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Generational forgiveness:

Possibility and permissibility

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Abstract

In this paper I will analyse the conceptual and normative implications embedded in generational forgiveness. Firstly, I will answer the question of whether generational forgiveness is possible. In order to do so, I will determine if generational forgiveness obeys to what the philosophical literature understands as forgiveness or if instead it is something else. To carry out this analysis I will distinguish between two presumed forms of generational forgiveness: the group of cases in which the harm has ceased and the group of cases in which the harm is still ongoing. After having established its possibility I will analyse the appropriateness of generational forgiveness, through the *permissibility question*. I will argue that generational forgiveness does not fit into the usual accounts proposed for the *permissibility* question, and therefore, it demands a different one in exceptional cases.

Introduction

Multiple studies in psychology have endorsed the healing properties of forgiveness (Mullen et al. 2023, Prieto-Ursúa 2023). At the same time philosophers have also defended the benefits that forgiveness can have for the moral community, for the victim and even for the wrongdoer (Holmgren 1993, Bell 2019). Nevertheless, as the extensive philosophical literature on the subject shows, forgiveness is anything but an easy concept to grasp. Even on its most basic grounds, philosophers debate about what the core nature of forgiveness is. Given the complexity of the subject most debates always spiral around interpersonal forgiveness. Because most of the open debate about the subject is limited to interpersonal forgiveness, I believe that there is a form of forgiveness whose conceptualisation is taken for granted: that is generational forgiveness. Put simply, generational forgiveness is the sort of forgiving that occurs when someone that is affected by a generational wrong —namely a wrong whose consequences transcends generations— forgives the past wrongdoer. I believe that we can easily think about multiple examples of this; some might be within the same family line, others might be about large collectives forgiving past wrongdoers for structural discrimination. However, I believe that whenever we are confronted with these sorts of forgiveness in our daily life, little questioning is carried out about the very nature of this act. Therefore, in this paper I aim to explore the conceptual and normative implications that can be found in the process of generational forgiveness. To adequately address these questions, this paper will firstly have to determine the possibility of generational forgiveness. Then, the topic of appropriateness and permissibility will also be attended to thereafter.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first section will address some preliminary topics that will be referred to repeatedly throughout the rest of the analysis. Once the grounds for certain terms have been established, the second section will address the possibility of generational forgiveness itself. In order to better understand the problem, this paper will propose two possible forms of generational forgiveness: the set of cases in which the harm has ceased, and the set of cases in which the harm is ongoing. After having assessed the possibility of these two forms of generational forgiveness; the third section, will address the question of the normative aspects of generational forgiveness. Here, most authors recur to the two main accounts of permissibility in the context of forgiveness: either the conditional or the unconditional view. Even so, this paper will argue that generational forgiveness is not entirely compatible with either of these two views given the fact that they require we make normative expectations of the dead. Finally, in the fourth and last section, I will address matters

that could be left for further research as well as pointing out potential objections to the paper's analysis.

1. Preliminary considerations

In this section I will share the accounts of other authors on the topic of forgiveness in order to settle the theoretical grounds for the further analysis contained in this paper. My main intention with this section is to provide an overview on the topic for the reader to get familiarised with some of the current debates that take place around the topic of forgiveness. While exploring certain issues, I will assume some positions while others will be identified as still open for debate.

1.1 Definition of generational forgiveness

First, I would like to address the semantics of the term "generational forgiveness". The "generational" adjective that I apply for these kinds of cases is borrowed from the psychological term "generational trauma". The latter term is used to describe the psychological effects that the trauma experienced on people have on the subsequent generations in that group. Parallel to this, generational forgiveness is the kind of forgiveness that focuses on forgiving the wrongs that have effects on subsequent generations. Generational forgiveness can occur between a living wrongdoer and a living victim; however, it is also likely that this sort of forgiveness occurs between a living victim and a deceased wrongdoer. This is an interesting topic that will be addressed again when analysing the permissibility conditions of generational forgiveness. To determine its possibility, I will distinguish between two proposed kinds of generational forgiveness. Once I have explored these two forms I will go on to illustrate a broader conceptualization of forgiveness in order to establish whether these two cases should in fact be called forgiveness or if they respond to another category.

> Generational cases of forgiveness in which the harm has ceased: these are the pre assumed cases in which someone intends to forgive a past wrongdoer under the claim that they relate to the past victim, either through identification or kinship. The subsequent analysis about their possibility will revolve around the question of the legitimacy of their standing to forgive.
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> Generational cases in which the harm is still ongoing: in cases where agents are affected by harm that originated in the past, and that were transmitted to them intergenerationally. Here, I will distinguish between two types: those in which the harm

is ongoing because the wrong has persisted across multiple generations, and those in which the consequences of a past harm affect living generations.

Regarding these cases, whether or not forgiveness will be possible will depend on the forgiver in question has a standing to forgive. Although I have nominally categorised these two types of cases under the label of forgiveness, someone could claim that these two sets of cases are two different processes that cannot be grouped under the same term. In order to assess this claim, first I will have to determine whether they allow for negative reactive attitudes to emerge; and thereafter, I will have to establish whether we can identify their respective standing to forgive. To achieve this, I will explore a broader definition of forgiveness based on the philosophical literature of the term in pursuit of a conceptualization which is better suited for etching out the possibility and permissibility conditions for forgiveness in generational contexts.

In the following subsection, I will address the standard view on forgiveness as well as other preliminary clarifications that I believe to be useful for further analysing the problem.

