offender is unable or unwilling to do these things, then any gesture of forgiveness shown by the victim would actually fall into the category of condonation: the excusing of an action when the offender has done nothing to merit actual forgiveness.

Interpersonal forgiveness is beneficial for the victim in the sense that it allows her to move beyond her resentment and gain some form of understanding of why the offender acted wrongly towards her. This can provide her with closure regarding the wrongdoing and potentially allow her to dwell less on it. The offender also gets several benefits, one of which is simply gaining a better understanding of why he acted as he did and then explaining those reasons to the offender. As previously noted, the offender can be motivated to positively change some aspects of his life so that he does not commit similar harms in the future. Lastly, the offender can gain approval from the victim, permitting him to view himself as more than his actions. This has the potential to give the offender some peace of mind regarding the offense.

The fact that forgiveness has many benefits does not mean that it is necessarily easy to achieve. Genuine interpersonal forgiveness, according to the literature, is a process that requires careful reflection on the part of both the victim and the offender. Withholding forgiveness might indicate that the victim is holding the offender to unreasonably high standards and that she does not have a complete enough understanding of what happened. It might also mean that she is failing to perceive the offender as an actual human being and instead sees him as a moral monster. This might mean that she has excessively high self-esteem in that she believes herself to

be incapable of committing such a wrong. Alternatively, granting forgiveness prematurely might mean that the victim has low self-esteem and doesn't fully recognize the offender's culpability. It could also suggest that the offender is drawn to forgiveness purely for its practical implications. It is tempting for someone to say that she's forgiven another and adopt an "out of sight, out of mind" mentality. This would allow the victim to avoid thinking about the offense and prevent potentially challenging confrontations with the offender.

Interestingly, both withholding forgiveness when it is justified and forgiving prematurely could result in the offender relapsing. In the first case, the offender might not feel the same commitment to act differently as he would if he were forgiven by the other person. In the second case, the victim might not have fully addressed the wrongdoing and made it clear that it was unacceptable. If she simply claimed that there was nothing to forgive and did not pursue the matter any further, then the offender might not fully recognize the harm that he did and would not have as much incentive to change his behaviors in the future. The victim's dismissive attitude could instead cause the offender to think that he will be easily forgiven for whatever he does in the future. Relapse is a topic that will repeatedly emerge throughout the later discussion of interpersonal and self-forgiveness.

As if interpersonal cases of forgiveness weren't complicated enough, cases of self-forgiveness add several more problems to the mix. Self-forgiveness remains an elusive and understudied topic. One reason for this is simply that self-forgiveness can be difficult to explain based on interpersonal forgiveness models. Many people view self-forgiveness as being the "stepchild" of forgiveness because it seems to arise when attempts at interpersonal forgiveness fail. Examples include when a victim is unable or unwilling to forgive an offender or when the offender has lingering guilt after the victim grants him forgiveness. These are exceptions that

don't fit neatly into interpersonal models. Another tricky example is if an individual needs to forgive herself for harm done to herself. This case raises the question of how to forgive oneself when the individual is both the offender and the victim. How does the individual override her conscience and allow herself to move forward from her wrongdoing? These are only a few of the many puzzles of self-forgiveness that have yet to be solved. One of my major aims is to spell out these puzzles clearly and then assess how well the current literature on forgiveness is able to handle them.

One concern with self-forgiveness that should be emphasized is that it can easily be abused since it can easily give the offender too much power. This is especially true in cases of forgiveness for harm done to others in which the offender forgives himself before being granted forgiveness by the victim. Asking for forgiveness becomes unimportant beyond making peace between the offender and the victim. This form of abuse is sometimes seen when individuals blame their actions on their circumstances and don't take steps to rectify their wrongdoing. The offender would be falling into a trap similar to the one seen in interpersonal forgiveness in which it he grants forgiveness simply because it is an easy way to move past the wrongdoing rather than dwell on it. As is the case with interpersonal forgiveness, it will be important to better establish a definition of self-forgiveness so as to avoid these instances of self-condonation.

Even after self-forgiveness is clearly defined, there is still the question of whether or not it should be viewed as the stepchild of forgiveness or as being a separate form of *genuine* forgiveness than interpersonal forgiveness. Placing it in a category that is beneath genuine forgiveness suggests that those who are left with no other choice but to engage in self-forgiveness are automatically at a disadvantage. They are not able to utter to themselves, "I am forgiven," but are instead left saying, "I am almost forgiven." This brings me to another reason

for intensely examining self-forgiveness, namely, that I think it is worth reassessing the status of self-forgiveness in relation to interpersonal forgiveness.

As indicated earlier in this introduction, understanding self-forgiveness is not solely a philosophical matter. Theorizing about metaphysics and our status as moral agents is certainly important for determining what constitutes self-forgiveness. But only focusing on theory could easily cause one to overlook the actual human *experience* through the process of forgiveness. In this thesis, I will be taking an interdisciplinary approach in order to better demonstrate how a change in one's emotions and regard towards oneself is crucial in the self-forgiveness process. I will draw from the psychology literature to further explore why some individuals tend towards justification of their wrongdoings while others end up trapped in extreme guilt and shame. I will also look into psychology's explanation of why self-forgiveness is so important and what beliefs and actions are necessary to promote self-forgiveness. The psychology literature will also be useful in addressing instances of relapse. The question of relapse will resurface in these cases in a more robust way than in cases of interpersonal forgiveness because forgiving oneself and preventing relapse are so intertwined. Part of forgiving oneself consists of changing one's behaviors; relapse would go against all of the efforts one put into making those positive changes. This once again shows the important practical applications of avoiding relapse that could overshadow the emphasis on making sure that the individual is pursuing genuine forgiveness and not condoning his actions.

I will now transition from my general discussion of interpersonal and self-forgiveness and provide a brief outline of the paper. In chapter one, I will begin by examining two interpersonal models of forgiveness provided by philosophers Charles Griswold and Margaret Holmgren. I will give an overview of their models as well as highlight three major criticisms of their models.

First, I will suggest that Griswold overemphasizes circumstances in his evaluation of forgiveness and that this sometimes forces the victim to drop her moral superiority over the victim when she shouldn't have to. Second, I will argue that Griswold overestimates the victim's power over the offender's peace of mind. Finally, I will suggest that Holmgren utilizes a theory of the self that overestimates our rational capacities. In chapters two and three, I will show how these criticisms still pertain in cases of self-forgiveness. I will do this by first detailing Griswold's and Holmgren's views on self-forgiveness and then assessing how their theories are able to handle a series of puzzles and case studies. In chapter 4, I will conclude that Griswold's theory is more valid than Holmgren's; however, it still fails to sufficiently handle cases of self-forgiveness. I will subsequently propose that Griswold's model can be improved by introducing Adam Smith's theory of the impartial spectator.

Chapter I: A General Survey of Forgiveness

Introduction to Griswold and Holmgren

Griswold and Holmgren are both concerned with how to define forgiveness in a way that prevents condonation. They recognize how easy it is for an offender to be forgiven prematurely if the wrongdoing is not appropriately addressed. Griswold proposes that this problem can be avoided by adopting a model of forgiveness that is primarily focused on the actual deed and narratives related to the deed. Holmgren instead focuses on the capacity individuals have to change their behaviors despite their past actions. The former relies on an argument based on the shared fallibility of individuals while the latter relies on an argument based on a fundamental respect for all humans due to our status as moral agents. In what follows, I will first trace Griswold's theory of interpersonal forgiveness and a potential critique of Griswold's model. I will then trace Holmgren's theory of interpersonal forgiveness and examine the implications of the version of the self that she relies on. In later chapters, I will assess how Griswold's model and Holmgren's model are each able to handle self-forgiveness.

A. Griswold

Griswold proposes a series of six steps that the offender must follow and a series of six steps that the victim must follow in order to attain an ideal form of forgiveness. These steps require the two parties to interact with one another in order to develop new perspectives of the other party in relation to the wrongdoing. For example, the first step that the offender must fulfill is acknowledging responsibility for one's actions. This requires that the offender actually recognize his role in the event. Second, the offender must repudiate the deed by acknowledging that his actions were condemnable. The third step adds emotional and performance components in that the offender must both *feel* but also *express* regret to the victim (e.g. an apology). The

fourth step requires a commitment to action in which the offender must work to not injure others in the same way again. Fifth, the offender must listen to the victim and attempt to understand the damage that he caused. This involves placing oneself in the position of the victim and extending compassion to the victim. Lastly, the offender must provide a narrative to the victim of what brought him to the point of committing the wrongdoing (49-51).

In order for forgiveness to be successful, the victim must also accomplish six steps. The first step the victim must complete is more emotionally involved than the offender's first step. The injured person begins by forswearing revenge directed towards the offender. The presence of revenge assumes that the victim acknowledges that the action against her was wrong and that the offender deserves to be harmed back. Forswearing revenge still allows for negative feelings towards the offender; however, one should no longer wish to harm the offender out of spite. The second and third steps involve one of the driving emotions behind revenge, namely, resentment. Resentment consists of longstanding anger and potentially hatred towards the offender. In the second step, the victim must moderate her resentment towards the offender which in turn leads to the third step of letting go of one's resentment altogether. The fourth step consists of the victim reframing her beliefs about the offender. This often requires that she begin to view the wrongdoing as only representing a *part* of the offender as opposed to being an irrevocable, fatal flaw in the offender's character. As a result, the offender is viewed as someone who did something bad rather than simply as a bad person. This recognition leads to the next step of dropping one's moral superiority in relation to the offender. The victim must recognize her *shared humanity* with the offender. This requires that she acknowledges they are both flawed and that simply because she did not commit the same act she is a morally better person. Lastly, the victim must express her forgiveness to the offender. This process needs to be clear and often

consists of a distinct statement of forgiveness followed by actions, behaviors, and attitudes that demonstrate a total foreswearing of resentment (55-58).

i. Critique of Griswold's Model of Forgiveness

Griswold's model of forgiveness is appealing because it is systematic and it operates on the notion that humans are flawed. The latter point is important because humans are often confronted with their limitations in a very real way, whereas—as we will see below—it requires a great deal of abstract thought to convince oneself of Holmgren's proposal that all humans are worthy of respect. One risk in Griswold's approach, however, is that the victim sacrifices her capacity to hold the offender accountable. Philosopher Hailey Huget examines this risk and proposes that Griswold's focus on human frailty takes authority away from the victim.

Huget opens her argument by describing the scene from *The Brothers Karamazov* in which brothers Alyosha and Ivan Karamazov discuss whether there are unforgivable crimes. Alyosha concedes that a General who unleashed a pack of hounds on a child in front of the child's mother should be shot rather than forgiven. Ivan then responds by asking whether anyone would have the right or capacity to forgive in such a terrible situation (337-338). Huget suggests that Griswold's account of forgiveness allows for the possibility of forgiveness in the scenario described. She supports Griswold's efforts to refine the definition of forgiveness so as to rule out pardoning and excusing. But one of the consequences of Griswold's systematic approach is that if both the victim and the offender follow the necessary steps, then the crime is forgiven. If not, then the crime is perhaps forgivable but unforgiven, and those involved might be forced to rely on an imperfect form of forgiveness. The answer to Ivan's question is then "yes" it is possible, but only if both parties involved participate in the necessary process (338).

One benefit of Griswold's paradigm of forgiveness is that the process of sharing narratives and eventually forswearing resentment is useful for promoting reconciliation. Huget thinks that reconciliation comes at cost, however. The weakness she finds with Griswold's argument is his reliance on what she refers to as the "human frailty thesis." Huget asserts that the "human frailty thesis supports the goal of reconciliation between victim and offender while undermining the equally important goal of holding the offender accountable for wrongdoing" (347). This potential problem with Griswold's model links back to one of the most fundamental components of forgiveness: forswearing resentment. Huget observes that the process of forswearing resentment creates a dilemma for the victim in terms of accountability. Holding the person accountable for the wrongdoing requires that the victim remembers the wrongdoing and holds the agent responsible. This could easily cause the victim to sustain resentment as he is reminded of the offender's actions. The easiest method of forswearing resentment would alternatively involve overlooking the wrongdoing in the future by adopting a "forgive and forget" mentality (341).

Griswold is able to defend himself on these points to a certain degree. He argues that the victim must gain a better understanding about the situation rather than just forget about it. The steps that the offender must take (e.g. providing a narrative, apologizing, and sympathizing with the victim) further demonstrate that forgiveness is an active process rather than a dismissive process. Griswold's steps ensure that the wrongdoing is recognized by both parties; however, recognition alone does not equate to holding the offender accountable (341-342). I will now provide a brief recap of Griswold's interpersonal model of forgiveness. I will then explain which aspects of the model Huget finds to be problematic. More specifically, I will explain why Huget

thinks that certain components of Griswold's model need to be changed so that accountability is not sacrificed for reconciliation.

The offender goes through the intense process of expressing regret, attempting to understand the experience of the victim, and providing a narrative that accurately reflects what happened without including excuses. Every step of this process both promotes reconciliation and acknowledges the culpability of the offender. Huget thinks that these steps align with the overarching goal of genuine forgiveness. The victim is faced with having a different relationship to the wrongdoing. His focus is not on what he did, what the consequences of his actions were, and how he needs to change. It is first on his feelings about the situation and then turns to how he views the offender from a more cognitive standpoint. The victim is forced to look at the offense from a more distanced perspective because he was not the one who actually committed the wrongdoing. He is left in the position of *forming a judgment* about the situation and the offender. Step four of Griswold's model is the point at which the offender shifts his focus from revenge and resentment to developing a new view of the offender. He reframes his beliefs so that the offender is no longer viewed as an entirely bad person or a moral monster but instead as a complex human being. The wrongdoing only makes up part of the offender and does not represent the offender as whole (343).

Reframing one's beliefs about the offender requires the victim to sympathize with offender. Placing oneself in the position of the offender allows the victim to better understand why the offender acted in such a way. The victim goes beyond simply attempting to feel what the other offender was feeling in the situation. He utilizes his imagination to come as close to understanding the offender's motives and the circumstances of the situation as possible. This allows the victim to see that the offender is a human being who is subject to error. The victim's

realization of shared humanity and fallibility allows him to complete the fifth step in which he drops his moral superiority in comparison to the offender. This stage is significant because the victim also changes his view of himself in relation to the offender and the wrongdoing. The victim realizes that the wrongdoing is not unconceivable and that he too is prone to committing wrongdoings that require forgiveness. Moreover, the victim changes his view of being a victim that was injured in a particular way by the offender. The victim is instead able to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the wrongdoing based on the offender's narrative and by sympathizing with the offender (344-345). Huget is overall comfortable with the first three steps of Griswold's model; however, she takes issue with steps four and five.

Huget draws on one of Griswold's own examples to demonstrate why steps four and five are problematic in terms of holding an offender accountable. She references the story in the *Iliad* when Achilles and Priam meet to dine after having done atrocious things to each other's families. They end up weeping and sharing food together after realizing that they are imperfect beings who share similar desires and have similar feelings. They also attribute many of their actions to their circumstances and the work of the Gods. An interesting part of the story is that Achilles and Priam do not speak of justice, placing blame, or forgiveness (346-347). Does this mean that recognition of inherent human frailty eliminates the need for forgiveness? How can an offender be held accountable if the focus of his wrongdoing is on his imperfections rather than on his capacity to make moral decisions?

It is unexpected that forgiveness and justice aren't spoken of at a time when both individuals involved were clearly perpetrators that harmed each other in significant ways. One explanation that Huget provides is that Achilles and Priam focused their attention on the *circumstances* surrounding the wrongdoings as opposed to the *agents* who committed the

wrongdoings. Achilles and Priam attributed their actions in part to the situations the Gods put them in. They also recognized that their humanness would always separate them from being perfect like the Gods. The fact that this realization is so powerful that they do not even speak of forgiveness makes it difficult to determine where accountability even factors in. Huget explains that to “mitigate resentment, the victim concludes that the offender is not *really* accountable for the wrong action—or at least that the circumstances are more to blame than the offender himself” (347).

The problem of accountability is exacerbated by the need for sympathy in order to drop one’s moral superiority over the offender. Victims must “imagine themselves in the same circumstances as the offenders and allow for the possibility that they, too, might have perpetrated the same crimes” (347). The victim is forced to admit that he might have committed the same crime in order to drop moral superiority and consequently attain forgiveness. The focus is once again placed on the circumstances of the given situation and overlooks the possibility that the victim’s character traits might have prevented him from committing the same wrongdoing. This result presents the danger that through sympathy the victim “fundamentally changes [his] view of [himself], coming to believe [himself] capable of even the most heinous wrongdoings in certain circumstances” (351). This claim calls into question how much agency any offender actually has in committing a wrongdoing. Moreover, it poses a definite threat to the victim’s self-respect as a moral agent by leading him to conclude that he too might have done something just as horrible under the given circumstances.

Is there a way to revise Griswold’s model so that accountability is not sacrificed at the expense of reconciliation? Huget proposes two solutions in an attempt to preserve a majority of Griswold’s theory. Her first is that Griswold downplay the role of sympathy. Huget suggests that

the fourth condition of reframing one's view of the victim can still be achieved without imagining that one might commit the same wrongdoing if presented with the same circumstances. It would be sufficient for the victim to learn about situation from the offender and gain a better understanding of the circumstances without placing himself in the same situation. This would allow attention to be directed towards *both* the agent and the circumstances. The second suggestion builds directly off of the first. Huget proposes that the victim should be able to consider his own character when determining whether he would have acted similarly under the given circumstances. The consequence of this is that the victim does not necessarily have to drop his moral superiority in comparison to the offender. This may make it more likely for the victim to sustain some resentment and negative judgment towards the offender; however, it does provide a pathway that supports both reconciliation and accountability.

ii. Response to Huget's critique of Griswold

One way that Griswold might respond to Huget's critique is by addressing her conception of sympathy. More specifically, I think Griswold can legitimately claim that Huget develops her argument around a different notion of sympathy than he actually supports. This raises the question of whether Huget's argument against Griswold still holds any weight. I would tentatively answer yes to this question; however, I do think that her argument is significantly weakened by the mismatch in definitions.