1.2 Finding a definition: the standard view

I will now engage the different positions on forgiveness in order to establish some common ground among these perspectives and identify a version that is more generally applicable to the problem[1]. Notwithstanding the fact that there are many discrepancies among the philosophical literature of forgiveness, there seems to be a great amount of common ground too. The most popular view among the literature of forgiveness is what John Kekes defines as "the standard view" (Kekes 2009). Many important authors ascribe to this view (Murphy, 2005; Cuoto 2016; Strawson 1963; Hieronymi, 2001), but there is a general agreement on Bishop Joseph Butler being the first one to introduce it into the philosophical debate. In his 1726 sermon "On forgiveness of injuries", Butler, defines forgiveness as the overcoming, on moral grounds, of the negative reactive attitudes —such as resentment or anger— that are occasioned when one has been wronged by another (Newman 1994). Although there are many disagreements about what these "reactive attitudes" are exactly, or about how the process of forgiveness is articulated in deeper detail, most philosophers that write about forgiveness do agree with this definition. In addition, most authors that follow the standard view agree with Butler when he defends that forgiveness is a moral virtue that entails a change

[1] Note: that although there is no explicit mentioning of it, most of the views that will be reviewed are about interpersonal forgiveness as opposed to other forms

in inner feelings. Moving forwards, I will refer to the standard view as the account which defines forgiveness as a process of overcoming negative reactive attitudes by the forgiver.

Being the standard view, this account of forgiveness has withstood critique from a wide variety of perspectives. John Kekes, for example, argues that:

1) Wrongdoing can produce other emotions in the victim that are not necessarily reactive— such as sadness or disappointment— or no emotions at all
2) feelings such as resentment are not targeted towards the wrongdoer but towards the wrong action
3) forgiveness cannot be considered a virtue because it is not a character trait
4) the standard view fails at explaining why forgiveness entails the “forswearing of resentment on moral grounds (Kekes, 2009)
However, even though Kekes raises some valid points against the standard view he still agrees with two fundamental aspects of the it: firstly the fact that “forgiveness often involves overcoming emotions like resentment, bitterness, anger, hatred, or indignation”; and secondly, “that these emotions may get out of hand, lead people to morally unjustifiable actions, and it is important to control them” (Kekes 2009).

Other authors completely disagree with the core of the standard view: that forgiveness entails the overcoming of negative reactive attitudes, and therefore it entails a change in inner feelings. Christopher Bennett, for instance, argues that “forgiveness is primarily a normative rather than a psychological phenomenon” (Bennett 2018). With this thesis, Bennett criticises forgiveness as change in inner feelings and instead argues that forgiving can be understood as a normative power that creates, waives, or alters obligations that can vary depending on the type of forgiveness. Other authors such as Brandon Warmke have joined Bennet in stating that the nature of forgiveness is at its core normative (Warmke 2016). However, without denying the strong normative implications that are embedded in forgiveness, I refuse Bennett’s view by claiming that numerous studies in psychology have underlined the personal and interpersonal benefits of forgiving in the healing process — proving that forgiveness does not only imply normative behaviour but also a change in the inner feelings of the victim (Prieto-Ursúa 2023, Coyle & Enright 1997, Enright &McCullough 1997). While there are more worthwhile objections to the standard position, they are not relevant to the goals of this paper. These concern areas of forgiveness unrelated to questions of generational forgiveness.

Now that I have briefly explored some of the key notions embedded in the standard view and have highlighted some perspectives which are critical of it — I will take the core of the standard

view as an assumption, namely, the idea that forgiveness constitutes the overcoming of negative reactive attitudes. The reason for this, simply put, is that alternative views on the topic are oftentimes too extreme and can easily lead to conceptual complications. Given the above, and the fact that this is the most broadly accepted account of forgiveness in the philosophical literature, I argue that it is an adequate account for the purposes of this paper. Moving forward, this definition of forgiveness will be at the core of further discussions. Despite this, I do not believe that the standard definition captures forgiveness in its totality — while overcoming negative reactive attitudes is a necessary condition for forgiveness, it is not a sufficient condition.

Having assumed the standard view as one of the necessary conditions for forgiveness I will now claim that this also applies to generational forgiveness, being that following generations can still foster negative reactive attitudes. Regardless of whether someone could or couldn't react upon the wrongdoer, a past wrong can still generate feelings of hatred, resentment, bitterness, anger, or indignation. However, as I shall explain later for the conditions of possibility of generational forgiveness this is not enough to make forgiveness possible. I argue that in order for something to be called forgiveness we also have to have a clear definition of who [or what] we understand as a forgiver. Even so, as stated above, these questions should be left for later, once these problems have been better contextualized and clarified.[2]

Thus far, I have established that I will assume the standard view of forgiveness for further analysis on generational forgiveness. Further conceptual questions will have to be addressed before delving deeper into the topic of generational forgiveness.

1.3. Forgiveness and the moral worth of the victim

A leitmotif in the topic of forgiveness is the idea that by wrongdoing someone we are damaging the moral status of the victim. Therefore, I take it as useful to expose the reader to some of the different ways that this idea is explained through different authors in the topic of forgiveness.

The idea that through wrongdoing someone can damage the dignity or moral worth of the victim is a recurring subject in moral philosophy. This idea has a strong link with the definition of dignity provided by Immanuel Kant, who in his 1785 *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* argues that all persons have an inherent value, or dignity, in virtue of which every

[2] See section 2.1

person conforming the human community has a distinct moral respect that we express by abiding by certain limits in our treatment of others. However, there is much debate about this topic in relation to forgiveness. Murphy, for instance, explains, when wronged by another, a fair part of the suffering comes from the degrading message that I —as the person who has been wronged— am less worthy than the wrongdoer and therefore the latter may use me as a means. So, when the wrongdoer sincerely repents, he now joins me in repudiating the degrading message (Murphy 2012). Regarding the ideas presented above, authors such as Holmgren argue that we assign too much value to the confused beliefs of the wrongdoer, further impressing their morally degrading message upon their victim. Holmgren states that "the person who truly respects himself recognizes his own worth and status as a person" (Holmgren 1993).

Another big account of forgiveness that has an implicit assumption of moral worth or dignity is Hieronymi's view. Hieronymi claims that the resentment that has to be overcome in forgiveness is a form of "moral protest". In order for the victim to resent, three previous conditions have to be met:

1) The act in question was wrong — it was a serious offense, worthy of moral attention.
2) The wrongdoer is a legitimate member of the moral community who can be expected not to do such things. As such, she is someone to be held responsible and she is worth being upset by.
3) You, as the one wronged, ought not to be wronged. This sort of treatment stands as an offense to your person (Hieronymi 2001).

Hieronymi, afterwards, adds a fourth condition in which she states that "past wrongs claim that you can be treated in this way, and that such treatment is acceptable" (Hieronymi 2001) To forgive, according to Hieronymi, is thus to revise the fourth condition while still maintaining the first three.

In this brief subsection I aim to provide a few examples about how different accounts address the issue of the moral worth of the victim in the context of wrongdoing, and how forgiveness can be a way of restoring this moral worth. Note, however, that most accounts do assume that moral worth cannot be lessened, and therefore, the nature of wrongdoing constitutes the flawed belief or claim that it can be. Before moving on to the analysis of generational forgiveness itself, there is one last subject which is crucial to address in considering forgiveness. This topic is the difference between forgiveness and apology.

1.4 Forgiveness and apology

Forgiveness is closely related to apology. However, forgiveness and apology constitute two different things. Now that I have analysed forgiveness —which entails the victimised subject— I'll delve into the role of apology, which is more involved with the wrongdoer. Apology is in many cases linked, and even confused, with remorse or repentance. However, apology is more complex than the aforementioned.

In many cases, an apology can be seen as conventional [public] performance. In terms of J.L. Austin, apology is a "speech act with performative utterances" (Austin 2023). In comparison with remorse or repentance, apology has a behavioural dimension that does not necessarily tell us anything about the inner states of the person that is apologising. Apology can in some contexts be a mere social convention— like for example bumping into someone and saying, "excuse me", but it does not require remorse. However, notwithstanding the inner feelings of the person apologising, it requires some conditions to be met in order to fulfil the public performance. For example, if while apologising to someone I use a sarcastic tone while I openly show a lack of seriousness then the apology will not succeed. These right conditions are what Austin calls "felicity conditions" (Austion 1961). In order for an apology to succeed as a public performance it has to show some level of authenticity and some degree of remorsefulness (if not genuine then faux). Nevertheless, there are some ways of formulating an apology that is acceptable in trivial situations but not in matters that require seriousness. Austin provides with the example of stepping on a snail compared with stepping on a child (Austin 1961). While in the first case you could say "I didn't intend to do it" in the second case it will not suffice. Following Austin this is a matter of social standards and codes that need to be satisfied in the context of a public performance. When stepping on a child, even if this happens by accident, I am required to express acknowledgement of the wrongdoing and to not misplace the object of remorse.

Thus, to represent remorse and repentance seems to be a necessary condition for a successful apology. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily imply real feelings of remorse or repentance in the person apologising. However, in a context of seriousness we normally do not take apology to be a mere Austinian performance —an "insulting piece of acting" (Murphy 2012)— but instead we assume it represents sincere remorse. It is precisely the assumption that an apology has to be sincerely remorseful that allows us to reject fake apologies when we suspect that they do not entail sincere feelings of regret. It is only when remorse is palpable in apology, that the wrong action becomes "reversible".

Now that I have addressed these important preliminary considerations, I would like to summarise the main points regarding generational forgiveness. I claim that generational forgiveness is a form of secondary-victimhood forgiveness that takes place across or between generations. I identify two types of cases of transgenerational forgiveness: those cases in which the wrong has ceased and those cases in which the wrong is ongoing. Therefore, in order to establish the possibility of generational forgiveness it must be proven that:

a) past wrongdoing can still make reactive attitudes emerge in current agents,
b) the forgivers hold a stand for forgiveness.

Now that we have established the preliminary grounds for forgiveness in general, we can now begin to delve into questions of generational forgiveness — and more acute matters regarding its possibility and permissibility.

2. On generational forgiveness: its possibility

Conceptual and normative matters in forgiveness can sometimes be hard to separate. In many cases, factors that affect possibility conditions can also affect their permissibility. Therefore, normative assumptions can change entirely depending on the definition of forgiveness we provide. In the words of Warmke “what we say about the nature of forgiveness has consequences for what we say about the norms of forgiveness” (Warmke 2015). However, although the link between normative and conceptual matters in forgiveness is undeniable, I believe that the questions regarding the possibility and permissibility have to be answered separately. In order to do so I will firstly address the matter of the possibility of transgenerational forgiveness and the following section will address its permissibility.

2.1 Third-party forgiveness and the victim only account

I have until now provided a definition of generational forgiveness. However, the analysis for its possibility raises the following question: is the phenomenon described until now forgiveness or is it some other process? Until now, I have mentioned that following the standard view, forgiveness is defined as the overcoming of negative reactive attitudes. So, following this view, the process of forgiveness demands negative reactive attitudes. As I mentioned before I defend that someone can legitimately have negative reactive attitudes when affected by a generational wrong. As an example, a person who is a descendant of a genocide survivor, can undeniably suffer from bitterness, resentment or anger when confronted with the experiences of their dead kin.

However, being able to feel some kind of reactive emotions cannot be the only condition of possibility for forgiveness. Most of the philosophical literature agrees that in order for forgiveness to be possible the forgiver also has to have a standing to forgive (Seim 2022, p. 194). The standing to forgive can be understood, following the philosophical literature on the topic, in two ways: standing as a right (Fritz & Miller 2019), or standing as authority (Sabini & Silver 1982). The standing to forgive can thus be either a normative question that determines the moral appropriateness of forgiveness if we understand it as a right; or a special authority that makes forgiveness either impossible or pointless if someone lacks it (Seim 2022).