Griswold speaks about different forms of sympathy when discussing the paradigm of forgiveness. One example he discusses and dismisses is sympathy by *analogy*. This form of sympathy requires the spectator to imagine how she would feel if she were in the same situation as another individual. For example, if one of my friends lashed out at me, I would try to understand how she felt by remembering a time that I lashed out at one my friends. This is

similar to the form of sympathy that Huget discusses. The victim is not asked to fully surrender her position and consider the situation as if she were actually the offender.

Griswold does not think that sympathy by analogy is ideal for forgiveness. He instead supports the notion of sympathy proposed by Adam Smith. The Smithian form of sympathy requires that the individuals involved in forgiveness sympathize through the use of their projective imaginations. This process requires that the victim actually try to place herself in the position of the offender. She has to do the best she can to take on the persona of the offender and consider the circumstances that the offender was placed in. The offender must similarly try to take on the persona of the victim in order to understand the victim's pain and suffering in full (87). Griswold further clarifies this concept by stating that sympathy is "understanding the other's purposes as generating reasons for feeling and action, reasons as independent of one's own. Here the other is seen as a separate, autonomous agent. We have advanced beyond an egocentric point of view, and have imaginative participation in the perspective and situation of the other" (88).

Through this imaginative participation, the spectator can either approve or disapprove of the agent's behavior and feelings. Griswold adopts Smith's claim that we can assess the agent's behavior if we attempt to understand the underlying causes of the behavior and "enter into" the agent's sentiments. If we are unable to imaginatively simulate, or "enter into," the agent's sentiments, then we consider her sentiments to be improper. If, however, we are able to "enter into" the agent's sentiments and approve of them, then we consider her sentiments to be proper (88).

It takes some effort to determine how this component of sympathy links to Griswold's model of forgiveness. It is strange to think that the victim would have to sympathize with the

offender and approve of his behavior in order to forgive him. This seems to run the same risk of condonation that Huget speaks of. I think that we would have to consider the phrase “approve of” a bit more loosely. The victim might not necessarily approve of the wrongdoing per se, but instead approves in the sense that act was conceivable given the circumstances. She is able to comprehend why the offender did what he did and realizes that that particular instance does not necessarily reflect the entirety of his character.

Up to this point, it is still not entirely clear that Griswold is able to adequately refute Huget’s critique against him. Griswold’s concept of sympathy and approval as discussed above is still predominantly centered on circumstances and leaves little room for the victim to forgive the offender, strongly disapprove of the offender’s actions, and retain her moral superiority over the offender. The Achilles and Priam example might be useful in building a defense of Griswold. I agree with Huget that Griswold’s choice of the Achilles and Priam case is a bit strange. As Huget points out, genuine forgiveness seems to be irrelevant because Achilles and Priam develop such a deep understanding of each other’s actions that forgiveness is not even discussed. However, I will discuss below why Griswold’s views on human fallibility and dropping one’s moral superiority in this example are important to take note of.

Achilles and Priam are able to understand each other’s point of view because they had similar experiences and faced similar challenges. This shared understanding leads them to recognize that they are only humans who are inherently fallible. They realize that they each made mistakes partially because of their imperfections. Huget instead looks at moral superiority and fallibility in terms of how the victim would have acted if he were in the same situation as the offender. This difference again goes back to Huget’s use of sympathy by analogy. She might suggest that Priam should disapprove of Achilles murdering his son on the account that he would

not have done the same thing under the same circumstances. Priam could thus maintain his moral superiority over Achilles in regards to this particular scenario. Griswold, on the other hand, thinks that dropping one's moral superiority should follow the "aha" moment in which the victim realizes that both he and the offender are fallible human beings. This realization results from vicariously sympathizing with the offender and understanding that everybody is flawed and is subject to outside forces. Perhaps the victim would have acted differently than the offender in that specific case, but that doesn't erase the fact that the victim is also imperfect and requires forgiveness too.

In short: the fact that Huget and Griswold use different definitions of sympathy makes it difficult to determine how seriously Huget's critique should be taken. Huget's misrepresentation of Griswold's conception of sympathy significantly undermines her efforts because she ends up missing her target. Her argument would be strengthened if she were able to formulate a similar critique using the same definition of sympathy as Griswold. Even so, it shouldn't be denied that Griswold has to emphasize the role that one's circumstances play in decision making in order to develop his fallibility model. Huget might be right in pointing out that Griswold's focus on human frailty causes one to underappreciate the agency that each individual has when committing a wrongdoing. Perhaps dropping one's moral superiority on the basis that all humans are fallible is far too general and does not take the actual situation at hand strongly enough into account. While Huget's misunderstanding of Griswold's use of sympathy does undermine her argument, she rightly acknowledges that his emphasis on circumstances could lead to condonation. This problem will also emerge during the later discussion on self-forgiveness.

I will now provide a more in depth analysis of the philosophical background of Griswold's theory. I look at Smith's philosophy on sympathy, self-approbation, and the impartial

spectator. Interestingly, it appears that a more in-depth analysis of Smith's theory actually leads to potential flaws in Griswold's argument. These flaws will also be relevant to self-forgiveness.

iii. An Extended Analysis of Smith's Theory

Griswold pays relatively little attention to components of Smith's theory aside from sympathy. Even his analysis of sympathy is not all-encompassing. Taking a more extensive look at Smith's theory reveals some potential implications for Griswold's model of forgiveness. The first thing to mention is Smith's claim that no one can fully enter into the persona of another individual when sympathizing. What we feel and think when we sympathize with another will always be our own impressions. Our egocentrism limits us from being able to comprehend exactly what that person experienced and what caused her sentiments. The best we can do is gain a close, yet weak understanding of what it was like to be the other person in a given situation (Smith 3-4).

This aspect of Smith's theory becomes relevant to Griswold's assertion that the paradigmatic case of forgiveness is dyadic. Sympathy between the offender towards the victim and vice versa is crucial in Griswold's model. Admitting that one can never fully enter into the sentiments of another individual might be particularly problematic when considering the act of the victim sympathizing with the offender. If the offender realizes that the victim can never fully understand why he committed the wrongdoing, then he may not accept the victim's forgiveness as being reason enough for him to forgive himself. He might instead feel persistent guilt and shame for his actions since he is the one who can best understand why and how he did what he did. This might suggest that Griswold's argument is flawed in the sense that two people could go through the process of forgiveness yet the offender still might not forgive himself. This will become more apparent in the later discussion of self-forgiveness.

The problem is exacerbated when considering Smith's views of conscience. Smith not only discusses approbation of another individual's sentiments, but also self-appraisal and disapprobation. Smith describes that we begin to form judgments of ourselves based on the judgments that other people make of us. We desperately want others to approve of us. As a result, we begin to view ourselves as if someone else were to view us. He continues on to say that we do not accept the judgment of just anyone, but only from a fair and impartial spectator (161-162). We split ourselves in two and develop this impartial spectator based on how we imagine others would judge us. We can then step into the perspective of the impartial spectator and evaluate our own behaviors (164).

The impartial spectator provides the individual with a better understanding of what behaviors should and shouldn't be approved of. Other individuals might be wrong in the judgments that they make of us. Smith demonstrates the importance of the impartial spectator's approval in the following two questions: "What so great happiness as to be beloved, and to know that we deserved to be beloved? What so great misery to be hated, and to know that we deserved to be hated?" (165). Individuals do not merely want to be approved of by others; they want to deserve to be approved of. One could extend this same notion and claim that individuals do not only want to be forgiven; they want to deserve to be forgiven.

Smith's conception of conscience could prove to be a major barrier to Griswold's theory. Is Griswold overestimating the power the victim has in the restoration of the offender's peace of mind? Does the offender also need to agree that he is truly worthy of being forgiven regardless of what the victim says? If so, can Griswold's fallibility model accommodate these needs or is his model severely lacking some other necessary component? These questions will become relevant again in the discussion of self-forgiveness. I will now move away from Griswold's

model and provide an outline of Holmgren's model of interpersonal forgiveness followed by a critique of the version of the self that she relies on.

B. Holmgren

Holmgren takes a significantly different approach to the interpersonal model of forgiveness than does Griswold. Her conception of forgiveness still requires that the individuals involved follow steps to certain extent; however, these steps are slightly more subjective and are much more focused on the attitudes of the victim. The major point of distinction between Holmgren's theory and Griswold's theory is that Griswold argues on the basis of shared humanity in terms of fallibility. Holmgren also includes the aspect of shared humanity in her theory; however, she is primarily concerned with arguing on the grounds of respect for individuals as being moral agents. The consequence of the latter stance is that forgiveness becomes the appropriate response to any wrongdoing in order to maintain this unconditional form of respect (3).

Holmgren proposes that the attitude of forgiveness consists of three components: cognitive, affective, and motivational. Forgiveness is possible when these three attitudes are *integrated* as opposed to *fragmented* or *conflicted*. Having the attitudes integrated is essential because it means that all three attitudes are present and foster one another. Both fragmented and conflicting attitudes are deficient in that the former consists of only having some of the attitudes present and the latter consists of maintaining a distorted perspective of at least one of the attitudes which counteracts the others.

The *cognitive* component of Holmgren's theory is similar to steps four and five of Griswold's model for the victim. Both Holmgren's and Griswold's theories address the significance of viewing the offender as a fallible being and recognizing that committing one

wrongdoing does not necessarily make the offender a bad person who should be punished indefinitely. Holmgren adds that the victim must also recognize that the offender has the capacity for growth and making different choices in the future. The *affective* component initially resembles steps one through three in Griswold's model. Holmgren similarly recognizes resentment as being a reactionary response to a wrongdoing that needs to be moderated in order for forgiveness to occur. Rather than just suggesting that the victim forswears resentment, however, she suggests that the victim also demonstrate compassion, kindness, love, and respect towards the offender. The final component is what prevents Holmgren's argument from allowing forgiveness to continuously result in condoning wrongdoings. The *motivational* component consists of the victim desiring that offender flourishes as an individual. As a result, the victim cannot simply be apathetic towards the offender. She instead needs to be concerned with both what steps the offender is taking in order to change his behavior and whether the offender is being punished unjustly (23-25).

i. Korsgaard's Theory of the Self

An integral part to Holmgren's assumption that we should extend respect, compassion, and the real goodwill to others is based on the conception of the self that she supports. Holmgren argues for a reductionist sense of the self in which the self is not an entity that exists beyond one's brain, body, and experiences. She agrees specifically with Christine Korsgaard's argument that the self is something that adopts practical identities and is deliberative. As practical agents, we consider ends and means and are consequently *agents* that make *choices*. This framework allows us to view ourselves as both moral agents who have moral obligations and as separate individuals who exist throughout time (148). Korsgaard provides a prominent argument for the self based on a modified interpretation of Kant's philosophy. She attempts to maintain that

individuals both have autonomy through their ability to reflect and that individuals' actions stem from the commitments that are a part of their practical identities. Her model initially appears to be useful in the effort to understand how one can forgive oneself for an action. If all humans have value based on their existence as moral agents, then one can forgive oneself on the grounds that he is respected for being a human and that he has the capacity to abstain from similar actions in the future.

Although Holmgren bases her model of forgiveness on Korsgaard's theory of the self, she provides a fairly surface explanation of what the self is. In *The Sources of Normativity*, Korsgaard establishes that the mind is self-conscious due to individuals' reflective capacities. Like Kant, she proposes that our reflective capacities lead us to develop a *conception* of ourselves as human beings that deliberate. The issue that arises from possessing the capacity to reflect and deliberate is that when we are faced with a choice or a desire we have to endorse the choice or desire prior to acting on it. This process results in a gap between our impulses and our beliefs and actions (93). Thus, the reflective self both raises one's awareness of conflicting impulses and provides a *reason* for an individual to act in one way rather than another. Kant argues that through this reflective consciousness, one gains freedom in the ability uphold the moral law (96). Moreover, the reflective self serves as "something over and above all of your desires, something which is *you*" (100).

Korsgaard begins to take serious liberties in her approach to Kant's philosophy when she introduces the notion of *practical identities*. She defines a practical identity as being a "description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking" (101). The result of taking on practical identities is that one is provided with reasons and obligations to act in a particular way. Thus,

one's motivations are derived from one's conception of oneself as displayed through practical identities. Although an individual can shed these identities, he must have *some* form of practical identity (120). The controversial aspect of this theory is that Korsgaard upholds the notion of the reflective self but takes away the abstract power of the reflective self that Kant adamantly defends. Rather than reflecting in a universal sense and going beyond one's own commitments in order to follow the moral law, Korsgaard suggests that the moral law is established by individuals based on the commitments that are a part of their practical identities (Moland 368-369).

Despite preliminary concerns about Korsgaard injecting particular commitments into Kant's theory of the reflective self, her eventual conclusion that all humans have value is worth further consideration. Her argument returns back to the notion that you must have *some* form of practical identity in order to act. This need comes from the most fundamental of all of our practical identities: the identity as a human being. Because we are humans we are given reason to conform to our particular practical identities. We consequently value ourselves as human beings by recognizing our humanity as a practical identity and engaging in the particular identities that result from that recognition (121). We constantly reaffirm this most basic respect for ourselves as a human being provided that "if you value anything at all, or, if you acknowledge the existence of any practical reasons, then you must value your humanity as an end in itself" (122). As long as we are humans and we carry out some form of action, then we have value.

The notion that all individuals deserve respect and value is appealing in the context of self-forgiveness. However, I think the previous description of Korsgaard's theory and initial critique of her argument gives rise to three major objections that have negative implications for Holmgren's model of self-forgiveness. The first objection stems from Korsgaard's attempt to

argue for the reflective self as it relates to the committed self (i.e. the self that is derived from one's practical identities) (Moland 369). More specifically, Korsgaard suggests a relationship between the noumenal self and the phenomenal self that ultimately undermines the importance she originally places on the reflective self. Recall Korsgaard's proposal that the need for practical identities stems from being human. An individual who is "moved to urge the value of *having* particular ties and commitments has discovered that part of their normativity comes from the fact that human beings need to have them" (119); thus, human beings take on practical identities which provide them with commitments to act in a particular way. Maintaining these commitments means that individuals have reasons to either act on desires and inclinations or not.

I think Korsgaard is right to recognize the role that practical identities play in our lives. Maintaining commitments tied to one's practical identities provides one with direction in terms of how to treat other people and how to do things as simple as choosing how to spend one's spare time. Moreover, I agree that it is important for individuals to have reasons for their actions, or else they would end up not being motivated to act at all. My concern is that Korsgaard fails to adequately address how practical identities are prescribed to individuals. Practical identities may help to guide an individual to act in a certain way, but what about cases in which the identity was not chosen by the individual (e.g. being a daughter or being of a certain race)? What if an individual finds value in a practical identity that does not align with the overarching practical identity of being a Citizen of the Kingdom of Ends?

The first question poses the possibility that there are different types of commitments, namely, those that we endorse and those that we fall into without having any say in the matter. The former case seems to align with Korsgaard's argument; however, the latter is not so clear. Surely we can engage in commitments that are associated with practical identities that are forced

upon us in different ways. We can determine the extent to which we want to uphold or reject the general responsibilities associated with being a daughter which suggests that our reflective self is acting in *some* way. Even so, there is an undeniable dilemma provided that the daughter can fail to uphold the commitments associated with being a daughter, but she is still a daughter nonetheless. Her practical identity loses merit in this situation because she does not endorse it so that she will be motivated to act in a certain way. It instead presents itself at times as being an inescapable burden that she is forced to manage.

This problem of being subjected to a practical identity rather than choosing one's practical identity reveals a gap in Korsgaard's theory regarding the relationship between having a foundational practical identity as a human being and realizing that the very existence of that practical identity provides reason for taking on multiple other practical identities. The case of being a daughter is problematic according to this reasoning because being a daughter is not something that the individual *needs* to be; it is simply something that she is. Similarly, there are instances in which an individual might want to take on a certain practical identity but is prevented from doing so (e.g. converting to certain religions). Once again, the individual is being forced into one direction or another regardless of what her reflective self endorses.

Cases in which the individual has a degree of choice in the identity (e.g. affiliating with a particular religion) present a different yet related problem. Korsgaard proposes that individuals need practical identities in order to be motivated to carry out certain actions. What she fails to fully explain is what motivates us to choose certain practical identities over others. Why did I choose to be a philosophy major as opposed to a science major? Why do I consider myself to belong to one political party as opposed to another? These decisions are likely based on the notion that I approve of the commitments associated with both of these identities. But I still need

a more basic reason for why I should endorse these commitments. One plausible response to this is that being a member of humanity, and therefore a Citizen of the Kingdom of Ends, provides me with reason to endorse practical identities that allow me to act as a moral individual who values humanity. Korsgaard alludes to this in stating that “moral identity exerts a kind of governing role over the other kinds” (130). If that is the case, then the value and motivation one finds through her practical identities becomes insignificant. One should not endorse a practical identity if it does not adhere to her commitment to being a Citizen of the Kingdom of Ends. Thus, despite the attempt to bring the noumenal self and phenomenal self together, we are led back to Kant’s distanced version of the reflective self that transcends our commitments. Practical identities become secondary regardless of whether they were forced or chosen.

Let’s grant that being a Citizen of the Kingdom of Ends can be a principle for determining which commitments an individual carries out in relation to her practical identities. How do we account for when an individual commits a wrongdoing and acts against her moral identity? Korsgaard proposes that individuals can, and, in fact, should shed aspects of their identities in certain circumstances. She asserts that this process must occur when one’s practical identity does not align with the value of humanity (130). The capacity to shed one’s practical identity in this situation could be particularly important in the context of forgiveness. Shedding one’s practical identity demonstrates that the individual changed from who she was at the time of the wrongdoing. She now has new commitments and a new conception of her practical identities that will not lead her to commit the same wrongdoing again.