In order to elaborate on the possibility of generational forgiveness I will focus on the standing to forgive as the second definition, that is, as an authority. When we assume this definition of 'standing' it becomes a condition necessary for the possibility of forgiveness because without a standing to forgive, forgiveness would be conceptually inappropriate, so. In other words, if the forgiver in question does not have standing to forgive then what we are doing is not forgiveness but something else. By understanding the standing to forgive as an authority, there are two potential accounts to be considered: firstly, a victim only account which would claim that only victims are able to forgive; and secondly, a third-party account of which holds that third parties [those that don't hold the victim status] can also forgive. Following this, I will explore those arguments which defend third-party forgiveness in order to later on refute these arguments in defence of a victim only account of forgiveness. Finally, I will justify generational forgiveness in a form of forgiveness carried out through secondary victims.

Consider this example: you hear through the broadcast that an attempted murder has taken place. When the exact address is shared, you realise that the event took place at your neighbour's house. Although you didn't hold the closest relationship with them you still feel strong compassion towards them — to the point that the compassion turns into bitterness. You can feel bitterness when hearing about the attempted murder of your neighbour, but does that mean you can forgive the wrongdoer of the attempt? This putative form of forgiveness would be what scholars refer to as "third party forgiveness". Third party forgiveness is the account that claims that forgiveness is possible through agents based on their relationship with the primary victim, regardless of their victim status. Many authors defend third party forgiveness (Pettigrove 2009, MacLachlan 2017, Black 2023, Chaplin 2019).

Like Maria Seim points out in her paper *The Standing to Forgive*, some authors have defended third party forgiveness based on the normative power that third parties can have (Seim 2022). MacLachlan and Chaplin rely on the idea of "relationship of moral solidarity" as the foundation

of what makes third party forgiveness permissible (MacLachlan 2008, Chaplin 2019). With moral solidarity MacLachlan means the way in which we can identify with the victims suffering. The most important point about their accounts is that third-party forgiveness, or the refusal of it, can offer support to the victim. MacLachlan and Chaplin are right when they state that third parties can support the victim and even assess normative considerations that can affect forgiveness, such as highlighting the blame of the wrongdoer. However, these considerations only focus on the benefits that come from considering that third-party forgiveness is permissible; however, they fail to provide a conceptually coherent argument as to why. Focusing on the possibility of generational forgiveness, these latter views should be rejected under the pretext that they do not contribute to the debate above, regarding third-party forgiveness. By extension, I will now focus on the accounts that aim to defend third party forgiveness by stating that it is compatible with the very same nature of forgiveness in itself.

In virtue of exposing a defence of third-party forgiveness that is based on the nature of forgiving I will expose Glen Pettigrove's account on the subject (Pettigrove 2009). I chose Pettigrove's account because it is the most clear and direct defence of this sort of account of third-party forgiveness. Pettigrove defends third party forgiveness based on the idea that wrongdoing invites negative reflection on the character of the wrongdoer and through forgiveness we are able to re-evaluate these reflections. Pettigrove holds that forgiveness is possible through a combination of the activities of overcoming negative reactive attitudes, repairing disrupted relationships and revaluing wrongdoers, altogether combined. According to Pettigrove, people other victims can engage in these activities, people that do not belong to the victim category can thus also forgive (Pettigrove 2009). Pettigrove's account manages to draw attention upon two interesting points that many other accounts of forgiveness fail to address. Firstly, in his defence he takes into account the "intricate social web in which wrongdoing reverberates" (Walker 2013), in other words, Pettigrove manages to identify the function third parties can have when assessing normative rules regarding wrongdoing. Secondly, Pettigrove also succeeds at pointing out that resentment can also be experienced by others rather than the victim of wrongdoing.

Notwithstanding the fact that it raises some interesting considerations, Pettigrove's account fails at recognising some important traits embedded in the very nature of forgiveness. When assuming that forgiveness only entails the overcoming of negative reactive attitudes in addition to re-evaluation of the wrongdoer's character, Pettigrove overlooks what forgiveness implies to a victim of wrongdoing. The problem is that Pettigrove pictures wrongdoing as a form of moral "debt" that the wrongdoer now owes to the victim (Pettigrove 2009, 584). This "debt model" fails to notice that —while being a victim of wrongdoing— through forgiveness

someone does not simply let go of the wrong. Instead, this is “absorbed” or “digested” (Hieronymi 2001, 551). The wrongs that are absorbed by the victim can range from being unsettling to being disastrous or life changing. It is for this same reason, that even after reparations, forgiveness of terrible wrongs can be admirable, astonishing or even seen as virtuous. Pettigrove’s account reduces wrongdoing to a debt of moral duties and fails at understanding the nature of victimhood. In the words of Margaret Urban Walker: “only a victim is left with the damage; that is what it is to be a victim, and that is at the core of the problem to which forgiving is a response”. Being that Pettigrove’s account fails to capture the nature of victimhood, he overlooks what in the philosophical literature is referred to as the victim’s “prerogative to forgive”. By extension, I disagree with Pettigrove’s defence of third-party forgiveness because it fails at providing an articulated account of victimhood and thus overlooks the victim’s prerogative needed for forgiveness. Although I claim that Pettigrove fails at justifying that third parties can forgive, I still agree with Urban Walker when she states that third parties “have key roles in affirming norms, sanctioning offenders, and vindicating victims” (Walker 2013). Being so, I refuse third-party forgiveness as possible form of forgiveness, and instead I claim that third-party are agents with the powers to assess norms.