In cases of interpersonal forgiveness, shedding her practical identity provides the victim with reason to forgive without the fear that she is merely condoning the wrongdoing. There is a distance between the offender and the victim that allows the victim to acknowledge that the

offender previously held wrong commitments but has since discarded those commitments. Being able to say that one has shed prior commitments and formulated new ones is also a useful step in instances of self-forgiveness. Having flexibility with one's practical commitments allows one to claim, "That is who I was, and this is who I am now." However, the lack of distance between the self and the other allows one to be hyper-cognizant of one's relationship to the wrongdoing. Claiming that one has changed does not eliminate a nagging tension between simultaneously viewing one's commitments as being disposable and realizing that one's practical identities are essential by virtue of being human. The latter point places substantial importance on determining which practical identities an individual takes on. Disposing of a practical identity would represent a major error in terms of one's commitments. So while the offender is left with the relief of being able to say that she was wrong and that she has changed, she is also left bewildered about how she came to initially endorse the practical identity that she now adamantly rejects. Not only did she commit an error, but the source of that error is the enduring reflective self that is at the basis of her actions. This leads one to the detrimental realization that what is supposed to be the agent's essence can still lead her to do things that she otherwise would not endorse. She is now left with both guilt and a mistrust of where her reflective self might lead her in the future.

A second concern that I have with how Korsgaard's theory as applied to self-forgiveness relates back to Holmgren's statement that "rather than conflating [himself] with his past wrong actions and attitudes, [one] recognizes that he is a sentient being and moral agent who is distinct from those actions and attitudes" (120). The notion of separating the sin from the sinner reflects the same issue that Korsgaard faces in her attempt to argue on behalf of a rational self while maintaining the importance of the committed self. Similar to Korsgaard's assertion that one can

shed practical identities throughout one's life, Holmgren suggests that one can change and drop attitudes. She also claims that the two attitudes of forgiveness and self-forgiveness are always appropriate in the face of wrongdoing. She argues this on the basis that these two attitudes always entail respect rather than condemnation and thus always demonstrate the value one has for humanity. In order to justify this claim, Holmgren falls into the same trap as Korsgaard does in that one's humanity as exhibited by one's rational capacities becomes the fundamental identity that one must adhere to. As Holmgren points out, the individual who forgives himself "transcends the focus on himself and his past wrongs, and turns his attention to what is truly of value," namely, the value of humanity (124). Like one's practical identities, the attitudes one adheres to become fairly unimportant if they do not directly link to valuing humanity. This leaves us with a hollow version of the self that might not be substantial enough to ease the cognitive tension that arises from cases of self-forgiveness.

What leads to the deception by the reflective self that causes one to commit regretful wrongdoings? I think that part of the answer to this question reveals second major objection to Korsgaard's argument for the reflective self. Korsgaard asserts that the reflective self distances an individual from her impulses in a way that allows her to evaluate those impulses and either act on them or not (113). In this way, the individual's acting self is subject to the reflective self (107). There is a dichotomy between the reflective and acting self that reduces the reflective self to something that stands outside of and above the acting self. While we can have a meta-awareness of our impulses, I think that Korsgaard overestimates the amount of control we have to actually think and act against these impulses.

Recent literature in the psychology of decision making poses several challenges to Korsgaard's reverence for the reflective self. One proposition is that there are two categories of

moral decision making: moral intuition and moral reasoning. Moral intuition results from having a strong affective reaction in a situation. This immediate reaction can lead to an evaluation of the situation as being either good or bad without any form of deep cognitive processing. Moral reasoning differs in that the individual relies more on reasoning rather than emotions to derive a judgment about the situation. Even so, it is possible that the individual carries out her evaluation of the situation in a manner that simply reinforces her initial reaction (Haidt 2). The issue is further compounded in that immediate emotions can cause us to alter our predictions of what the future outcome of a situation will be and cause us to bias what information we attend to in making the decision (Loewenstein & Lerner 628-629). While it can be argued that the reflective self still plays a role in the aforementioned cases, these alternative theories suggest that the reflective self is part of a *system* that is very much influenced by emotions and desires as opposed to standing separate from them.

Recognizing that our actions and decisions can be substantially influenced by emotions and desires threatens Holmgren's claim that individuals need to acknowledge one another as *moral agents* who make *choices*. Holmgren uses this assertion as a reason that we should forgive each other because we are rational beings who have the capacity for growth by making different choices in the future. She also claims that acknowledging one's moral agency requires one to admit that what he did was wrong and that he both could and should have acted differently (106). Paradoxically, she also suggests that having respect for oneself allows an agent to examine the factors that were out of his control but still had a significant impact on influencing his behavior (e.g. when an individual steals money after having grown up in a maladaptive home) (122). This assertion conveniently overlooks her previous emphasis on choice. While recognizing that an individual's actions are often influenced by factors outside of one's control (e.g. emotions,

desires, and being forced into certain practical identities) and can be helpful in providing justification to forgive oneself, doing so would mean giving up the overarching rational self that both Korsgaard and Holmgren are committed to. Instead, emphasizing that one is an agent who chooses his actions and behaviors leaves one with an extreme sense of responsibility.

The third and final objection to Korsgaard's theory challenges her argument for the value of humanity. Korsgaard writes that "if you value anything at all, or, if you acknowledge the existence of any practical reasons, then you must value your humanity as an end in itself" (125). I can understand this statement if an individual chooses practical identities that actually align with valuing humanity. As previously mentioned, however, there are cases when an individual can take on a practical identity that does not value humanity and should be shed. The resulting conclusion is that when an individual chooses a practical identity that does not align with the value of humanity, she is acting against the value of humanity yet still affirming the value of her own humanity simply because she has a practical identity that motivates her to act. This contradiction suggests that Korsgaard, and in turn Holmgren, are making use of two conceptions of value in order to construct their arguments. The first conception of value consists in merely being human. Because the individual is a part of humanity, he has some worth and thus some form of motivation to act. The second conception of value consists in how the individual actually treats himself and others (e.g. with respect, compassion, and real goodwill). This form of value is not permanent, but should be something that the individual adheres to. In order for Holmgren to base her model on respect for others, she first needs to acknowledge the two definitions that she is utilizing. She then needs to clarify why value in terms of respect should always come from the value of being human. If not, then we are left with the possibility that an individual can still

value his humanity by acting in an unforgiving way towards himself even if he does not *respect* his humanity.

Korsgaard's theory of the self provides several appealing concepts that can be used to promote self-forgiveness. Valuing humanity, including one's own humanity, as well as being able to shed one's practical identities help one to overcome guilt and move forward in a way that promotes the well-being of all those involved in the wrongdoing. However, the objections that arise from bringing the rational self and committed self together in the way that Korsgaard proposes are worth bearing in mind. The implications that these objections have for Holmgren's model of self-forgiveness make it necessary to further explore other models of forgiveness and the self.

Conclusion

Forgiveness has the power to promote reconciliation and healing after being injured by a wrongdoing. It involves letting go of one's resentment and working towards harmony. For these reasons, it is important to gain a better understanding of what forgiveness actually is and how it can be achieved. I have presented two possible models of interpersonal forgiveness based on Griswold's and Holmgren's theories. Griswold claims that forgiveness can be achieved by following a series of steps that culminate in recognizing one's own fallibility. Holmgren instead argues that forgiveness consists of affective, cognitive and motivational components that must be integrated. She claims compassion, kindness, love, and respect for humans is at the core of forgiveness. I've isolated three potential problems with their arguments. The first problem is that Griswold might emphasize circumstances to the point that he promotes condoning a wrongdoing. The second is that Griswold seems to overlook the role of conscience to the point that he rules out the possibility of the offender being forgiven by the victim even though he does not forgive

himself. Lastly, Holmgren seems to rely on a theory of the self that overemphasizes the power of the rational self. This has detrimental implications for her argument that forgiveness requires treating others with respect on the basis that they are human beings. All three of these topics will resurface during the following discussion on self-forgiveness.

Chapter II: The Complexities of Self-Forgiveness

Introduction to Self-Forgiveness

Interpersonal forgiveness, as we have seen, is a complex topic that leads to a number of open-ended questions. To complicate things a bit more, I will now transition into an even thornier topic, namely, self-forgiveness. Alice MacLachlan describes what is particularly vexing and painful about reflecting on our own wrongdoing by claiming that “we are often more critical of our own wrongdoing not because we hold ourselves to a higher standard, but because it rankles personally in a way that the failures of others do not: my misdeed is mine and I have good reason to take it personally and to be personally invested in how it is taken up, redressed and remembered” (8). In this passage, MacLachlan eloquently describes the burden of being hyperaware of our own actions. When a person is the judge of his own conduct, he is able to reflect on the situation as he experienced it. Being able to reflect in this way can result in the disturbing realization that he knows what he did was wrong, yet he still allowed himself to do it. No one else will be able to fully understand what combination of character traits, beliefs, and circumstances led him to commit that wrongdoing.

In cases of interpersonal forgiveness, the distance between the offender and the victim is especially important. As MacLachlan points out, the forgiver views the offender’s actions differently because it is not her own wrongdoing; the victim instead finds some security in knowing that it was someone else’s mistake. She can then scrutinize the offender with a different level of intensity than she might if she were the one who committed the wrongdoing. She can listen to the offender’s narrative and sympathize with him, but she will only be able to judge him with a limited understanding of the factors that led to the wrongdoing. She then has the privilege of being able to separate herself from the offender and turn her concern to other things whereas

the offender can easily become trapped blaming himself and trying to figure out how he allowed himself to behave in such a way.

The possibility that the offender won't have peace of mind after being granted forgiveness might make self-forgiveness necessary. Some cases of interpersonal forgiveness will likely result in the offender finding comfort in victim's compassion and understanding that the offender is not a moral monster. However, it seems that something else is needed in cases, as described above, when the offender is conscious of the fact that the victim cannot possibly understand the entire scenario and she is perhaps granting him forgiveness prematurely. If this were the case, then the offender would also have to find a way to forgive himself in order to let go of his self-blame.

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, self-forgiveness is often labeled the "stepchild" of forgiveness because it approaches, but does not actually represent, genuine forgiveness. Griswold adopts this mindset by placing self-forgiveness under the category of imperfect forgiveness. This makes sense given that one of the fundamental aspects of his model is that forgiveness is dyadic. Steps such as dropping one's moral superiority over the offender are particularly problematic when either the victim isn't engaged in the process or the offender and the victim are the same person.

Determining how self-forgiveness aligns with interpersonal forgiveness becomes even stranger when all of the different cases that would require self-forgiveness are taken into consideration. Griswold claims that there are three cases in which self-forgiveness might be appropriate, namely, when the offender harmed someone else, when the offender harmed herself, and when the offender could not help inflicting harm. He examines how these forms of self-forgiveness differ from each other and what steps the individual must take in order to achieve

self-forgiveness. Although Holmgren similarly acknowledges that both harm to someone else and harm to oneself merit self-forgiveness, she proposes that both forms of self-forgiveness follow the same pathway.

Several questions arise from the many layers involved in understanding self-forgiveness. How does one move towards self-forgiveness without either receiving or accepting forgiveness from another? How does one reconcile being both the forgiver and the forgiven while maintaining such an enmeshed conception of one's actions? Is self-forgiveness applicable in cases when one harms oneself? What does harm to oneself entail? I will now address some of these questions by detailing the numerous puzzles involved in self-forgiveness. I will then consider what Griswold and Holmgren have to say about self-forgiveness with an eye towards how their models handle the puzzles presented. This will set up the subsequent two chapters in which I will focus on three case studies relevant to self-forgiveness and then examine the strengths and weakness of Griswold's fallibility approach and Holmgren's respect-for-humans approach. I will pay particular attention to the critiques that Griswold relies too heavily on circumstances and that he overestimates the power of the victim on the offender's peace of mind. I will then examine the consequences of Holmgren's reliance on the reflective self.

A. The Puzzles of Self-Forgiveness

The overarching puzzle I will focus on is the variety of situations in which self-forgiveness might be necessary. One major difference between self-forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness is that self-forgiveness can be broken down into several different categories. The two broadest categories are self-forgiveness for harm done another and for harm done to oneself. The former case can be broken down into the following three subcategories: 1) the offender is unwilling to forgive; 2) the offender is unable to forgive; and 3) the offender is willing to

forgive. I will begin by spelling out different examples of self-forgiveness for harm done to others and transition into a general description of self-forgiveness for harm done to oneself. As I work through the different examples of self-forgiveness, I will identify numerous puzzles embedded within each category.

i. Scenarios of Self-Forgiveness for Harm Done to Another

For the first scenario, imagine that Ted was driving too fast and was distracted by checking his cell phone. He consequently ran a stop sign and struck Lisa's vehicle. Lisa was severely injured with spinal damage and damage to both knees. She will no longer be able to continue her career as a professional tennis player and is left not knowing what her next career path will be. Ted recognizes that he was wrong to drive distractedly and far above the speed limit. He provides an account of the circumstances to Lisa and apologizes for his wrongful actions. He claims that he tried to understand the physical and mental struggle that she must be experiencing as best as he could. He offers to help her in any way possible and commits to changing his own driving practices as well as promoting safe driving to others. Despite all of these efforts, Lisa is unwilling to accept anything that Ted has to say. She is unable to get over the consequences of the crash and blames Ted to his face. Ted contacts Lisa every year to apologize and see how she is doing, and each year she expresses resentment towards him. Ted is left with having taken the appropriate steps for forgiveness; however, he remains unforgiven. He still feels a great deal of guilt about the situation and needs to seek some manner of forgiveness in order to move forward.

Now imagine the same scenario except that the accident was severe enough to put Lisa into a coma that she will likely not wake up from. Ted still shows remorse, but this time he is not able to directly communicate with Lisa. This means that he is not able to apologize or provide his

account of what transpired. There is also no way for Lisa to communicate her perspective about the accident and either accept or reject Ted's apology. The possibility for interpersonal forgiveness is eliminated from the start provided that the victim is *unable* to forgive. The severity of the consequences for such mindless behavior causes Ted to feel extreme guilt that cannot be mitigated unless he finds a way to forgive himself.

The third case involves two stages of forgiveness. The first regards forgiveness between the victim and the offender and the second between the offender and himself. Return to the first scenario in which Lisa receives spinal and knee damage. She again starts out being very angry towards Ted for his carelessness. Ted goes through the previously described process of sympathizing with Lisa, apologizing, and committing to change his behavior in the future. This time, Lisa is accepting of his efforts and attempts to understand his perspective both before and after the accident. She realizes that she is not benefiting anyone by withholding forgiveness. She tells Ted that she accepts his apology and forgives him. Ted is glad that Lisa is able to forgive him; however, he is unable to stop replaying the scenario in his mind. He is frequently reminded of how preventable the accident was and realizes the tremendous impact he had on Lisa's life. He cannot understand how he could let such a thing happen. He continues to feel guilty about the event and believes that he needs to hold himself accountable for his actions. Ted still needs to find a way to forgive himself despite Lisa already having forgiven him.

All three of the scenarios would have an impact on Ted's ability to function after the accident. Continuously blaming himself could cause him to significantly lower his self-esteem and sense of self-worth. Asking what circumstances might cause him to experience varying levels of guilt and blame adds yet another component to this puzzle that I will illustrate by considering further versions of the story. For example, imagine that Ted is almost always a

cautious driver. He rarely uses his phone in the vehicle and tends to drive through town at about 5mph over the speed limit. The day of the accident he rushed because he was running late for an important business meeting and knew that being late could jeopardize his chance of receiving a promotion. Ted was searching for his boss's phone number so he could call about being late when he ran the stop sign and hit Lisa. The crash resulted from behaviors that were uncharacteristic of Ted. This could cause him to feel excessive guilt upon realizing how costly it was for him to lower his standards in those circumstances. The other possibility is that he finds comfort in recognizing how strong of a role the conditions played in that situation. He could convince himself that he is less blameworthy because the incident was out of character.

Alternatively, imagine that Ted prides himself on being a risk taker and that he tends to get distracted easily. He often drives fast simply because he likes the thrill of it. He had no reason to be in a hurry on the day he hit Lisa, and the only reason he checked his phone was because a buddy sent him a Snapchat. It is more difficult to attribute the crash to uncontrollable circumstances in this situation. Ted might find some relief in the thought that his thrill seeking and distractibility are inherent parts of him that he can't change; they are qualities that are beyond his control. This assertion has significant implications if it is pushed further, however. Ted could conclude that he was doomed to cause events like this to happen because the qualities in question are a fundamental part of his character. He would then be unable to view the crash as being an isolated act and instead would view it as the result of his condemnable traits. He would likely live in fear that something similar will happen again due to his inability to change these traits.

There is another way that Ted might also react in this situation. Perhaps he realizes that his risk taking behavior and distractedness are not inherent qualities. He developed these habits

over a span of at least 15 years and never attempted to change them. Taking risks made him feel macho, and he thought he was above having to pay careful attention to everything he did. This case could be especially challenging for Ted to handle because the traits that led him to cause the accident are traits that he *cultivated* and once took pride in. He either didn't take the time to reflect on how his habits might negatively impact others or didn't care enough to actually try to change them. He might find that the only way for him forgive his 15-year old habit-forming is to emerge as a "new person" who is extremely attentive and cautious.

A final thing to consider in this scenario is that Ted seems to hold himself to higher moral standards than Lisa does. This is evidenced by his intense feelings of shame and guilt even after he has taken all of the appropriate steps for forgiveness and Lisa has willingly forgiven him. Although we cannot directly infer this from the scenario as it is currently described, he might also have low self-esteem and doesn't think himself worthy of forgiveness. Both of these dispositions result in interpersonal forgiveness losing some of its beneficial power over the offender's well-being, causing the offender to turn to self-forgiveness. Why is it that Ted holds himself to this higher standard despite Lisa's change in attitude towards him? Is self-forgiveness actually an essential component of interpersonal forgiveness that is overlooked because it often overlaps with interpersonal forgiveness?

ii. The Complexities of Self-Forgiveness for Harm to Oneself

As complicated as self-forgiveness in the case of harming others is, forgiveness for harm done to oneself is more challenging to illustrate because it is difficult to understand what harming oneself even means. Harming and then forgiving oneself is philosophically strange because there is not the clear distinction between the injurer and the injured that is seen in interpersonal forgiveness. The offender and the victim are the same person. Does this suggest

that the individual must have a split-self made up of an injuring self and an injured self? Can an individual who harms herself be deceived in the same way that she could be in cases of interpersonal forgiveness? How can people do things like drop their moral superiority over the offender if they are the offenders? Is it possible for the injuring self and the injured self to merge narratives as is the case in interpersonal forgiveness? If not, what are the implications for only being able to provide one narrative?