Having argued against third party forgiveness as a form of claiming a standing to forgive, we are left with only the victim-only account. The victim-only account claims that forgiveness is only possible through those who belong to the victim-category. However, this victim-category, or victim pool as some authors denominate it (Seim 2022, Govier & Verwoerd 2002), also accepts secondary victimhood. These are victims that were not targeted as primary victims for a transgression but still suffer from the consequences of the wrongdoing. For instance, by stealing a great amount of someone’s savings I could collaterally also damage the family members of the primary victim that was targeted by the wrongdoer. The family members that are being affected by the great economical struggles that the theft of the savings has provoked are thus secondary victims, and as such they qualify as forgivers. The victim-only account thus only considers forgiveness conceptually appropriate for all those that belong to the victim pool, including secondary victims.

2.2 The victim-only account applied to generational forgiveness

Now that I have established that I will defend a victim-only account by arguing against third-party forgiveness, the next step in order to explore the possibility of generational forgiveness will be to establish whether it corresponds with the victim-only account, or if instead, is a form of third-party forgiveness — and therefore, not genuine forgiveness. In order to continue with this analysis, I will proceed by examining the two forms of generational forgiveness separately. I will first start delving into the analysis of cases in which the harm has ceased and then continue with the cases of ongoing harm.

Let's start with the first set of cases: those in which the wrongdoing has ceased. Let's picture an example: suppose that a relative of mine that belonged to a past generation was a victim of some form of institutional discrimination. Now, let's suppose that this form of institutional discrimination has not only ceased, but that also institutional efforts have been made towards reparations in response to this past wrong. Let's imagine that I have actually benefited from these reparations and therefore my life is somewhat easier thanks to these policies. To clarify, 'I' am in no way personally damaged by this previous harm.

Given this example, under which conditions, if any, can I justify a standing to forgive the past wrong? Considering the victim-only approach that I have assumed I would have to justify my belonging to the victim pool, and that in turn would imply that I have to clarify that I am in some way still affected by the wrong even when the latter has ceased. Considering that I am not affected by the direct consequences of the wrong, I would have to find another way of justifying my victim status in relation to this past wrong. One way that this idea could be defended is by arguing that through wrongdoing, the perpetrator presented a detrimental claim regarding the worth of the victim, and that I —as someone that avows to have a standing to forgive— am affected by that claim. In order to provide a better detailed explanation of how this happens I will resort to Hieronymi's account of forgiveness. Following Hieronymi's account, resentment that to be overcome through forgiveness is a form of "moral protest" — a protest against "a past action that persists as a present threat" (Hieronymi 2001). This threat is the implied claim that the victim can be treated this way. The wrong action entails a claim, this claim constitutes a threat, and this threat persists in the "social space" until rebutted (for example through forgiveness) or otherwise undermined (Hieronymi, 2001).

Nevertheless, in order for this to be possible the victim has to justify —again as the person who claims to have a standing to forgive— that she somehow relates to this detrimental threat that Hieronymi refers to. I suggest that this could be claimed through identifications or kinship.

Identification can take place when an individual or collective shares ethnicity, religion, gender, political ideas or sexual orientation, among others, with the past victim; and, in addition, the victim was hurt because of this shared trait. When a certain person is a victim of a hate crime, the threat is consequentially the implied claim that any member of the group can be treated this way because of their belonging to said collective. On top of this, members of the shared discriminated group can suffer from distress or other reactive feelings such as resentment or anger. The current members of said collective could potentially claim that they have a standing to forgive because a detrimental threat was posed against their collective through past wrongdoing. This threat would imply that those that belong to the group targeted for wrongdoing ought to be treated this way. In other words, through the wrongdoing, the moral worth of those that belong to the group is thrust into question. In the case of kinship something similar could be argued. When a deceased relative was wronged in the past, the wrongdoing that questioned their moral worth can cause distress to their descendants due to the relationship that kinship entails.

Considering the above, I argue, nonetheless, that unless affected by other consequences related to the harm caused to the primary victim, none of these can be considered actual claims for defending someone's inclusion into the victim category. By claiming that 'Alberto' identifies with the past victim he is not actually proving that I share a part of the generational harm, but instead he is just expressing what MacLachlan calls a "relationship of moral solidarity" with the deceased victim. When this occurs, 'Alberto' is joining the repudiation of the wrong act by assessing that the act is wrong, but he does not "absorb" the harms of the wrong the same way that the victim does. When someone feels distress, sadness or even resentment in relation to a past victim with whom they identify, they are showing indeed negative reactive attitudes, but as I have addressed before: these are not enough for claiming the status of secondary victimhood.

For the reasons expressed above, I argue that once the harm has ceased, there is no potential form of claiming victimhood and therefore those who claim a standing to forgiveness through identification or because of kinship are not victims, but third parties. When relating with a past victim —whether this is because of identification or kinship— someone from a future generation can have reactive attitudes towards the wrongdoing, but these reactive attitudes are merely descriptive, and they do not mean in any way that someone is suffering the ill-effects that come from wrongdoing. I do not intend to claim, however, that the identification of these third parties with the past victim does not bear with it significant weight. The reactive attitudes or emotions of the third parties in the future generations can be descriptive, regarding the way people react; but also normative, regarding the way people should react when

reflecting on their identification (Perez 2012). Given the normative aspect of their reactive attitudes, third parties can help to assess moral norms when relating to past wrongs.

Following with the above, I claim that when the harm has ceased, generational forgiveness is not possible. This is due to the fact that there is no harm that comes from the original wrongdoing, and that in turn, somehow this affects future generations. If the harm is something that does not transcends generations, there cannot be a claim for victimhood — these kinds of cases cannot be admitted as forms of generational forgiveness. Since the first presumed type of cases lead to the impossibility of generational forgiveness, I will now analyse the second type to clarify if generational forgiveness is at all possible in this scenario.

As I have mentioned in the introduction the second type of proposed cases of generational forgiveness are those in which the harm is still ongoing. This can occur either because the consequences of the wrong are still experienced by following generations, or because the wrong has been reproduced generationally. An example of generational harm that is still felt through its consequences could be the native population of a country that was colonised in the past but now still confronts the economic consequences that derive from its colonial past. A hypothetical example of a harm that has been reproduced, could be of a certain minority that has been institutionally discriminated against in the past and still is today by the same institutions. I will defend, however, that a wrong can only be generational when the consequences are felt by the future generations of the primary victim. I argue then that the wrongdoing that is felt through reproduction [of the wrong] and the wrongdoing that is felt through consequences are —although not mutually exclusive— two different things. In order to further clarify this, I will introduce Adelsberg analysis of forgiveness in cases of ongoing wrongs (Adelsberg 2018).

In his article *Collective forgiveness in the context of ongoing harms*, Adelsberg describes an event occurred in 2016 simultaneous to the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, in which a group of military veterans knelt in front of Oceti Sakowin Elders as way of demanding for forgiveness for the colonial occupation of the lands. While performing this gesture, begging for forgiveness to the native elders; the organiser of the group, Wes Clark Jr., addressed many past wrongs: the illegitimate occupation of their land, the physical harm committed, breakage of signed treaties, the exploitation of resources, etc. However, while this event was taking place the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline was also occurring. The construction of this pipeline was considered a potential threat for the water quality of the region, and therefore, was considered detrimental for the indigenous communities that inhabit the area. This symbolic kneeling took place on the 5th of December — just two months before the Dakota

Access Protest itself, and the militarised police intervention upon the same. The irony of this episode is that while Clark and the rest of the veterans were apologising to the Oceti Sakowin Elders the local community was still being damaged by the same perpetrator, namely, militarised federal forces. In his article Adelsberg argues that forgiveness is not possible in this example because the wrong is still being reproduced across generations.

I want to clarify that I agree with Adelsberg's thesis: wrongs cannot be forgiven when they still are ongoing and remain unaddressed. However, I argue that Adelsberg includes a mistake in his analysis. When Adelsberg groups the past colonial wrongs and the events occurred during the protests under the same wrong he fails to notice that these two constitute different wrongs that share the same nature, namely, the U.S.' treatment of the native population of North America. Following Adelsberg's account, all these different wrongs are part of an ongoing wrong, that persists generationally. However, I defend that these are two different wrongs that emerge from the same flawed assumption: that the native population of the U.S. can be treated this way. Although the assumption from which the wrongs emerge might be reproduced generationally, the wrongs are different. The wrongdoers are different and so are the victims that have to "absorb" the costs of the wrong (Hieronymi 2001). Even when the same wrong is reproduced through different generations each generation should be held accountable given their level of participation in the wrong. Nevertheless, I want to clarify once more that I agree with the thesis that Adelsberg defends in his article: forgiveness is not possible as long as the assumption —or "threat" in the words of Hieronymi— present in the wrongdoing is addressed. I aim to defend, however, that following my understanding of the term, 'a wrong', can only be considered generational when the consequences of it are experienced by the upcoming generation — regardless of the fact that the wrong persists generationally. Although I believe that this clarification is important, admittedly, there are [very] few cases in which a wrong is being reproduced through multiple generations, without the consequences of the past wrongs being felt by the next generations. In most cases in which a wrong is reproduced, the consequences of the past wrong can still be felt. However, I contradict the claim that a wrong is generational merely because it has been reproduced through multiple generations. I hold that a wrong can only be categorised as "generational" when its consequences transcend different generations.

Having clarified that reproduction is not enough to claim that a wrong is generational, moving forwards, I will focus my analysis on cases in which the harm is ongoing because of the generational transmission of consequences of the harm. In order to further explore their possibility we have to see if they are compatible with a victim-only account. To achieve these goals, I will analyse the nature of these forms of wrongdoing. I present the following scheme:

- Premise 1: A inflicts a wrong upon B
- Premise 2: C, as an agent that belongs to a future generations in relation with B, is somehow affected by the wrong committed by A
- Conclusion: C is a secondary victim of the wrong committed by A

Given the fact that, considering the previous scheme, C will suffer the backlash of the wrongdoing committed by A — C qualifies as a secondary victim. Being that I have established that negative reactive attitudes can also be felt by future generations and these, in turn, can qualify as secondary victims; by extension, I claim that generational forgiveness is possible under these circumstances. I hold thus that regardless of the relationship between A and C, wrongdoing will be generational if C shares part of the harms that originated from A's transgression.

I have until now rejected the possibility of generational forgiveness for those cases in which the harm has ceased. For the cases in which the harm is ongoing I only consider generational forgiveness to be possible if the consequences of a perpetrator's wrongdoing are felt by the future generation. If these conditions are met, the agents of the future generations can qualify as secondary victims, and in addition with the overcoming of negative reactive attitudes, forgiveness is indeed possible.

Until now I have focussed on the possibility of generational forgiveness. In the next section I will evaluate the normative aspects of and explore the permissibility of this topic.

3. On generational forgiveness: permissibility

Now that I have clarified under which conditions generational forgiveness is possible, I can start to analyse its normative implications. In order to do so I will first have to address what can be called, the permissibility question: under what circumstances [if any] is forgiveness morally permissible? Regarding this question there are three different potential accounts to be taken. Firstly, we can find the pessimist account which holds that there are no conditions that either the wrongdoer or the victim whatsoever can meet in order to make forgiveness morally permissible. Although logically possible, there are few if any authors that defend this account — Warmke for example, tangentially refers to Niestzche's relationship with the concept (Warmke, 2015, p.18). Secondly, we can find the account of th*e* conditionalists, which is the most common view among most philosophers today. This view argues that forgiveness is

permissible only if certain conditions are met by the wrongdoer (Kolnai 1974, Murphy 2005 or Haber 1991). Finally, the unconditionalists argue that there are no conditions that have to be met by the wrongdoer in order to make forgiveness morally permissible (Garrard & McNaughton 2003, Holmgren 1993).