Forgiveness for harm to oneself is also tricky because the notion of acting out of self-interest becomes skewed. Harming another is often motivated by some form of self-benefit or benefit to a group that one belongs to. Harming oneself involves a trade-off between perceived benefits and definite bodily and psychological harm. Consider cases such as doing drugs, cutting oneself, and starving or purging oneself. Any benefits in these situations (e.g. feeling high, stress relief, and thinness) come at a definite cost. However, it seems difficult to claim that the individual is intentionally harming herself if she approves of her actions due to some underlying motive. For example, if a person cuts herself as a coping mechanism for high stress, the harm done is a pathway to what is perceived as being a greater overall benefit. It is difficult to say what the person would be forgiving herself for in this case. Perhaps the individual must consider something to be predominantly beneficial at one point and then retroactively determine how harmful it actually was. If the harmful behavior stopped prior to this realization, then the current self might have to forgive the former self for its wrongdoings. If the behavior is ongoing, then we are still left with having the injured and injuring selves that need to interact.

These few cases are a starting point for thinking about self-forgiveness for harm done to oneself. I will turn to an actual case study in the following chapter to expand on the topic. The important thing to recognize at this point is that determining what constitutes self-harm is

challenging in and of itself. Understanding what it means to claim that a person has harmed herself and then proceeding to forgive herself for that harm is even more difficult. Does self-harm and self-forgiveness involve having a split self? If so, what are the implications for this in regards to Korsgaard's and Griswold's models of forgiveness? Can an individual knowingly harm herself if there is beneficial motive driving the behavior? I will later address these questions by examining a case study that I believe demonstrates self-harm and is useful in developing a stronger theoretical model of self-forgiveness. At this point, I will turn to Griswold's and Holmgren's theories of self-forgiveness and examine how they manage the puzzles depicted above.

B. Griswold's Theory of Self-Forgiveness

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Griswold considers self-forgiveness to be imperfect because it excludes the victim's role in the forgiveness process. He fears that it is far too easy for an offender to simply excuse herself or condone her behaviors when she is not being held accountable by the victim. The offender might be tempted to quickly resolve any feelings of guilt or shame that he had in relation to a wrongdoing by simply saying that he forgives himself without actually addressing the issue and trying to make amends. Griswold does, however, also recognize that there are certain moral and psychological implications for not forgiving oneself in certain situations. He admits that "we sometimes wonder whether a person's refusal to forgive herself betrays an objectionable sort of pride in being outstandingly principled, in never buckling under the weight of one's humanity. A failure to forgive oneself, when self-forgiveness is due, may lead to destruction of one's own capacity for agency, and even to self-annihilation" (122). The downsides of not forgiving oneself motivate Griswold to examine self-forgiveness in some detail.

A majority of the puzzles listed above were inspired by Griswold's description of self-forgiveness. He similarly breaks self-forgiveness into general categories that include self-forgiveness for harm done to another and self-forgiveness for harm done to oneself. He also adds a third category of self-forgiveness for an injury that could not be prevented. In the latter cases, the offender injures another while under extreme circumstances (e.g. being tortured). While I will provide a description of the third category, I will not refer to this category of self-forgiveness in later chapters. I will instead focus on cases in which it is more obvious that the offender is actually *responsible* for her crimes. The first category of self-forgiveness that Griswold describes is when the victim is unwilling to forgive. This would occur if the offender followed all of the necessary steps for forgiveness and the victim was unreasonable and did not grant forgiveness. Griswold proposes that the offender must "first of all examine [himself], and the injury [he] did as well as the remedial steps taken, from the standpoint of "any one of us" — that of a detached and impartial spectator" (123). In addition to this, the offender must vicariously or sympathetically feel the victim's pain. The offender can then forgive [himself] based on the perspective of an impartial spectator. He cannot, however, forgive himself in the name of the victim. This form of self-forgiveness is seen in the first Ted and Lisa example in which Ted feels guilty about the accident, explains what happened, tries to sympathize with Lisa, apologizes, and tries to make amends. Lisa still refuses to forgive him even after he follows all of the necessary steps for forgiveness. According to Griswold, the next appropriate step would be for Ted to take on the perspective of an impartial spectator and determine whether he should be forgiven regardless of Lisa's perspective. If Ted determined that forgiveness was appropriate, then he could forgive himself but only in the name of the impartial spectator and not Lisa (123).

The second category of self-forgiveness parallels the example in which Ted follows all of the necessary steps of forgiveness but Lisa can't forgive him because she is in a coma. Griswold that would say that this scenario falls under the category of self-forgiveness when the victim is either dead or is unable to forgive the offender due to some form of psychological condition. Once again, Ted would have to experience Lisa's pain either sympathetically or vicariously. In this scenario, however, Ted would adopt Lisa's viewpoint rather than an impartial spectator. This would require that he actually cared about Lisa and that he has some knowledge about her personality, beliefs, and character. If Ted were unable to develop a narrative on Lisa's behalf, then he would be left in the unfortunate circumstance of being forgivable but unforgiven (123-234).

Griswold raises the third case of self-forgiveness for harm done to another more as a point of caution. He claims that not forgiving oneself when the victim is willing to forgive would indicate that the offender is both proud and holds excessively high moral standards for himself. When Ted is unable to forgive himself even though Lisa forgives him, Griswold would likely suggest that Ted needs to accept the forgiveness that he has rightly been granted. Griswold also points out an alternative case in which an offender forgives himself prior to asking the victim for forgiveness. In this scenario, Ted would have prematurely granted himself forgiveness and then asked Lisa forgiveness as a sort of formality. This is especially problematic for Griswold because an offender should only fall back on self-forgiveness when genuine interpersonal forgiveness is not possible. (123-124). I think that there are some issues with Griswold's stance on self-forgiveness in cases when the victim is willing to forgive that I will hint at below.

It is possible that Ted is unable to forgive himself because he holds himself to too high of moral standards. I don't, however, think that Griswold adequately addresses *why* Ted holds

himself to higher standards than the victim does. A number of nuanced scenarios emerge from cases of self-forgiveness when the victim has already forgiven that Griswold never addresses. These include the examples in which Ted struggles to forgive himself because: the wrongdoing was out of character, the wrongdoing was in line with his character, and the wrongdoing resulted from habits he cultivated throughout his life. I think that these potential barriers to forgiving oneself even when the victim grants forgiveness supports my previous assertion that Griswold might be overestimating the power that the victim has on the offender's peace of mind. It seems that the offender's inability to forgive himself is largely because of his deep understanding of what led to the wrongdoing and his inability to reconcile with those factors. The victim will never be able to *fully* understand these factors, no matter how strong of a narrative the offender provides. Recognizing the different levels of understanding between the offender and the victim might help to explain why the offender does not feel like he can also forgive himself. This problem will resurface in the next chapter when I look at case studies of self-forgiveness. At this point, I will transition into Griswold's views of self-forgiveness for harm done to oneself.

Griswold proposes that harming others could be a form of injuring oneself if the offender believes that he has betrayed his moral principles and has become someone who he does not wish to be. If this is the case, then the offender can rightfully pursue self-forgiveness even if the victim is willing to forgive him. This might apply to the Ted and Lisa scenario when Lisa grants forgiveness if Ted thinks that he has harmed himself by losing sight of his moral principles. This case is rather abstract and seems to rely on a loose definition of injuring oneself. A person could, as I mentioned above, harm herself more directly with self-destructive behaviors like addiction, cutting oneself, and starving. Griswold claims that these cases are somewhat unusual in that the individual does not really resent herself in the same way that one resents another person. He

proposes that the individual instead moderates self-hatred as opposed to self-resentment (125). Although this is an interesting distinction, I will not be focusing on it later in this thesis. Lastly, I want to repeat that self-forgiveness for harm done to oneself is especially difficult to map onto Griswold's model of interpersonal forgiveness because the victim and the offender share the same narrative.

The third major category of self-forgiveness for an injury that could not have been prevented seems to be the most distinct from Griswold's interpersonal model of forgiveness. An example of this would be if a man who hated Lisa broke into Ted's car and hid in the back seat. The man had memorized Lisa's walking route and wanted Ted to hit her with his car. The man put a gun to Ted's head while Ted was driving and threatened that if Ted did not hit the woman walking on the side of the road hard enough to severely injure her, then he would kill Ted and his entire family. Ted was terrified and hit Lisa in order to protect himself and his family. He later felt crippling remorse and thought that he could have been cleverer in the situation and avoided having to injure Lisa. It would, however, be contradictory to ascribe Ted responsibility when he was under such extreme circumstances. Self-forgiveness is mostly required to mediate Ted's guilt even though he was not really at fault. Griswold's model of forgiveness could help Ted realize that his limitations of being a human contributed significantly to his actions. Although I will not be focusing on this form of forgiveness in later chapters, I think it is worth noting that this is an example of why pursuing self-forgiveness can be so beneficial from a practical standpoint. Even though self-forgiveness might not have been appropriate in this situation, seeking self-forgiveness could benefit Ted by helping him to mediate his feelings of guilt and shame.

C. Holmgren's theory of self-forgiveness

Holmgren's approach to self-forgiveness is much less systematic than Griswold's. While she does look at some different examples, she doesn't break down and meticulously analyze each possible case with the same attention that Griswold does. Holmgren also takes a very different stance on the status of self-forgiveness in relation to interpersonal forgiveness. She does not think that self-forgiveness is an imperfect form of forgiveness but instead thinks that it is an important part of the interpersonal forgiveness process. Because her theory is so different from Griswold's, I will not be assessing the Ted and Lisa scenarios in the same way in this case. Rather than seeing how Holmgren's theory applies to each case sequentially, I will provide a general explanation of her theory and then assess how it handles the cases collectively.

I alluded to one significant distinction between Griswold's and Holmgren's theory of self-forgiveness, namely, that Holmgren is much less systematic and meticulous in her approach to different cases of self-forgiveness. The reason behind this is that Holmgren intentionally tries to establish one model of self-forgiveness that will account for all possible scenarios. As will be explained below, this model is very similar to her interpersonal model that I described in the previous chapter. Holmgren's reliance on a respect-for-humans approach rather than a sympathy and fallibility approach is what allows her to do this. Holmgren does not rely on the narratives of the victim and the offender in the same way that Griswold does. Because individuals have to respect everyone by virtue of being human, they also have to respect themselves. This creates an opportunity for self-forgiveness to come into play, even in cases of interpersonal forgiveness.

Holmgren emphasizes the importance of self-forgiveness in her claim that "the offender must ultimately recognize for himself that he is worthy of respect, compassion, and real goodwill in spite of what he has done. If he fails to grasp this truth for himself, and instead relies on the

victim to tell him he is acceptable, his self-forgiveness will not be stable or genuine" (115-116).

This statement really highlights just how different Holmgren's views on self-forgiveness are from Griswold's. The first noticeable thing in her assertion is that the offender must recognize his own worthiness of respect regardless of what the victim thinks. Holmgren recognizes that the victim and the offender could be at two different levels regarding their abilities to mediate resentment and guilt respectively. Secondly, Holmgren proposes that self-forgiveness can be genuine as opposed to Griswold's claim that it is always imperfect. It actually appears that genuine self-forgiveness is not only possible in cases of interpersonal forgiveness, but it is also necessary.

What are the risks involved in putting so much power regarding forgiveness in the hands of the offender? Holmgren agrees with Griswold that there is certain danger involved in self-forgiveness. Since the offender does not depend on the approval of others, he might condone his actions by forgiving himself prematurely. Holmgren defends her theory by proposing that an attitude of self-forgiveness consists of the same three components as interpersonal forgiveness (i.e. cognitive, motivational, and affective). Furthermore, she maintains that like interpersonal forgiveness, self-forgiveness is always the appropriate response to a wrongdoing as opposed to perpetual self-condemnation and punishment. As is the case with feelings of resentment, holding on to feelings of self-condemnation is a violation of respect for the victims, respect for morality, and respect for humans as moral agents. Forgiveness of oneself is a corrective attitude that allows the individual to overcome his initial feelings of guilt and regret and replace them with respect for himself (104-105). Rather than wallowing in self-contempt and guilt, the offender decides to embrace his capacity to grow and begins to make changes that positively impact

himself and others. I will now go more deeply into the actual components of Holmgren's theory that promote self-forgiveness rather than contempt.

The cognitive component of self-forgiveness consists of an acknowledgment that the individual committed a wrongdoing and that he could and should have acted differently. It also requires that he recognizes that whomever the wrongdoing was committed against is a moral agent who is worthy of respect. He needs to realize that he has inflicted suffering on a human being and needs to make amends for his wrongdoing. Lastly, the offender needs to recognize that *he is also a moral agent who is worthy of self-respect*. This final aspect is only slightly different than the cognitive component of interpersonal forgiveness. The distinction is that interpersonal forgiveness is more directed towards recognizing the worth of others and self-forgiveness is more directed towards recognizing the worth of oneself. In recognizing one's own worth, the individual is provided with reason to forgive himself rather than remaining in a state of self-condemnation.

The motivational component of self-forgiveness coincides with the cognitive component in that the offender has a desire to make amends for the wrongdoing and promote the well-being of all parties involved. This allows the offender to still regret what he did but also be able to work towards a better form of living without being burdened by guilt. Lastly, the affective component of self-forgiveness can result from achievement of the first two. The offender transitions from feeling guilt, shame, and anger at himself to feeling self-respect and self-acceptance (105-106).

In order for the offender to genuinely forgive himself, he must integrate all three of these components. Holmgren thinks that this approach is superior to self-condemnation and

punishment because it provides a context in which the individual can make amends for his wrongdoing and progress in developing himself as a moral agent. She explains that

In reaching a state of genuine self-forgiveness, he extends an attitude of respect, compassion, and real goodwill to himself as a person at the same time that he thoroughly condemns his wrong act. In other words, he separates himself, the “sinner,” from the sin. *Rather than conflating himself with his past wrong actions and attitudes, he recognizes that he is a sentient being and moral agent who is distinct from those actions and attitudes* [emphasis added]. Therefore he can forgive himself at the same time that he utterly renounces his offense. (120)

The individual must not consider himself as consisting of his past actions and attitudes. He must instead view himself as a moral agent with the capacity to both grow and to choose not to act in the same way in the future. He must also recognize that other humans share these same capacities and that valuing himself in this manner is derived from the overarching value he has for humanity (125).

The interesting result of Holmgren's respect model of forgiveness is that all of the Ted and Lisa examples can be handled in essentially the same way. The distinction Holmgren makes that the offender's self-forgiveness is not dependent on the victim's forgiveness means that Ted can and should forgive himself regardless of whether Lisa grants him forgiveness. Unlike in Griswold's argument, it is not a problem if the offender has not forgiven him as long as he has integrated the cognitive, motivational, and affective components of self-forgiveness. He does not need to have a thorough knowledge about Lisa or rely on the impartial spectator in any case because his forgiveness is dependent on how he views himself and not how another person views him. He can therefore always at least forgive himself even if Lisa is unable or unwilling to

forgive him. Holmgren goes as far to say that this model of self-forgiveness is equally as appropriate in cases of forgiveness for harm to oneself. There would only have to be some minor changes made regarding how the individual addresses the harm done given that there is no other person to apologize to and make amends with.

One point of caution regarding Holmgren's theory is that she still relies on Korsgaard's theory of the self in order to argue that all humans should be treated with respect. If Korsgaard's theory of the self cannot be upheld, then Holmgren's respect model of forgiveness would be severely compromised. Holmgren would be left with an empty model of self-forgiveness in which she cannot provide a strong argument for why the offender should respect consequently forgive himself. This could be especially challenging in cases of self-forgiveness because the reason the offender needs to forgive himself is because he is hyperaware of the situation and is experiencing extreme guilt and shame. It would be very difficult for him to override that guilt and shame and treat himself with love and respect if he does not have a legitimate reason to do so. I will expand on why Holmgren's reliance on Korsgaard's version of the self could be a detrimental threat to her self-forgiveness model in the following chapters.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented numerous puzzles that emerge from a close examination of self-forgiveness. I began by suggesting that self-forgiveness is so complicated in part because the offender is unable to distance himself from the wrongdoing in the same way that the victim is able to. I then used Griswold's categories of self-forgiveness to come up with different scenarios in which self-forgiveness might be appropriate and then proceeded to apply Griswold's and Holmgren's theories to the scenarios. Griswold provides a methodological explanation of how to achieve forgiveness in a majority of these cases. He thoroughly details the steps that the offender

must go through (e.g. relying on an impartial spectator and sympathizing with the victim) in order to make self-forgiveness align with interpersonal forgiveness as much as possible. One of the major problems that Griswold faces is that he might initially overestimate the power that the victim has on the offender's peace of mind. This would challenge his original claim that self-forgiveness should be an imperfect form of forgiveness that the offender should only fall back on if absolutely necessary. Holmgren seems to provide a solution to this problem by focusing on each individual's need to treat both themselves and others with respect. Her model allows for the possibility that the victim and the offender each need to go through their own forgiveness process. This means that the offender always has the opportunity to at least genuinely forgive himself, even if the victim does not forgive him. A potential issue with Holmgren's model is that she bases her respect for humanity argument on an unsustainable version of the self. Consequently, the offender would have trouble finding an actual reason to treat himself with love and respect as opposed to self-contempt. I will now turn to actual case studies in order to further explore the problems that each theorist faces.

Chapter III: Case Studies of Self-Forgiveness

Introduction to Case Studies

Now that I've presented some of the general puzzles involved in self-forgiveness, I will move away from theoretical examples and turn to three case studies in which self-forgiveness might be appropriate. These case studies will be useful in understanding both the psychological and philosophical complexities of self-forgiveness. They will also provide a starting point for evaluating how Griswold's fallibility model of forgiveness and Holmgren's respect model of forgiveness apply to real-life scenarios. The first example comes from a study conducted by Keren Gueta. Gueta interviewed 25 recovering drug-addicted mothers in Israel. Her interviews focused specifically on self-forgiveness in order to determine what aided and what hindered self-forgiveness. The mothers were particularly challenged by trying to forgive themselves for the negative effects that drug use had on their parenting. They specifically struggled to forgive themselves for neglecting their children due to drug abuse. The second example demonstrates self-forgiveness for harm done to oneself. It is based on research conducted by Alvin Lander on a 26-year-old named Miriam. Miriam was diagnosed with having a serious eating disorder that became life-threatening. I will discuss the development of her eating disorder and how her therapy incorporated self-forgiveness into the recovery process. The final example depicts forgiveness in cases of extreme harm. This case is based on interviews conducted by Jean Hatzfeld with perpetrators in the Rwandan genocide. Hatzfeld presents the accounts of perpetrators before, during, and after the genocide in his book *Machete Season*. I will draw specifically from the story of Pio's involvement in the genocide and his views on forgiveness. This example is a bit of an anomaly because Pio never specifically refers to self-forgiveness. This is somewhat surprising because it initially appears like he would have reason to forgive

himself for harm to others when they are not able and willing to forgive. Lastly, I will conclude by discussing what makes Griswold's and Holmgren's models of forgiveness appealing in relation to the cases provided.