In offering these three conditions I aim at assessing which one is the best for determining the permissibility of generational forgiveness. Out of the three options presented above I will start by rejecting the pessimist account. I reject this account because I take it that eliminating the permissibility of forgiveness is too radical as an approach — I argue that forgiveness is too important for our moral lives for its permissibility to be eliminated. The debate for the permissibility of generational forgiveness then remains between the conditionalist and the unconditionalist view. In the following subsection I will address these arguments individually, exposing arguments used in the defence of each.

The unconditionalist view on forgiveness is in most cases defended by authors that claim forgiveness to be permissible when the victim goes through some inner changes that do not entail any kind of reparative action from the wrongdoer. Some defend this idea by arguing that through unconditional forgiveness we respect the wrongdoer as a moral agent by recognising their intrinsic value as a person, regardless of her performances (Holmgren, 1993). Others claim that, by adopting an unconditional view of forgiveness we are recognising our shared human condition and giving us a reason to be forbearing among each other (Garrard & McNaughton 2003). Other authors claim that unconditional forgiveness can be engendered out of love and understanding for the forgiven (Pettigrove, 2012). Most of these accounts echo Saint Augustine's idea of separating the sinner from the sin — articulated more modernly, to understand the wrongdoer as a valuable person who can make mistakes[3].

Although the stance that these authors present picture forgiveness under a more positive view, there are many claims that can be made about the impermissibility of unconditional

[3] Interestingly, studies carried out by the *Universidad Pontificia de Comillas* aimed at developing a psychometric instrument to measure the beliefs that people hold about the conditionality of forgiveness. The study concluded that a wide-held view among the subjects reflected that forgiveness is unconditional. Particularly this view was mostly held by people with stronger religiosity. Prieto-Ursúa et al. *Conditional or Unconditional Forgiveness? An Instrument to Measure the Conditionality of Forgiveness.* Psychology Department Universidad Pontificia Comillas. 2018

forgiveness. The most recurrent arguments against it are that unconditional forgiveness can be detrimental for the respect of the victim, the wrongdoer and for the moral community. Authors such as Murphy or Haber claim that a victim that is too predisposed to forgive might incur into servility. Haber says in *Forgiveness: a philosophical study*: "bad feelings ... are not only natural but... called for as expressions of aversion to mistreatment" (Haber 1991, p. 82). Murphy also joins Haber in stating that the victim of wrongdoing ought to respect herself. To do so she has to refuse any judgment that she lacks worth, but by incurring into wrongdoing the perpetrator has implicitly claimed this judgement. Murphy claims that in showing repentance, the wrongdoer joins the victim into rejecting this judgment, and therefore forgiving without any reparative act from the wrongdoer is disrespectful towards the victim herself (Murphy 1998). Regarding the wrongdoer, authors that oppose the unconditional view, claim that by forgiving the wrongdoer too easily we are not respecting him as a moral agent. In defence of this argument Haber says that by forgiving the perpetrator without any reparative action "we indicate that we have an attitude of [dis]regard for wrongdoers, in the sense that we do not look on them as things whose movements happen to cause injury" (Haber 1991). Lastly, many authors have also argued that through unconditional forgiveness the victim is showing a lack of respect for morality itself (Kolnai 1973, Haber 1991). These authors hold that to forgive a wrongdoer who doesn't repent is to condone the wrong. Following this argumentation, until the wrongdoer repents, he is endorsing the wrongdoing. Haber goes as far as stating that it is the wrongdoer who has to go through the trouble of separating the sinner from the sin (Haber 1991, p. 104)[4].

Although these arguments against the unconditional view raise some concerns about the permissibility of forgiveness, I believe that the defenders of this approach have already addressed them on multiple occasions (Garrard & McNaughton 2003, Holmgren 1993 or Pettigrove 2012). However, there are some further arguments against the unconditional approach that remain unaddressed. Firstly, some authors argue that by allowing unconditional forgiveness we would be unable to distinguish between forgiveness and other ways of giving up our 'hard' feelings; like for instance, someone releasing reactive attitudes through therapy (Griswold 2010). Another argument against that is closely connected to the latter one is that if we were to adopt an unconditional account of forgiveness, we wouldn't be able to show how forgiveness is distinct from condonation (Bell 2019). Condonation is a way to overlook the wrongdoing, whereas in forgiveness we don't deny the wrongdoing, but we forswear the

[4] I believe that all these arguments are elegantly refuted in a defence for an unconditional approach in Margaret Holmgren's 1993 paper "*Forgiveness and the intrinsic value of persons".*

vindictive attitudes. Opponents to the unconditional view argue that without a reparative attitude from the wrongdoer these two are indistinguishable. Finally, some claim that when accepting an unconditional view of forgiveness, we are failing to understand that forgiveness is a process of *relational repair*[5] (Bell 2019, Griswold 2010). These authors picture wrongdoing as a form of impairing our relationships. Following this idea forgiveness would be the process that allows us to repair the relationship broken through wrongdoing. If we were to assume an unconditional account, we would be denying the relational element implicit in forgiveness, according to this perspective, forgiveness only entails that the victim to overcome her inner reactive attitudes without any need of the wrongdoer during this process. These arguments can be considered insofar as a serious threat for the permissibility of forgiveness under the unconditional view. Therefore, I will, for now, leave the unconditional account on the side and start exploring the option of the conditional view as a potential account for the permissibility of generational forgiveness.