A. Israeli Drug-Addicted Mothers

A great deal of value is placed on being an Israeli mother due to religious traditions and efforts to increase the Jewish population. Being a mother is a major part of many women's identity and sense of morality. The emphasis on the mother's role is likely to contribute to feelings of guilt and shame when a mother is neglectful or abusive. These feelings are exacerbated because Israeli society often rejects mothers when they do not carry out their roles well (4). The mothers in this study experienced intense feelings of shame and guilt mostly because of their inability to fulfill their roles as good mothers. Gueta describes that "discussing past motherhood patterns evoked intense feelings and many of the participants needed a break at that point of the interview" (6-7). For many, this was the most difficult part of the therapy process. One participant expressed, "She [the woman's daughter] didn't deserve a mother like this...I hated myself that I was an addict and raising a child. She was growing and understood why I was feeling bad all the time. I hated that it was hard for me to take care of her" (8). The participant not only expresses feelings of self-hate and guilt, but also an acceptance of responsibility that was observed among the rest of the women as well.

Not all of the women in the study were able to forgive themselves. Some of the mothers experienced persistent guilt which consequently put them at greater risk for relapse (10). Others were able to work past their guilt and shame and form better relationships with their children as well as view themselves in a more kindhearted way. The two critical factors in this self-forgiveness process seem to be a change in behavior and a change in narrative. Actually working

to recover from addiction was one important change in behavior. This helped provide the mothers with the capacity to alter other behaviors linked to the addiction. For example, some were able to change how they parented their younger children even if they had been neglectful or abusive to their older children. Some were also able to reconcile with the children and develop a healthy relationship with them. Reconciling was significant because it sometimes helped the mothers feel like they had permission to forgive themselves because their children had forgiven them.

The second major thing that self-forgiveness often depended on was how the mothers constructed their narratives about their past actions and their current situations. One belief that was helpful for many mothers was that what they did was in the past and was unchangeable. They were faced with the choice of either constantly dwelling on that realization or accepting it and working to change their present behavior (13). Another important recognition was that the mothers never *intended* to abuse or neglect their children. Many of them indicated that they were out of control and weak at that time. They did not maliciously try to harm their children and desperately wished that they never had (9).

Although many of the mothers were able to at least work towards self-forgiveness, several of them were not able to overcome their guilt. This was in part because they believed that they both deserved to feel guilty and to be disrespected by their children. They were caught up in their own responsibility for their actions despite their circumstances and the capacity they had to alter their behaviors. For some, extreme guilt ended up leading to relapse rather than positive life changes (10). The stark difference in how self-forgiving mothers versus unforgiving mothers portrayed their situation can be seen in their testimonies. A self-forgiving mother claimed, “All the time I realized that I was a sick person—That’s not me, I’m a sensitive and caring human

being, I'm not a bad woman, I wouldn't hurt my children...To constantly turn the blame on yourself is a kind of misery and self-pity and I am not like that! I'm a fighter!' ” (12). Another mother presented a very different account in claiming, ““I cried and I asked for her forgiveness but I have already hurt her, like they hurt me when I was young. I already did this to my child. Maybe I am a monster' ” (11). The first mother rejected blame as being a kind of weakness and as a barrier that prevents her from acknowledging who she truly is. The second mother was bound to the irreversibility of her actions and questions whether those actions actually reflect her true character.

Apart from the mother who claimed to be a “fighter,” it seems that a majority of the women were not able to fully overcome their guilt and self-blame. Constructing a narrative that focused on the external causes of their addiction and the power of their addiction helped significantly. Even so, many still reported experiencing waves of guilt over time. The belief that their actions were unchangeable not only helped them to move beyond their past, but also limited their ability to fully move forward. They faced the tension between trying to move forward from their unchangeable past and always knowing that they could never erase their harm no matter how many amends they made. This recurrence of guilt and shame suggests that self-forgiveness in this case has to be viewed as an ongoing process rather than something that can be achieved (11).

B. Miriam's Recovery from Anorexia

i. Eating Pathology

Eating disorders are often associated with monitoring food intake, extreme thinness, and purging. Alone, these characteristics only provide a very surface level view of eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. Eating pathology results from a complicated mix of

environmental, emotional, and cognitive factors. Some background information about anorexia and bulimia is necessary in order to be able to understand Miriam's story in the context of self-harm and self-forgiveness. I want to make it clear that I will only be providing a minimal account of eating disorders. The purposes of this paper restrict me from being able to do address all of the complexities among different categories and individual cases of eating disorders.

Alexithymia is a condition in which an individual has difficulties describing, regulating, and processing emotions. The major consequence of alexithymia is a chronic sense of being overwhelmed. Alexithymia is a common trait among individuals with eating disorders and is thought trigger abnormal eating habits as a coping mechanism. A second emotional component of eating pathology is having high levels of anger; however, individuals with eating disorders are incredibly good at suppressing their anger towards others. They instead tend to direct their anger towards themselves in the form of self-criticism and self-punishment. Moreover, individuals who struggle with anorexia are often diagnosed with comorbid anxiety and depression (Lander 120).

The cognitive components of eating disorders are entwined with the affective components. Individuals with eating disorders engage in self-punishing behaviors in part because they think that they deserve to be punished. They often have very high levels of perfectionism which results in holding themselves to significantly higher standards than others hold them. These perfectionistic tendencies are associated with high levels of rumination about both their bodily flaws and their shortcomings more broadly defined. Lastly, individuals with eating disorders tend to have high levels of shame and guilt and low levels of self-esteem and self-worth (Watson et al.).

The combination of the affective and cognitive components of eating pathology can make it especially tricky to convince individuals to enter into treatment without using force. Writer

Andrew Solomon eloquently explains why this is the case in his description of depression. He claims that, “you think that the veil has been taken away, the veil of happiness and that now you’re seeing truly....it’s difficult with depressives because [they] believe [they] are seeing the truth” (Solomon). Solomon also explains that depressives know that their behaviors and inhibitions are abnormal and somewhat ludicrous. Solomon’s description of the struggles faced by depressives compares nicely to the struggles faced by individuals with eating disorders. Many realize that their behaviors are abnormal and ridiculous, yet they are trapped by the conviction that there is some form of truth in their behaviors that others can’t see. This dynamic once again raises the question of what constitutes self-harm if individuals are held back from changing their destructive behaviors because they see some form of underlying benefit in it all.

ii. Forgiveness Therapy

Forgiveness therapy has become increasingly popular in clinical settings within the past couple of decades. It was originally used to reduce feelings of anger and to help individuals view their injuries in a different way. Psychologist Robert Enright helped to develop one of the most commonly used models of forgiveness therapy. One interesting parallel between Enright’s model and Griswold’s model is that they both use a series of steps to achieve forgiveness. Enright’s process model of forgiveness includes an uncovering phase, a decision phase, a work phase, and a deepening phase. In the uncovering stage, an individual addresses the wrongs that were done to her and describes how she felt about those wrongdoings. In the decision stage, the counselor describes the forgiveness process and tells the individual about the potential benefits of forgiveness. The individual can then choose whether or not she wishes to pursue forgiveness. If she does choose to pursue forgiveness, then she will move into the work phase. This stage involves activities like role-taking and reframing so that the injured individual can develop

empathy and compassion toward the injurer. The counselor will also teach the injured person skills so that she can handle any future pain associated with the wrongdoing in a healthy manner. Lastly, the individual will develop a more positive outlook of the situation in the deepening stage (Lander 121).

Alvin Lander used an adapted version of Enright's model to help Miriam forgive herself. The major difference between the two models is that Lander focuses on the offender forgiving herself whereas Enright focuses on the victim forgiving the offender. One important adjustment Lander made was to incorporate another form of therapy known as compassionate mind training (CMT). CMT is often used for individuals who are highly self-critical and self-blaming. The main objective of CMT is to promote love and kindness toward oneself rather than being hostile toward oneself. As is described below, the CMT component of therapy was critical in helping Miriam forgive herself.

iii. Miriam's Account

Miriam was an only child whose family immigrated to Israel from the Soviet Union shortly before her birth. Her father's alcohol abuse caused strain in her parents' marriage which eventually led to their divorce when she was in kindergarten. Her mother was often verbally combative towards her father and demanded that he permanently leave the home. Despite her mother's urges for her father to say away, Miriam sometimes met him in secret at a local restaurant. For the most part though, neither parent was consistently present throughout her childhood. Her mom worked many hours and was rarely home until Miriam entered high school. Miriam often kept to herself in her bedroom and had few positive interactions with friends.

Miriam's disordered eating habits really began to develop towards the end of her elementary school years. She was criticized by her mother for not liking to eat and for eating

very little. She began weighing her food and counting calories when she was 12.5 years old. She viewed herself as being fat and made it a goal to achieve a minimum weight. When she reached 7th grade, she began frequently vomiting in secret.

A major life event occurred when she turned 16 and began dating a 40-year-old former drug addict. He was both physically and emotionally abusive to her and resisted her attempts to break up with him. The relationship ended prior to her entering college at age 18. Miriam was able to pass her classes despite severely struggling with her eating disorder. In her second year at college, however, she noticed the physical toll that her eating disorder was having on her body. She lost much of her long hair and was warned that she might have complications with reproduction later in life due to her disrupted menstrual cycle. The physical side-effects culminated in her passing out in the street and having to go the hospital by ambulance. Her electrolytes were at such a low level that she was at risk for having a heart attack. Soon after, she entered a residential treatment program and was able to develop more normal eating behaviors and reach a healthier weight (Lander 124-125).

After 18 months of being out of treatment, Miriam decided to enter into therapy. She was proud of her healthier BMI and ability to maintain normal eating habits. She also had a full-time job as a computer programmer and took good care of her two dogs. Although things were better for Miriam, she still socialized very little with others and hardly spoke to her mother. She claimed that the most difficult thing was her inability to forgive herself for her injurious behaviors. Her therapist, Alvin Lander, described her reaction upon entering therapy in the following way:

She spoke of an intense ache that she had felt consistently for the past 10 months over the way she had harmed herself and had inflicted substantial physical and psychological

damage on her own person. She was highly concerned that some of these self-inflicted injuries might be irreversible. She worried that she had ruined her own physical health—her long thick hair, her teeth, and perhaps even her reproductive system. Miriam openly wondered about the intelligence of a person who could put their bodies and their lives through such maltreatment for such a lengthy period of time (123).

Miriam admitted that her behaviors were self-injurious and took responsibility for wronging herself.

Lander determined that forgiveness therapy might be beneficial for Miriam. He thought it would be important for her to be able to reduce some of her negative emotions and beliefs and work towards a more positive view of herself and more active engagement with her emotions. The model of forgiveness therapy he used consisted of four stages. The first stage was called *uncovering*. In this stage, Miriam worked on being able to recognize her emotions and understand the negative impact her eating disorder has had on her life. This stage made it clear that intense feelings of anger and guilt had been detrimental to Miriam's life for many years. Miriam then progressed to the second stage in which she faced the decision of whether she would pursue self-forgiveness. In the *decision stage*, she began to understand what the consequences were of her not forgiving herself. She spoke with several people about the importance of self-forgiveness and learned that not to forgive herself would be similar to a slow form of suicide. These conversations helped her realize that she would have to make dramatic changes in her life. One of the most substantial of these changes would be learning to love herself. Doing so would hopefully lead her to have a new sense of purpose and vitality in her life (128-130).

The final two stages consisted of Miriam learning about the work that self-forgiveness would require and about the potential lifestyle she could have if she were able to forgive herself. In the *work stage*, Lander taught her that she will likely relapse into feeling self-directed guilt and anger even if she were to forgive herself. He also taught her strategies of how to deal with such relapses when they occurred rather than letting anger and guilt persist. The *deepening stage* was especially important for Miriam. She spoke to Holocaust survivors about how they were able to grow from their experiences that involved wrongdoing, suffering, anger, and guilt. One of the most important things she learned from one of the women was that “one must do anything and everything possible to protect one’s health, both physical and mental. What is more, the power needed for doing this comes from love, starting with love of the self and extending to love of others” (132). Miriam took this lesson seriously and began to develop a sense of self-love and self-respect. She ended therapy claiming that she had forgiven herself for her self-injurious behaviors. She then proceeded to make several positive life changes that included improving her work attendance, developing stronger relationship with her mother, beginning graduate school, having a more robust social life, and moving into her own apartment. Lastly, she reported a dramatic shift in her overall happiness and in her capacity to love herself (132-135).

C. Pio and the Rwandan Genocide

i. The Genocide

Tension between different ethnic, political, and socioeconomic groups existed long before the Rwandan genocide took place. The group that had primary political power and privileges went back and forth between the Hutu and the Tutsi throughout history. In the early 1990s, Hutus dominated the political sphere and made Tutsis the target of ridicule and hatred on the radio and in newspapers. The propaganda towards Tutsis was infectious among the Hutu

population. One of the most influential accusations was that the Tutsi led Rwandan Patriotic Front of planning to reestablish a Tutsi government. While some were persuaded by threat to express their “Hutuness” by discriminating against any Tutsis and moderate Hutus, others joined the cause on their own accord with fervor.

On the night of April 6, 1994, Hutu President Habyarimana’s plane was shot down by a missile. Hutu leaders blamed the Tutsis and used the event to initiate the massive wave of violence that occurred over the next three months. The Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement (MRND) and the Interahamwe were two of the leading groups that spread propaganda about the need to exterminate all Tutsis. They were also largely responsible for setting up blockades and requiring Rwandans to present their identity cards whenever asked. The violence quickly escalated and received little response from outside countries (Smeulers and Hoex 435).

Two things that stand out about the Rwandan genocide are the forms of killing that took place and the rapidity of the killings. Researchers Alette Smeulers and Lotte Hoex describe that, “Victims were not often simply killed, but were hunted down, beaten, raped, and mutilated before being killed by gunshots or machetes. Bellies of pregnant women were slashed open, babies and small children were smashed against walls and relatives were forced to watch how their loved ones were raped, tortured, and killed” (435). It is even more challenging to comprehend that the death toll reached over 800,000 people within 90 days (434).

Despite this horrific history, Rwanda has achieved almost unbelievable reconciliation in the years since this conflict. Many people currently look at Rwanda in awe of its apparent stability. While it is true that Rwanda has made tremendous strides in their reconciliation efforts, one should not be deceived by the outward appearance of harmony within the country. Many

often criticize Rwanda's government for having been somewhat forceful in their attempts to promote forgiveness. This is largely because the government mandated that individuals do not talk about their ethnic groups in public. If they do, then they are subject to punishment by the government. Many view this as a "Band-Aid" approach to preventing conflict. It implies that tension does not exist between the two groups just because people are not openly talking about any lingering resentment. Some also think that the Gacaca court system that was implemented after the genocide became a forum for superficial rather than genuine apologies. This is because perpetrators were enticed by receiving a reduced sentence if they admitted to their crimes, apologized, and asked for forgiveness. It is difficult to say whether perpetrators truly felt remorse for their actions or if they simply wanted to have a shorter prison sentence.

Despite these potential flaws in forgiveness and reconciliation efforts, one should not overlook the remarkable healing that has taken place. Private organizations seem to be looked upon more favorably for their success in promoting *genuine* forgiveness between perpetrators and victims. For example, some organizations consist of families of perpetrators and victims who speak about the importance of harmony and reconciliation rather than violence. One example of this is an organization consisting of widowers, the men who killed the women's husbands, and the wives of the perpetrators. They share their personal narratives with others and teach about forgiveness. Other organizations bring together perpetrators and the families of the individuals they killed. Moderators will work with the two groups to teach them about forgiveness. These teachings often include lessons about God's capacity to forgive and how God wants people to show mercy and forgive one another. The results of this program have been incredible. Perpetrators have even lived with the families of the people they killed so that both parties could better understand each other and begin to unite together.

Interpersonal forgiveness efforts in Rwanda are viewed with a mixture of skepticism and praise. The extreme nature of the genocide also raises a number of questions about the possibility of genuine self-forgiveness for wrongdoings committed during the genocide. How does one forgive oneself for brutally torturing and killing numerous people? Moreover, how does one forgive oneself for transforming from being an ordinary and respectable individual to being a génocidaire? Referencing an individual account will be useful in examining these questions and gaining a better understanding the status of self-forgiveness in situations involving extreme wrongdoings.

ii. Pio's Account

Pio Mutungirehe loved playing for the Kibungo soccer team. He played alongside Tutsis without any animosity towards them. They worked together to do well in the sport that they all cared about. It wasn't until the killings started that Pio's feelings towards Tutsis dramatically changed. He was 20 years old when he joined in on the collective hatred of Tutsis.

How could so many Rwandans like Pio devote themselves to a cause as atrocious as genocide? What led many of them to transform from being reputable human beings to killers? Pio claimed that one of the main reasons he began killing was simply to fit in. He imitated others so that he belonged to the group in power. There were a number of things that factored into his following the actions of the collective. The first is simply that so many other people were committed to being involved in the genocide. Not participating would have meant rejecting the views of the majority and resisting incredible peer pressure. A second factor was that Pio was enticed by benefits such as food, money, and power. He admitted that greed was a major driving force behind his actions.

The most substantial factor was the influence of Rwandan leaders. As discussed in the background section, the leaders of the genocide used propaganda on the radio and in the newspapers to make their cause known. They convinced people that the rise of Hutu power was a good thing and that the only way to facilitate that rise was to exterminate the Tutsis. Anyone who did not take part was not a true Hutu and would be considered allies of the enemy. The danger of the propaganda was that it was convincing to a large number of people. People like Pio felt a sense of connection to the cause at hand. Many didn't simply partake in the killings in order to avoid being accused of associating with Hutus; they took part because they thought it was right thing to do. Brainwashing in this way was what made the genocide possible. Pio and others were moved by the idea of working together to achieve complete success in their mission. They were convinced that Rwanda could not achieve its highest potential as a country if the Tutsis remained a problem. Such convictions fueled anger and hatred that made it even more challenging for them to look upon the Tutsi population sympathetically (Hatzfeld 229).

A disturbing aspect of Pio's story is his claim that killing became normal and gratifying. The génocidaires took pride in their work and wanted to kill (63). The entire process involved savagery. The perpetrators were savage, the targets were viewed as savages, and the methods of killing them were savage. Pio described his own transformation in the following way:

...it is as if I had let another individual take on my own living appearance, and the habits of my heart without a single pang in my soul. This killer was indeed me, as to the offense he committed and the blood he shed but he is a stranger to me in his ferocity. I admit and recognize my obedience at that time, my victims, my fault, but I fail to recognize the wickedness of the one who raced through the marshes on my legs, carrying my machete. That wickedness seems to belong to another self with a heavy heart. The most serious

changes in my body were my invisible parts, such as the soul or the feelings that go with it. I alone do not recognize myself in that man (48).

He was consumed by the mission and lost the capacity to sympathize with the Tutsis. An evil self, he says, took over him and saw goodness in his actions. He accepted that this transformation took place and did not expect that others would be capable of understanding (48).

Pio pleaded guilty to several murders on March 29, 2002. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison but was released early on May 5, 2003 after serving four months in a reeducation camp in Bicumbi. Despite the horrific acts that took place, Pio was hopeful that life could once again be good among Rwandans. He did not wish to hide from what he'd done and committed to apologizing when given the opportunity. He both took responsibility for his wrongdoings and acknowledged that his fate was unlucky. He knew that he was at fault to a certain degree for his actions; however, he also believed that he and many others had simply been overcome by temptation as a result of the circumstances that they were in (191).

The extreme nature of the genocide made forgiveness seem somewhat miraculous. Pio understood that seeking forgiveness was natural for génocidaires, but that granting forgiveness was an immense act of mercy. He described forgiveness after the genocide in the following way:

I see too many difficulties for us to exchange forgiveness on the hills. Too many bad memories will grow again on the fine words...Someone who grants you forgiveness on a day of mercy, who can say he won't take it back some other day in anger, because of a drunken squabble? I can't imagine any forgiveness capable of drying up all this spilled blood. I see only God to forgive me—it's why I ask that of Him every day. Offering Him all my sincerity, without hiding any of my misdeeds from Him. I don't know if He says yes or no, but I do know that I ask Him very personally (206-207).

Interpersonal forgiveness seems to be an unreliable thing to count on in this case. Only God, who is not easily influenced by human emotions and who completely understands the situation, has the power to grant genuine forgiveness. Pio's reliance on God suggests that this is not an explicit case of self-forgiveness. I will discuss below how the models of forgiveness are able to handle this case and why Pio might have chosen to pursue forgiveness from God rather than self-forgiveness.

D. Connections to Griswold's and Holmgren's Theories of Forgiveness

These three cases each bring to light different elements of self-forgiveness. I will now introduce some of the ways that both Griswold's and Holmgren's theories can be applied to each. I will also mention some of the potential shortcomings in each theory's ability to handle instances of self-forgiveness. Among these shortcomings I will focus on the three problems I isolated in Chapter 1: namely, Griswold's reliance on circumstances, his overemphasis on the victim's power on the offender's peace of mind, and Holmgren's reliance on Korsgaard's theory of the self.

i. Applications to Israeli Drug-Addicted Mothers' Case

How might Holmgren's emphasis on Korsgaard's theory of the self and Griswold's fallibility approach be applied to the case of the Israeli drug-addicted mothers? I introduced the drug-addicted mothers' case by emphasizing the importance of the maternal role in Israel. Recall that mothers in Israel often feel a great deal of pressure from society to fulfill their role well. This pressure is heightened by the backlash that they face when they are perceived as being unfit mothers. It is likely that the strength of these pressures contributed to the intense guilt that the drug-addicted mothers felt for their poor parenting. This poses an interesting problem for Korsgaard's theory of the self and thus, potentially, to Holmgren's theory. According to

Korsgaard's theory, the mothers should have been motivated to act in accordance with their practical identity of being a good mother. However, there was a definite gap between the mothers' conceptions of what it meant to be a good mother and what their behaviors actually represented. This gap between the mothers' beliefs and their behaviors challenges Korsgaard's argument that practical identities determine people's behaviors. Korsgaard's theory would suggest that the women should be able to take on the role of being good mothers if they chose to and that doing so would motivate them to fulfill that role. If so, the women would have refrained from drug use and would have taken better care of their children. It is strange that the women instead understood what it meant to be a good mother and wanted to be good mothers yet were unable to do so.

One possible reason for this conflict is, as I discussed in Chapter 1, that Korsgaard overestimates the power of the reflective self. It seems that the version of the self that Holmgren relies on in order to promote respect and compassion can actually lead to feelings of guilt and shame instead. Earlier I described the tension between Korsgaard's emphasis on our capacity to choose and Holmgren's claim that forgiveness requires us to think of factors that were outside of one's control in a given situation. Holmgren's claim suggests that there are barriers (e.g. emotions, desires, and external pressures) that prevent individuals from being able to fulfill the roles that they've endorsed. This makes sense in the case of the drug-addicted mothers because they had a conception of the role that they wanted to fulfill but couldn't largely due to external influences and the nature of addiction. The mothers themselves may have overestimated their own capacity to be the parent that they thought they could and should have been. It is likely that the realization that they were unable to live up to those expectations was the source of their extreme guilt and shame.

Griswold's model might be more promising here in that the mothers would have to recognize their inherent fallibility in the situation. They would have to develop a narrative of how they developed their addiction and to what extent their behaviors were actually in their control during the times that they were using. This could allow them to consider what factors outside of their control might have contributed to their behaviors. It could also help them to see that they are humans who made mistakes in their past but are not necessarily defined as individual by those mistakes. Similar to cases of interpersonal forgiveness, it would be important for them to recognize that they are not the only humans who have made mistakes but rather that *all humans* are fallible. The combination of these realizations would help them to accept that all humans are bound to make mistakes and, consequently, let go of their self-directed anger.

One point at which both Holmgren's and Griswold's theories appear to show promise is the importance of the mothers' changing their behaviors in the future. Behavioral change links to the cognitive component of Holmgren's theory. Holmgren indicates that one of the important aspects of forgiveness is recognizing that the offender is a human being who is capable of growing and making different choices in the future. Similarly, the mothers' efforts to change their behaviors helped them move past the harms that they previously committed and try to live better in the future. It seems that recognizing their capacity to change and actually acting on that capacity was important in allowing the mothers to view themselves as being more than just their wrongdoings. They were able to recognize that they were not necessarily bound to their drug-addictive behaviors and were capable of developing a more positive lifestyle. Changing their behaviors might have also caused them to feel like they were making amends for their past actions by committing to treat their children better. This could have helped mediate their feelings of guilt and shame, especially if their children were receptive to their mother's efforts.

Griswold also touches upon the notion of changing one's behaviors in his six steps that the offender must follow. In order to prevent condonation, the offender must try not to repeat the same wrongdoing in the future. This would require that the mothers actually *commit* to changing their behaviors in the future. The mothers would thus be fulfilling one of Griswold's steps towards forgiveness if they decided that they were going to try to overcome their addiction and be better parents. It is important to point out that the mothers' actual capacity to change is largely dependent on the circumstances that they are in and their own inherent flaws. Griswold addresses this challenge in his discussion of moral monsters. He admits that while all humans are capable of sympathy and thus cannot be moral monsters, some humans might have an evilness in them that is impossible to overcome. If this is the case with any of the mothers, then they would not even be forgivable.

Griswold's theory is also relevant to the emphasis placed on narrative formation. The mothers often reconstructed their narratives so that they no longer viewed themselves as being horrible mothers and subsequently horrible human beings. This reframing aligns directly with Griswold's fallibility model in part because they began to incorporate their circumstances and their conditions into their understanding of why they were poor parents at that time. They were able to formulate a more holistic conception of themselves that did not focus solely on their behaviors at that point in time. They instead recognized that they had made mistakes but that those mistakes did not completely make up who they were as individuals.

One final thing to consider in this case is the comparison between the mother who claimed that she might be a monster and the mother who claimed that she was a fighter. The former mother's view links to Griswold's assertion that the victim needs to alter her view of the offender so that the offender is no longer seen as a moral monster but instead as a fallible human

being. One could similarly argue that the mother needs to view herself as more than her actions during the time of her addiction.

One challenge to the application of Griswold's theory in this situation is that the mother's behaviors cannot be reduced to a single event. Having to accept responsibility for ongoing wrongdoings seems different than having to accept responsibility for an isolated wrongdoing. She might find it more difficult to admit that her circumstances played a substantial role in her actions and instead think that her actions were primarily due to a character flaw. That stark recognition that it was actually an internal quality that prompted her to act as she did might make it especially challenging to look beyond the wrongdoings. She not only has to forgive herself because she was vulnerable under certain circumstances, but also because she has something fundamentally wrong with herself. None of this is helped by the fact that she does not have the privilege of distance from the offender that a victim has in cases of interpersonal forgiveness. She instead faces the guilt and shame associated with her wrongdoings every time she thinks of them.

Why is it that the mother who claimed to be a fighter did not allow her actions to define her in the same way that the mother who claimed to be a monster did? It is true that the mother who claimed to be a fighter was able to develop a more comprehensive narrative of herself that did not focus solely on her wrongdoings. This once again aligns with the narrative formation component of Griswold's argument. However, it seems as though there is something more going on in this case. The mother does admit to having made mistakes, but she rejects that those mistakes were a part of her. She instead identifies as something totally different that helps her to overcome harsh self judgment. She tries to push past the notion that she is fallible and instead move towards a more positive identity that she believes to be true.

This mother's approach might demonstrate one of the strengths of Holmgren's argument. More specifically, this mother was able to shed the practical identity of being a drug addict and poor parent and hold on to the practical identity of being a fighter. She clearly viewed herself as being more than her actions and instead focused on one positive, fundamental characteristic of herself. This perspective aligns with Korsgaard's assertions that practical identities can be shed and that all individuals are worthy of respect on the bases of their being humans. Holmgren depends on the latter point to conclude that everyone is worthy of being treated with love, respect, kindness, and compassion. Holmgren also depends on Korsgaard's assertion that humans consist of a reflective self in order to argue that individuals should be recognized for their capacity to change. This mother seems to demonstrate the value of both of these assertions. By conceptualizing herself as a fighter, she recognizes her capacity to change and to make better decisions in the future. She simultaneously treats herself with love and respect by viewing herself as something more than her actions and choosing an identity that will likely lead to a more positive life than if she were to constantly blame herself. In short, Griswold's theory helps mothers to find comfort in the fact that imperfections are an inherent part of being human while Holmgren's theory allows the mothers to take on a practical identity (e.g. being a fighter) that can lead them to promote their well-being and treat themselves with love and respect.

ii. Applications to Miriam's Case

Not surprisingly, there are several nuances in how each model applies to Miriam's case of self-forgiveness for harm done to herself. The first complication that Griswold faces comes from the basic setup of his model. Griswold's requirement that the offender and victim interact is an especially problematic in instances of self-forgiveness for harm to oneself. The mothers in the previous example could at least either directly interact with their children or imagine how their

children might react to an apology. Miriam instead faces the problem of having to formulate the same narrative for both the offender and the victim. Once again, this is a result of Miriam's case being one of self-forgiveness for pure self-harm as opposed to self-forgiveness for harm done to others.

Griswold's model might be more useful in addressing the perfectionist tendencies of individuals with anorexia and bulimia. Miriam's case did not speak specifically about perfectionist tendencies beyond her physical appearance. It is possible that either the author of the case study left out details about Miriam's other perfectionist tendencies or that Miriam did not follow the common developmental path for eating disorders. Rather than making assumptions about Miriam's case, I will instead look at how Griswold's model applies to eating pathology more broadly defined.

I described in the introduction to Miriam's case that perfectionism often drives eating pathology. Disordered eating habits are both a method of working towards physical perfection and punishing oneself for one's imperfections. This creates a dynamic in which striving for perfection involves being hyperaware of one's imperfections. Griswold's model works in an interesting way here because the individual's recognition of her flaws is part of the reason that she's developed disordered eating habits. At the same time, her efforts to overcome those shortcomings and simultaneously punish herself for those shortcomings suggests that she is holding herself to moral standards that are far too high. While she recognizes that she is fallible, she is unable to accept her fallibility. In this case of forgiveness for harm to oneself, it is difficult to conceive what it would mean to drop one's moral superiority over the offender as Griswold proposes. Even so, it seems like this notion could be very important to the process of actually

accepting one's status as a fallible human being. This could be beneficial in both the initial recovery stages as well as the later stage of forgiving oneself for self-harm.

While Griswold's fallibility model could be useful in eating disorder cases, it is worth noting that Miriam's recovery process actually aligns more strongly with Holmgren's respect model. Miriam was able to convince herself that she was actually worthy of self-love and self-respect. This prompted her to claim that she forgave herself for her previous behaviors and to treat herself with more respect. This might suggest that Holmgren's model has something valuable to offer that goes beyond merely accepting one's fallibility. The affective component of Holmgren's model indicates that the victim needs to demonstrate love, respect, kindness, and compassion to the offender. The motivational component indicates that the victim needs to be concerned with the offender's future actions so that the offender is able to flourish. It is possible that Miriam would not have been able to transcend beyond the shame associated with her fallibility of without embracing the notions of self-love and self-respect. This would have consequently prevented her from taking the necessary steps that would help her flourish as an individual.

iii. Relapse and Self-Forgiveness

I want to pause briefly before discussing Pio's case and expand on my discussion in the introduction of the power of forgiveness to prevent relapse. This power exists also in cases of self-forgiveness. The possibility of relapse was addressed in both the drug-addicted mothers' case and Miriam's case. The drug-addicted mothers' case emphasized that lingering feelings of guilt and shame could lead to a relapse. This trend sheds light on the importance of self-forgiveness and healing from a purely practical standpoint. If the mothers are unable to forgive themselves, then they risk harming both themselves and their loved ones again in the future. It

seems that even a form of self-forgiveness that shades into condonation would be more beneficial than excessive guilt in this situation. A similar point can be made about Miriam's case. Being very self-critical and holding herself to inappropriately high standards likely factored into the development of her eating disorder. Feeling persistent guilt and shame about injuring herself would indicate that she still had highly self-critical tendencies. It is possible that maintaining those tendencies would put her at a greater risk for relapse in the future.

It is also interesting to compare how relapse in instances of self-forgiveness can differ from relapse in instances of interpersonal forgiveness. It is possible for either the victim or the offender to relapse in cases of interpersonal forgiveness without it having any impact on the other party involved. For example, an offender could commit the same harm to another person without the original victim ever knowing. The offender may feel some guilt if she committed to changing her behavior; however, it is unlikely that her relationship with the original victim will change substantially. The victim could also relapse by occasionally feeling resentment and wishing that bad things happen to the offender. This is once again fairly inconsequential if the victim is never aware of it.

Relapse in the drug-addicted mothers' case would be similar to when an offender relapses in a case of interpersonal forgiveness. Both cases involve breaking one's commitment to change one's behavior in order to prevent future harm. In cases of interpersonal forgiveness, there would have to be a new instance of forgiveness if the offender harmed the same victim again. There would similarly have to be a new instance of *self-forgiveness* if any of the mothers relapsed. Both cases also allow for the offender to distance herself from the victim. Doing so would reduce the exposure that the offender had with the victim. It might help the offender to mediate her

feelings of guilt if she is unable to see the victim being either angry at her or in pain because of her actions.

Miriam's case unsurprisingly raises a number of questions regarding relapse and self-forgiveness for harm done to oneself. The challenging part about her case once again comes from the fact that there is only one person involved in both the injury and the healing process. One issue with Miriam's harm being self-directed is that she might not be as afraid of how her wrongdoings influence others. More specifically, fear of how a victim might respond after an offender relapsed might help keep the offender in check in cases of forgiveness for harm done to others. This would especially be the case if the victim was someone who's judgment and/or well-being the offender cared about. This form of accountability in Miriam's case is not clearly present. Other people might demonstrate that they do not condone her behavior by trying to persuade her not harm herself. However, harming herself indicates that she already has a negative view of herself. It seems that others' negative judgments might not be enough to persuade her to act otherwise and could even feed into her own negative view of herself.

Another noteworthy point is that Miriam's recovery is a major indicator that she has actually forgiven herself. This is especially relevant to Holmgren's model of forgiveness in which it is so important to love and respect the offender as well as hope that the offender will flourish. Recovery would indicate that Miriam has accepted all of these things. It seems that relapse would violate these conditions and suggest that either Miriam never genuinely forgave herself or that she returned to her original mindset of being highly self-critical and having low self-worth. A relapse in her eating behaviors would indicate that she also relapsed in terms of loving and respecting herself as a human being.

Griswold's model applies a bit differently to Miriam's case. Miriam's breach of self-forgiveness would be that she did not maintain her commitment to change her behaviors and that she returned to having too high of standards for herself. It is once again possible that she never fully forgave herself by accepting her fallibility and committing to change or that she simply slipped back into her old behaviors and ways of thinking.

iv. Applications to Pio's Case

Pio's case is an outlier from the previous two because self-forgiveness is never explicitly mentioned. The extreme nature of the genocide and of Pio's individual actions seems to be the source of this difference. Pio spoke about how the effects of the killings were so intense that genuine interpersonal forgiveness was likely impossible. There was too much pain involved for people to ever be able to move beyond the génocidaires' actions. Others would not be able to comprehend why individuals like Pio took part in the genocide and the transformation that they underwent when they began killing.

The extremeness of this case has further implications for how forgiveness is perceived. The example seems like it should fit into Griswold's category of forgiveness of oneself when the victim is unwilling to forgive. We see, however, that Pio never pursues self-forgiveness in the way that Griswold describes. He recognized his wrongdoings, attempted to make amends, and worked to change his behavior, and hoped for a life of harmony with others; however, he was still unable to be the judge of whether or not he should be forgiven. Only God had the capacity to grant him true forgiveness for his horrific actions.

I think that the significance Griswold places on sympathy is relevant to Pio's skeptical view of forgiveness. Most notably, I think that sympathizing with the victims in this case could actually hinder the process of self-forgiveness and perhaps turn one away from even considering

self-forgiveness at all. This goes back to the extreme nature of the genocide. Individuals who sympathized with the victims would have to deeply engage in understanding the chronic effects of their atrocious actions. They would also have to face the stark contrast between who they perceived themselves to be before the genocide and type of person they were during the genocide. It is easy to see how this process could be overwhelming and debilitating rather than helping one move to a point of healing and self-forgiveness.

The notion that Pio took on an evil self might present a second barrier to the pursuit of forgiveness. Pio spoke about how the genocide was full of savagery. The killers both dehumanized their victims and acted as if they were not humans themselves. This creates a paradox that is difficult to solve with Holmgren's model of forgiveness. According to Holmgren's theory, the offender is supposed to be viewed with respect because he recognizes his humanity. Pio's explanation instead suggests that a key factor in the genocide was the killers' lack of humanity. This same observation also presents a challenge to Griswold's claim that the offender should not be viewed as a moral monster. It might be possible to overcome both of these challenges if the offenders recognized that they were in fact still humans during that time period and that they consist of more than their actions; however, the level at which they approached being unhuman would certainly be difficult to ignore.

Conclusion

The three case studies above help to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of Griswold's and Holmgren's theories. Griswold's theory is helpful because it requires the offender to recognize that she is a fallible human being. This could be especially important in cases of self-forgiveness like Miriam's in which one of the factors contributing to self-harming tendencies is perfectionism. If offenders in cases like this are able to not only recognize but also *accept that*

their fallibility is a part of being human, then they might be able to lower their moral standards to align more closely with other individuals. One potential barrier to this approach is that accepting one's fallibility might not be enough for the offender to forgive herself. This is also seen in Miriam's case when she needed to learn that it was OK to treat herself with love and respect. Changing her feelings from guilt and shame to love and respect was crucial in her recovery process. Miriam's change in behaviors that followed from her shift in feelings speaks to one of the benefits Holmgren's respect based model, namely, that realizing one is worthy of love and respect has the power to change how one treat's oneself.

While Holmgren's model might be useful in causing the offender to love and respect herself, Holmgren runs into some problems because of her reliance on Korsgaard's version of the self. As mentioned in the drug-addicted mother's case, there are instances when one wants to fulfill a practical identity but does not necessarily have the capacity to fulfill that role due to her own limitations and the circumstances she is in. Her inability to fulfill that role when she thinks that she should have been able to could lead to extreme guilt and shame that hinders the self-forgiveness process. It is also unclear how practical identities are beneficial in cases like Pio's when the identity he took on was that of a savage and led him to disrespect humanity in an extreme way. I will take up these problems and some of the other challenges mentioned above in the next chapter when I assess whether we should strictly follow either model or if modifications are required to develop a stronger model of self-forgiveness.

IV: The Debate between Griswold and Holmgren on Self-Forgiveness

Introduction to the Griswold and Holmgren Debate

Both Griswold and Holmgren argue that how we perceive humanity has important implications for achieving genuine forgiveness. They differ, however, in which perspective of humanity will allow for forgiveness. More specifically, Griswold thinks that the only way we can genuinely forgive anyone is by admitting to our *shared fallibility as humans* whereas Holmgren thinks that it is necessary to forgive out of *respect for humanity*. The many problems illustrated with each model still cause us to wonder: Should we agree with Griswold and forgive ourselves out of recognition of our human fallibility, or should we agree with Holmgren and forgive ourselves out of *respect for all humans*? I will begin this chapter by summarizing the major advantages and disadvantages of Griswold's and Holmgren's models. I will use this summary to explain why I don't think that we should strictly follow either model as they stand now; however, there are some valuable components to each model that should be preserved. I will then propose that Smith's impartial spectator could help manage some of the problems each theorist faces.

A. The Strengths of Griswold's and Holmgren's Models of Self-Forgiveness

i. Griswold

Griswold is very systematic when discussing any facet of forgiveness. His close attention to detail and organization allows him to clearly establish what he thinks genuine forgiveness is and why anything that deviates from that standard should be considered an imperfect form of forgiveness. For now, we can set aside the notion that self-forgiveness falls into an imperfect category of forgiveness and focus on how useful Griswold's systematic approach might be. As is the case with interpersonal forgiveness, Griswold describes the series of steps that the offender

must follow in order to achieve self-forgiveness. It is particularly helpful that Griswold identifies when self-forgiveness might be appropriate and then articulates what steps might have to be altered to accommodate different situations. One of the advantages of following Griswold's step-by-step approach is that it reduces the chance that the offender will unjustifiably excuse or condone his actions. The offender must follow the forgiveness process that Griswold lays out in order to be able to legitimately say that he forgives himself.

Two of the most important of these steps are that the offender must take on the perspective of either the victim or an impartial spectator and that the offender must try to prevent himself from committing similar harm in the future. The former step assures that the offender is not given so much power that he forgives himself prematurely without fully considering the impact of his wrongdoing. It also forces the offender to develop an understanding of why he should grant himself forgiveness (e.g. either because the victim or impartial spectator would) rather than simply deciding to forgive himself in order to escape from his feelings of guilt and shame. The latter step is important because it assures that the offender actually recognizes that what he did was wrong and that he shouldn't forgive himself if he simply intends to commit the same offense in the future. Griswold admits that not everyone can fully change their behaviors; however, it is important that the offender at least tries to mitigate the chance that he will act the same way as much as possible.

One of the most noteworthy aspects of Griswold's argument is that acknowledging one's fallibility is much more tangible than having to admit one's worthiness of self-love and respect. Humans can become aware that they are flawed simply by paying attention to things like accidents or limited intelligence. Holmgren's reliance on such a complicated version of the self suggests that being able to legitimately conclude that one is worthy of love and respect takes

more effort. One would have to recognize the importance of her practical identities, realize that relying on practical identities affirms her humanity, and determine that she is worthy of love and respect because she is a human. Griswold's approach is significantly more accessible to the general population because it focuses on one of the most fundamental aspects of being human.

Another advantage of Griswold's human fallibility model is that the offender gains both a better understanding of the victim and of his own status as a human being during the forgiveness process. Griswold's model is very intimate in that the offender has to try to understand how the victim does or would respond to the wrongdoing on both an emotional and cognitive level. Through sympathy, the offender has to try to comprehend what the consequences of his actions were. In doing so, he forms a deeper understanding of the victim. In cases in which he has to rely on his knowledge of the victim in order to determine whether she would forgive him or not, he also realizes that others don't necessarily view him as being a moral monster. The victim might instead see him as a human being who is unavoidably fallible. The offender then gains a more holistic view of what it means to be human because he no longer thinks that he is entirely represented by a single wrongdoing. He can admit that he made wrong choices yet not be bogged down by the assumption that he is unworthy of forgiveness just because he is the one who supposedly had control over his decisions and actions.

A final strength of Griswold's model is that there is an inherent connection between human fallibility and forgiveness. Without human fallibility, forgiveness would be irrelevant. Although we might try to avoid wrongdoings as much as possible, it is inevitable that we will harm others and others will harm us simply because we are limited human beings. Forgiveness provides us with a way to maintain relationships and move forward from our past actions without being consumed by our shortcomings. One might argue that being inherently flawed and having

the option of forgiveness means that we get a free pass to do whatever we want. I don't think that this conclusion can be legitimately drawn from Griswold's work, because he never suggests that we don't have the capacity to strive to be more moral individuals. A better conclusion is that *no individual is beyond needing forgiveness* at certain points throughout his life when his limitations lead him to commit a wrongdoing. This is especially important in cases of self-forgiveness in which an individual can be pained by guilt and shame upon realizing that he allowed himself to commit an action that he no longer approves of. Forgiveness is necessary in these cases because it allows the individual to admit his fallibility and recognize that he is an individual with other positive attributes and the capacity to change.

ii. Holmgren

Holmgren's approach to self-forgiveness is appealing in a different way from Griswold's systematic approach. Holmgren's overarching forgiveness model makes it so that she doesn't have to pay as close attention to the specific details of different cases of self-forgiveness. She instead suggests that essentially the same approach can be used in all cases of forgiveness. Unlike Griswold, her interpersonal model of forgiveness maps almost directly onto instances of self-forgiveness. In both situations, the individuals involved have to integrate the cognitive, affective, and motivational components of forgiveness. Doing so will assure that the offender is viewed and treated as a human being worthy of respect. By taking a respect rather than a fallibility based approach, Holmgren avoids some of the complexities around narrative sharing and sympathy that Griswold has to meticulously tease out. This could be useful in forgiveness therapy because it provides one model for all instances of self-forgiveness rather than having to go through a specific process for different cases.

Another important consequence of Holmgren taking a unilateral approach is that the offender and the victim are given equal amounts of power in the forgiveness process. They each have to realize that the offender is worthy of being treated with respect, compassion and real goodwill like any other human. This means that both the offender and the victim have to go through the forgiveness process in which they both integrate the affective, cognitive, and motivational components of forgiveness. Holmgren makes a bold statement here by suggesting that the offender's self-forgiveness is necessary in cases of interpersonal forgiveness. This dichotomous approach to cases of interpersonal forgiveness allows Holmgren to avoid Griswold's problem of overestimating the power the victim has on the offender's peace of mind. She also avoids the potentially detrimental situation of having an offender remain unforgiven when he is forgivable. It is important for the offender to consider how his wrongdoing affected the victim; however, his forgiveness is not contingent on how the victim *would respond* to the wrongdoing.

One final advantage of Holmgren's self-forgiveness model is illustrated in Miriam's case of forgiveness for harm done to oneself. An important aspect of eating disorder recovery is being able to give up some of one's perfectionist tendencies. This means that rather than constantly punishing oneself for one's mistakes and attempting to achieve unrealistic standards, the individual must recognize her fallibility and need for forgiveness at times. The process of recognizing one's fallibility and lowering one's standards aligns much more strongly with Griswold's model of self-forgiveness than Holmgren's. Interestingly, this realization didn't seem to allow Miriam to forgive herself for her self-harm. She needed a more substantial form of motivation for her to seriously engage in the forgiveness process. This motivation ended up being the benefits she envisioned in loving herself after having talked to several other women

about forgiveness. Miriam started to view herself as a human being worthy of respect which led her to change how she treated herself. She not only maintained healthy eating habits, but also started going to work consistently and arranged to start college again. She treated herself with love by doing things that would allow her to flourish without remaining trapped by a hyperawareness of her flaws. It seems that recognizing one's worthiness of respect might be necessary to really convince some individuals that it is *okay* that they are fallible human beings and that they should still treat themselves with love *despite* their flaws.

iii. The Downsides of Griswold's Model

The many strengths of Griswold's model are not enough to overshadow the problems that I've addressed throughout this thesis. The two most substantial challenges Griswold faces are his reliance on circumstances and his overestimation of the victim's power on the offender's peace of mind. The persistence of these problems throughout the puzzles and case studies chapters suggests that we should treat Griswold's theory with caution. I will now give a final explanation as to why I think the problems illustrated in Huget's critique and Smith's philosophy are detrimental to Griswold's model of self-forgiveness.

Recall from the first chapter that Huget thinks Griswold sacrifices accountability for reconciliation. Huget argues that Griswold's use of sympathy and his focus on human frailty forces the victim to claim that she might have done the same thing; therefore, the offender should be forgiven. Huget thinks that the issue with this process is that the victim is not able to admit that her moral code and character might have actually prevented her from doing the same thing in the given situation. Thus, the victim unjustifiably drops her moral superiority over the offender when she makes the very general claim that there was a chance she would have done the same thing. I think her argument holds some merit even though she used a different

definition of sympathy. More specifically, I think that she rightly points out the difference between admitting that the victim is fallible and that the victim is not morally superior to the offender. The first point is about an inherent quality of being human. The second point is a comparison between the levels of fallibility among humans. Why should the victim have to drop her moral superiority if she is generally more moral and would not have likely committed the same wrongdoing as the offender?

A similar problem surfaces if the offender attempts to follow Griswold's steps for self-forgiveness. When the offender has to adopt the perspective of the victim, he must believe that the victim would actually sympathize with him and would in turn conclude that he should be forgiven on the basis that they are both fallible. In this situation, the offender is assuming that the victim would realize her own status as a fallible human being and that she would drop her moral superiority over the offender. Once again, it is important to recognize the distinction between assuming that one is fallible and assuming that one is *equally* fallible as other humans. If we admit that the victim might not be equally fallible as the offender, then the offender might not be able to assume that the victim should and would drop her moral superiority over him. This would be especially relevant in the nuanced cases of self-forgiveness like when Ted hit Lisa's car because of the traits that he developed for fifteen years. This case seems to suggest that Ted might need to be held to a different level of accountability than if had hit her because he lowered his standards for one day due to of an odd series of circumstances.

Smith's notion of conscience is the second major challenge to Griswold's theory. Smith suggests that we can never fully understand why a person did something or how an event impacted her. We can only approach understanding her thoughts, feelings, character traits and circumstances because we are always limited by our own egocentrism. This has proven to be

problematic for Griswold on several accounts as demonstrated by both the puzzles and the cases studies. One issue is that Griswold might be undervaluing self-forgiveness by arguing that it should be considered an imperfect form of forgiveness. Griswold suggests that the offender should simultaneously forgive himself when the victim forgives him. The victim's forgiveness is genuine and should relieve the offender of his feelings of guilt and shame as long as both parties have followed all of the necessary steps. Smith's notion of conscience challenges Griswold's argument specifically regarding narrative formation and sympathy. The offender would be correct to acknowledge that the victim will never be able to fully comprehend his perspective no matter how detailed a narrative he provides. Similarly, the offender will never be able to fully comprehend the pain and suffering that he has caused the victim. The inevitable distance existing between the two parties should concern the offender about whether or not he should actually be forgiven, regardless of what the victim decides.

In short, we should question if Griswold is not only overestimating the victim's power on the offender's peace of mind, but also whether Griswold might generally be giving the victim too much power in the forgiveness process. It is strange that self-forgiveness is a last resort when the victim only has a limited understanding of the offender. It seems that Griswold's model would be strengthened if there were a way for the individual with the most comprehensive understanding of the wrongdoing, namely the offender, to hold himself accountable rather than relying on the victim's approval. I will suggest how I think this might be possible after addressing some of the major problems with Holmgren's theory.

iv. The Downsides of Holmgren's Model

Holmgren's focus on respect and love for humanity creates a really beautiful and uplifting notion of forgiveness. Unfortunately, we have to question whether her reliance on

Korsgaard's version of the self provides adequate support for her argument. As I described in the first chapter, Korsgaard takes a Kantian approach and argues that all humans have a reflective self that allows them to deliberate prior to making decisions. The reflective self gives individuals the capacity to uphold the moral law and thus be citizens of the Kingdom of Ends. Korsgaard also proposes that individuals have to take on practical identities in order to motivate them to act in a certain way. By taking on these practical identities and acting on them, we are affirming our overarching identity as a member of humanity who deserves to be respected. I proposed that Holmgren builds her argument on Korsgaard's assertion that all humans are worthy of respect without adequately critiquing Korsgaard's attempt to mix the noumenal and phenomenal selves.

I think that the greatest hurdle Holmgren faces is Korsgaard's argument regarding practical identities. There is a metaphysical messiness to Korsgaard's argument that she never acknowledges, let alone pulls herself out of. Korsgaard's description of the self suggests that we affirm our status as respectable human beings as long as we hold certain practical identities and act on them. As I described in my earlier critique of Korsgaard, this seems to suggest that an individual can affirm his status as a respectable human being even when he has taken on a practical identity that does not motivate him to treat other humans with respect. If this is true, then it is difficult to see how forgiveness would apply to any of the puzzles and case studies because the offender would constantly be validating his respect for humanity regardless of what his actions were.

A second problem with Korsgaard's theory is that practical identities only seem to be a means of fulfilling the most important identity, namely, being a citizen of the Kingdom of Ends. Korsgaard ultimately wants us to exercise our reflective selves so that we will only endorse practical identities that align with the moral standards of being citizens of the Kingdom of Ends.

Thus, what kind of personal connection we have with our practical identities (e.g. being a musician because we find music to be aesthetically pleasing) is of little importance. We are left with an empty version of the self that places too much emphasis on rational capacities and overlooks our other humanistic qualities. Moreover, the challenge of being a citizen of the Kingdom of Ends could cause us to lose sight of the fact that we are actually fallible human beings who only have a limited capacity to oversee our every decision and action. Korsgaard, and consequently Holmgren, seem to erroneously suggest that forgiveness is required because we failed to fully exercise the rational capacities that we are capable of using. This is a case where I think Griswold correctly recognizes that we instead require forgiveness because fallibility is an inherent part of being human, regardless of the strength of our rational capacities.

Lastly, Holmgren's theory is problematic because of how inaccessible Korsgaard's version of the self is. Even if we accepted Korsgaard's theory of the self, an offender would have to work through all of its philosophical complexities just to determine that he is actually worthy of self-respect. Given the amount of time and careful analysis it took to tease out Korsgaard's theory for the purposes of this thesis, it is unlikely that a majority of individuals would take on this task. If, however, an offender simply took for granted that he is worthy of being treated with love and respect, then his attempt at self-forgiveness would likely fall into the category of condonation.

B. A proposal for an Improved Model of Self-Forgiveness

i. Turning to the Impartial Spectator

Do we have to choose either Holmgren's or Griswold's theory despite their flaws? Are there some modifications that could be made that address the flaws of their theories and allow us to preserve some of the benefits? Interestingly, I think that one possible solution comes from a

source that Griswold only paid minor attention to, namely, Smith's impartial spectator. I introduced the impartial spectator in my critique of Griswold's general theory of self-forgiveness. I spoke specifically about Smith's argument that we should adopt the view of an impartial spectator when we are forming judgments about ourselves. In doing so, we take on the perspective of an imaginary person who judges us based on how society as a whole would judge us without being subjected to individual biases. I propose that utilizing the impartial spectator in all cases of self-forgiveness appropriately takes some of the power away from victim and still allows us to recognize our inherent fallibility as human beings.

The image of universal love and respect is appealing; however, I think that Holmgren's reliance on Korsgaard's version of the self compromises her theory to the point at which it is not worth considering how the impartial spectator might be helpful. I will therefore focus primarily on how I think Griswold's model could be improved by introducing the impartial spectator and pay some attention to why the impartial spectator is a better option than Korsgaard's version of the self. I will also demonstrate how the impartial spectator bridges certain valuable components of Griswold's and Holmgren's arguments.

One consequence of introducing the impartial spectator is that the offender always has an option to fall back on regardless of whether he is granted and accepts the victim's forgiveness. As a result, the offender will never have to remain forgivable but unforgiven as Griswold suggests in cases when the offender does not know enough about the victim to determine whether she would forgive him or not. Secondly, introducing the impartial spectator would require Griswold to come up with a new way of handling all of the different cases of self-forgiveness that he addresses. If the offender could always turn to the impartial spectator rather than relying on the victim's sympathy and approval, then we don't have to go through the

juggling act of trying to determine which different steps must be followed depending on which instance of self-forgiveness we are dealing with. We instead get a more simplistic approach similar to that of Holmgren's in which one means of attaining forgiveness can be used to address all of the different situations.

One reason that using the impartial spectator is so successful in the different cases of self-forgiveness is because it eliminates the problem of dealing with multiple narratives. In cases of forgiveness for harm to another when the victim is unable to forgive, the offender no longer has to concern himself with trying to figure out whether the victim would actually recognize that they are both fallible human beings and that he should be forgiven. He instead only has to offer his own narrative to the impartial spectator and then consider what the impartial spectator's judgment would be. The outcome is similar in cases of forgiveness for harm done to another when the offender is unwilling to forgive. This is the odd case in which Griswold actually suggests that the offender turn to the impartial spectator rather than being forgivable but unforgiven.

Using the impartial spectator is also advantageous in cases of self-forgiveness when the victim is willing to forgive. The impartial spectator helps reduce the psychological distance between the individual being forgiven and the agent granting forgiveness. The difference between relying on the victim for forgiveness and relying on the impartial spectator is that the impartial spectator is *imaginary*. This removes the barrier of the victim's egocentrism that interferes with her ability to fully understand the offender's perspective. The offender is able to offer up all of his thoughts and concerns about the wrongdoing to the impartial spectator without any reservations. He can go into detail about all of the nuanced factors, such as, whether the wrongdoing resulted from him lowering his standards for a moment or from some habit that he

cultivated over 15 years. Moreover, the impartial spectator is always available for him to consult when he thinks of new factors that may have contributed to the wrongdoing. The impartial spectator is at the offender's disposal in a way, allowing him to work through the difficult questions of why he did what he did and how he should address the wrongdoing. Lastly, relying on the impartial spectator in this situation is also useful because it still holds the offender accountable for his actions. The offender has to offer up his wrongdoing to the impartial spectator for judgment rather than judging himself. Although he does not have to rely on the victim's perspective as Griswold suggests, he is not given total power in the situation. Thus, the impartial spectator still takes care of Griswold's and Holmgren's fear that individuals will abuse self-forgiveness. The impartial spectator also helps the offender to look beyond his own negative evaluation of himself by serving as a "middle man" who allows him to evaluate his moral standards within the broader context of society's standards.

Can the impartial spectator also help in the challenging situation of self-forgiveness for harm done to oneself? The motivation behind harming another is often more clearly understood to the general population than intentionally harming oneself. We often harm others either because: they have harmed us first, we want to demonstrate our power over them, we are motivated by material gains, or we had a momentary lapse in judgment. The forgiveness process helps us to realize that we are limited in our ability to both understand others and handle various circumstances. How we treat ourselves is different because it directly involves how we view ourselves rather than another. Harming ourselves thus implies that a person has a low enough sense of self-worth to think that she deserves to be maltreated. When a person tries to forgive herself, she realizes something different than what she would take away from cases of interpersonal forgiveness, namely, she realizes that she didn't even know how to treat the one

person who she is supposed have the most thorough understanding of and control over. As seen in Miriam's case, attempting to figure out how an individual allowed herself to commit self-harm can be tormenting and destructive.

It is possible that a person with low self-esteem might develop self-destructive behaviors because she's convinced herself that she doesn't deserve to be treated any better. An example of this might be when a person with an eating disorder views herself in terms of her body image and doesn't fully consider her other valuable qualities. A person might also hold too high of standards for herself which causes her to engage in self-induced punishment when she fails to meet those standards. An example of this might be when a person with an eating disorder has perfectionistic tendencies that are impossible to maintain. The combination of these two motivations suggests that she would engage in self-destructive behaviors to both maintain her overvalued body image and to punish herself for not meeting certain moral standards.

An individual who harms herself might not respect herself and hold too high of moral standards because she either doesn't receive any validating judgments from others or because she does not trust others' judgments. The latter possibility is similar to instances of self-forgiveness when the offender thinks that the victim might be granting forgiveness prematurely. The impartial spectator is once again a convenient resource that gives the individual access to a judgment that extends beyond her own evaluation. This is especially important in cases of self-forgiveness for harm to oneself because she doesn't even have the victim's point of view to consider and because her previous misperception of herself might make her very hesitant in accepting her own opinion. Turning to the impartial spectator causes her to transcend her personal judgments and consider how society would judge her. In doing so, she will also reassess her own moral standards and determine whether they align with the general rules of society.

Now that I've demonstrated how the impartial spectator can help manage many of the problems with Griswold's theory of self-forgiveness, I want to acknowledge how the impartial spectator handles one of the major problems of Holmgren's theory. I indicated in the previous section on that even if we accepted Korsgaard's version of the self, individuals would have to do an incredible amount of philosophical inquiry just to determine that all humans are worthy of respect. This is especially impractical because forgiveness is something that humans have to rely on in order to continue functioning, despite their fallibility. Korsgaard's theory is far too complicated to navigate for it to be successful in everyday life. The impartial spectator, however, is something that can be more readily understood and accessed by the general population because it is constructed of the general rules within society as opposed to an abstract conceptualization of the self.

One final consequence of relying on the impartial spectator is that it ties Griswold's and Holmgren's theories together in a unique way. I've argued that Holmgren's reliance on Korsgaard's version of the self undermines her forgiveness model based on respect. I've also suggested that, especially in cases of self-forgiveness for harm to oneself, recognizing one's fallibility might not be enough motivation for an individual to forgive herself. There seems to be a missing component that allows the individual to transcend her feelings of shame and guilt. It is appealing to turn to Holmgren's theory that all humans should be treated with respect, even if it can't be fully supported. We saw how important it was for Miriam to adopt attitudes of self-love and self-respect in order to make significant progress in the healing from her eating disorder. Her new mindset became a protective factor against relapse because it motivated her to maintain her physical and mental health as well as make positive changes regarding work and school. Adopting an attitude of self-respect seems to have practical significance; however, it is important

to acknowledge that doing so without proper justification might place this situation in the category of condonation rather than forgiveness.

I explained how supplementing Griswold's model with the impartial spectator in cases of self-forgiveness for harm to oneself provides the individual with an alternative source of judgment from her own. I claimed that this is important in order for her to conclude that she is actually worthy of forgiveness. The complicated question becomes how she should *treat herself so that she is acting in accordance with self-forgiveness*. If we take a step back and consider Griswold's and Holmgren's general theories of forgiveness, we see that Griswold is significantly less concerned about how positively the victim treats the offender compared to Holmgren. Griswold thinks the victim's responsibilities towards the offender need not go beyond sympathizing with him and forswearing his resentment whereas Holmgren thinks that the victim should also treat the offender with love and take the appropriate steps to help him flourish as a human being. I think that Griswold's conclusion in cases of interpersonal forgiveness is appropriate for his fallibility approach; unless we have a legitimate argument for treating all human beings with respect and love, then requiring a victim to do so in cases of interpersonal forgiveness would be an unjustified burden. However, cases of self-forgiveness for harm to oneself have a different outcome that Griswold never fully addresses.

Griswold's attempt to minimize the victim's responsibilities does not transition well to case of self-forgiveness for harm done to oneself. Recall that relapse in these situations implies a lapse in forgiveness because the individual has failed to uphold her commitment not to harm herself. The blending of identities between the victim and the offender in these cases makes how the individual treats herself significantly more important than how the victim treats the offender in cases of interpersonal forgiveness. Her "offender" self must take the appropriate steps to

prevent herself from committing the same harm in the future. Consequently, her “victim” self is going to be very invested in the offender’s capacity to flourish because any relapse is going to directly harm her. She does not have the liberty to settle for mediated guilt and shame without having to actively promote the well-being of the “offender” as is allowed in cases of interpersonal forgiveness.

I have already established that the impartial spectator can help her conclude that she is a fallible human being worthy of forgiveness. I think that the impartial spectator can also serve as an important guide for her actions so that she treats herself in accordance with forgiveness. Smith suggests that “there are two different occasions upon which we examine our own conduct, and endeavor to view it: first, when we are about to act; and, secondly after we have acted” (221). Thus, the impartial spectator can both help her forgive herself and hold her accountable to refrain from harming herself in the future. The interesting consequence is that she is called to treat herself in a way that she should treat others or others should treat her. Moreover, the acceptable way to treat others is often in a way that demonstrates respect for them. Thus, she is led to treat herself with respect *not because she is worthy of self-respect by virtue of being human*, but instead because *a fair and impartial spectator would deem it appropriate for her to act in a way that aligns with respecting herself*. This outcome suggests that cases of self-forgiveness for harm done to oneself require a unique combination of Griswold’s fallibility theory and Holmgren’s emphasis on respect, each of which are modified through the use of the impartial spectator.

ii. A Concern about the Impartial Spectator

One legitimate concern regarding my proposal to rely on the impartial spectator is that the intimate connection that can develop between the victim and the offender is compromised. Griswold tries to facilitate this deep connection between the offender and the victim by requiring

that they provide narratives and sympathize with one another. They end up changing how they view and feel about one another. The impartial spectator could provide a means to bypass much of the work that has to be done between the victim and the offender and simply allow the offender to rely entirely on the impartial spectator's judgment. Why would the offender worry about the victim's opinion if he can seek forgiveness via the impartial spectator? Is the victim's forgiveness ever genuine if the offender has to turn to the impartial spectator for judgment that he trusts? What value is there in interpersonal forgiveness if the offender always has access to the impartial spectator?

I think that relying on the impartial spectator does pose a threat to the important relationship between the victim and the offender that develops out of the forgiveness process. Reliance on the impartial spectator could also make it so that the victim's forgiveness is considered secondary and imperfect. I do, however, think that these outcomes can be avoided to a certain degree if we view an offender's reliance on the impartial spectator *in combination* with Griswold's step-by-step theory. In one sense, it is important that the offender makes an effort to understand the victim's perspective so that he can better understand the consequences of his actions. Doing so demonstrates that the offender is taking the appropriate steps to understand why his actions were wrong. It also shows that he is taking a personal interest in the victim and recognizing that she is a valuable human being. Both of these things would be important for the impartial spectator to consider when judging whether the offender should be forgiven. I think there is a slightly deeper consequence that comes from the interaction between the offender and victim as well. Both Griswold and Holmgren agree that two of the most important components of forgiveness are the cognitive and emotional shift that occurs in the victim's view of the offender. Even if the victim can never fully comprehend the offender's actions, this shift is worth pursuing

in *as genuine a way as possible*. The impartial spectator should not be considered a replacement for the victim's forgiveness, but rather as supplementary to it. Time constraints prevent me from considering other possible ways to preserve the relationship between the victim and the offender and validate the victim's forgiveness; however, I do think that this topic is worthy of further examination in the future.

Conclusion

Smith's impartial spectator could be an important addition to the current philosophical theories of forgiveness. It seems to be especially helpful in dealing with the cases of self-forgiveness that Griswold's theory has difficulty handling. It provides the offender with a "middle man" to consult who is at a distance from the offender but is not limited to the perspective and judgment of the victim. Having access to this imaginary judge opens up several possibilities in regards to self-forgiveness. For example, the offender no longer remains forgivable but unforgiven when the victim is unable to forgive and the offender is unable to determine how she might judge him. The impartial spectator also helps the offender determine whether he is worthy of forgiveness in cases when the victim's forgiveness is not enough to give him peace of mind. The impartial spectator is also especially beneficial in cases of self-forgiveness for harm to oneself because it both helps the individual determine that she is worthy of forgiveness and provides her with a guide for how she should treat herself in the future. As a result, the impartial spectator serves as a protective factor against relapse by holding her accountable for not harming herself in the future. There are, however, legitimate concerns that the impartial spectator might remove too much of the victim's power and diminish the relationship between the offender and victim; however, I think that these concerns can be taken care of in part by recognizing the importance of the victim's cognitive and emotional shift *in*

conjunction with the offender's need to accept himself in spite of his wrongdoing. The impartial spectator serves this purpose in a way that is accessible to society while still promoting genuine forgiveness over condonation.

Conclusion

After having explored many of the philosophical complexities of forgiveness, we are left wondering: What can we do with this revised model of self-forgiveness? One of the goals that I isolated at the beginning of this thesis was to examine the psychological components of forgiveness. I did this to a certain extent by pointing out the challenges involved in forgiving oneself and the psychological torment that can result from not forgiving oneself. I think that with a topic like forgiveness, it is especially important to go a step further and see how we can take philosophy outside of the ivory tower and put it into action.

The revised model of self-forgiveness could help improve forgiveness therapy as it continues to develop within the field of psychology. As I mentioned in regards to Miriam's case, forgiveness therapy is becoming more prominent in dealing with cases of self-forgiveness. It will be important to carefully examine the process of forgiveness therapy and to what extent it actually achieves the goal of self-forgiveness. Miriam's case seems to suggest that the current model of self-forgiveness therapy deals with the cognitive component on a somewhat surface level. Miriam did learn to treat herself with respect and let go of feelings of blame and guilt; however, she had little justification for making this transition beyond the fact that others told her that she needed to love herself and that it would improve her life. Furthermore, the therapy focused more on her emotions as opposed to helping her realize that she is a fallible human being who perhaps held too high of standards for herself. Griswold's theory with assistance from the impartial spectator could be promising in this context. It is convenient that Griswold's theory is a series of steps, because it would be able to follow the same step by step format as the current self-forgiveness model. It is already set up in a way that can allow the person in therapy to focus on one step at a time and work through the process at her own pace.

Another important implication for using the revised model of self-forgiveness in forgiveness therapy is that it can help to prevent relapse in cases of both harm to oneself and harm to another. This is especially important in cases of harm to oneself when there is not another person there to hold the individual accountable. The impartial spectator becomes something that she can consult before she harms herself in the same way again. One legitimate concern might be that a person who is severely struggling with blame would always conceptualize an overly harsh impartial spectator that does not allow her to forgive herself. This can be countered by Griswold's emphasis on sympathy and the resulting realization that she is not a moral monster. Her conception of the impartial spectator would begin appropriately change after she began to change how she views herself.

A second potential application for the revised model of self-forgiveness is to reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts following major conflict. While the proposed model shows some promise, I think that we need to continue developing our understanding of self-forgiveness and major acts of violence in order to make significant progress. Both the promise and challenges of relying on the proposed theory are illustrated by Pio's case. Pio recognizes that he is unable to trust either his own or anyone else's judgment regarding forgiveness. He consequently has to turn to God who serves as a quasi-impartial spectator. Like the impartial spectator, God is considered to be the most reliable source of judgment. However, the implications for turning to God in cases of self-forgiveness are much different than turning to the impartial spectator. While the impartial spectator provides the offender with a judgment about whether he is worthy of forgiveness, turning to God leaves him in a state of uncertainty. Consequently, Pio has to accept his fate of not knowing whether he is actually forgiven or not despite his efforts to understand his wrongdoings and make amends.

If this is a common mentality among others who committed similar crimes as Pio, then it seems like the impartial spectator might not have enough power to help the offender forgive himself. He approached the level of a moral monster so closely that even consulting an impartial spectator might not be able to provide him with peace of mind. However, one thing that is important to keep in mind is that the forgiveness process includes commitment to behavioral change. If Pio was able to change his behaviors in order to prevent the same wrongdoing in the future, then it seems like there might be at least some possibility that self-forgiveness is attainable. This possibility would be made even stronger if there was more general knowledge about how one approaches that level of savagery so that his actions can at least be comprehended by society. Alternatively, crimes like genocide might be so extreme that the best people like Pio can do is work through the revised model in order to gain some peace of mind, but ultimately have to turn to a judge that transcends human understanding.

Pio's case and the many other challenging cases of self-forgiveness seem to suggest that we have not yet established a paradigm of forgiveness. Although Griswold claims that his interpersonal model is the paradigm of forgiveness, he seems to undervalue the role of self-forgiveness by overestimating the victim's power to provide the offender with peace of mind. This suggests that self-forgiveness might be equally important as interpersonal forgiveness as opposed to being considered the stepchild of forgiveness. This has significant implications for work done on forgiveness in the fields of both philosophy and psychology in which a majority of attention is directed to interpersonal forgiveness. The complexities of self-forgiveness are not only philosophical interesting, but could shift how individuals pursue self-forgiveness both inside and outside of a therapy setting.

In conclusion, self-forgiveness is a difficult but important process that helps individuals heal after realizing that they allowed themselves to commit a wrongdoing. This realization can be challenging to deal with because it causes the offender to question her character, judgment, and level of control over circumstances. The process of self-forgiveness is a way for her to wrestle with these questions and eventually view herself as being more than just her past actions. This transformative process is *humbling* in that it causes her to admit that she is a fallible human being who is capable of making mistakes. At the same time, it is a *hopeful* process in which she recognizes her capacity to change so that she does not commit the same harm in the future. Ultimately, self-forgiveness is an incredibly complex topic that incorporates how we feel and think about ourselves and about humanity. It speaks to the difficulties of what it means to have the capacity to reflect and make decisions, as well as being inherently limited. Self-forgiveness helps us to reconcile these facets of being human so that we do not have to live bound by self-hatred and blame but can strive to live in harmony with ourselves and our fellow humans.

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