The conditional account of forgiveness appears to be the most common among the philosophical literature. The concept of conditional forgiveness posits that before forgiveness can be granted the offender has to take certain steps in order to meet specific conditions. Most authors who formulate this need for conditions under the idea that by wronging someone, we are showing that we don't value the victim as an equal and that we are unwilling to be responsive to their needs (Bell, 2019). This idea is formulated through many different ways depending on the author: Murphy holds that through the perpetration of wrong, we are implicitly sending the message that the victim is less worthy (Murphy 2012). Hieronymi on the other hand, frames it in the form of a thread that claims that the victim can be treated this way (Hieronymi 2001). Finally, the Kantian school would frame it as violation of someone's human dignity (Korsgaard 1996). Insofar the wrongdoer has trespassed the victim, he has to show somehow that he withdraws the mistaken thought, claim or message that states that the victim can be treated this way. Most authors hold that repentance or remorse are sufficient conditions for this. This idea aligns with what the New Testament has to say about forgiveness 6. Other authors like Adelsberg hold that in order for genuine forgiveness to be possible, the wrongdoer also must show commitment to not reproducing the wrong (Adelsberg, 2018).

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[5] I will clarify later how this *relational repair* can be understood in the context of generational forgiveness

[6] e.g. *Luke 6:37*: if another believer sins, rebuke that person; then if there is repentance, forgive. Even if that person wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, you must forgive.

The conditionalist view allows us to solve some of the normative problems that the unconditional view presents. It allows us to frame forgiveness in such a way that is different from other ways of overcoming reactive negative attitudes insofar the process of forgiving also entails action from another agent than the victim. In addition, the conditionalist view also allows us to underline the relational repair that some authors claim to be implicit in forgiving (Bell, 2019).

Notwithstanding, the conditionalist view might at first glance seem to be a better normative approach for forgiveness it also has been criticised. Firstly, Holmgren points out that by endorsing a conditionalist view we are failing at perceiving the victims as autonomous beings. Holmgren defends the idea that as autonomous beings we are able to assess our own actions and attitudes from a moral point of view (Holmgren, 1993). By delegating the conditions needed for forgiveness to the wrongdoer we are stripping the autonomy away from the victim. A second objection that can be posed against the conditionalist approach is that through it we fail at showing compassion for the wrongdoers. Holmgren affirms in relation to this last point "what opponents of unconditional genuine forgiveness tend to overlook here is that mistaken attitudes and wrong actions have sources" (Holmgren 1993). The very fact that we are autonomous beings entails that we also have the *capability* to make mistakes. Following this argument the conditionalist view fails at understanding the reasons through which someone can incur into wrongdoing.

However, there is another argument against the conditionalist view that is more concerning for my analysis of generational forgiveness. As Macalester Bell suggests, following the conditionalist view we have to presume that persons have normative powers — that is, "powers to give and provide reasons" (Bell, 2019 p.35). Through the exercise and mutual recognition of these powers, we construct preconditions for reciprocal relations. When our normative expectations are not reciprocal, we can incur into wrongdoing. In line with Bell's thinking, the primary route in which wrongdoing impairs our relationship with other persons, because insofar he has committed a wrongdoing, the perpetrator has undermined the characteristic reciprocity of normative expectations. However, some agents are stripped away of these normative powers. This could be the case for those who are in a vegetative state, but even more important for our analysis, for the dead. The dead cannot express remorse or repentance as the conditionalist demands. This is not because the dead are unrepentant, but because —as Bell refers to it— they are non-repentant. Insofar generational forgiveness is aform of forgiveness that frequently entails forgiving the dead, we have to adopt an account of permissibility that encompasses forgiveness of the dead too.

Out of the three accounts mentioned before —pessimist, unconditional and conditional— I take the conditional account to be the best for cases in which both victim and wrongdoer are still alive. This is because it allows for the permissibility of forgiveness, in opposition to what the pessimist account defends, and it also avoids the normative problems that the unconditionalist account entails. However, the conditionalist view doesn't allow for forgiveness of dead people. In some cases of generational forgiveness, there may be a demand for the secondary victim to forgive dead persons, we have to also find an account that also integrates the forgiveness of the dead. For these reasons I will explore Macalester Bell's account on forgiving dead people, in order to integrate an account that allows for a conditional view and allows for forgiving the dead at the same time.

3.1 Macalester Bell's account on forgiving the dead

In her 2019 article, called *Forgiving the Dead*, Macalester Bell, proposes a third path between the conditional and unconditional view of forgiveness that allows us to picture the forgiveness of the dead as something fully coherent and morally valuable. However, Bell does not argue for the forgiveness of the dead in such a way in which we would have to give up the conditional account. Ultimately Bell's view allows us to still adopt the conditional account when the wrongdoer is still alive, and adopt her particular 'third path' when the latter is deceased.

To carry on with the exposition of Bell's defence on forgiving the dead I will firstly explain why she adopts a conditional view for the cases in which the wrongdoer is still alive. Bell argues that an adequate account of forgiveness has to satisfy the following conditions:

1. It has to allow us to explain why forgiveness is a laudable or meritorious response to wrongdoing
2. It has to be able to explain how forgiveness is different from other way of dealing with wrongdoing (as for instance writing the offender off)
3. It will provide a way to distinguish between forgiveness and condonation
4. It will provide resources to explain why forgiveness can be difficult in some cases. (Bell 2019, p. 32)

Being that Bell's view demands an account of forgiveness that satisfies these desiderata, she takes a stand and argues in favour of the conditional account insofar only this view can satisfy the previous conditions. Like I have addressed previously, the unconditional view struggles to differentiate between forgiveness and other forms of dealing with wrongdoing, as well as differentiating between meritorious forgiveness and condonation. Therefore, Bell chooses the

conditional view over the unconditional, because, following her argumentation, only the former can satisfy these foundational demands of forgiveness.

Nevertheless, Bell's conditional account still differs from that of the rest of the defenders of the view. This is due to Bell's formulation of the very nature of forgiveness. Following Bell, forgiveness does not only entail the overcoming of negative reactive attitudes, but in addition to this she also states that this overcoming of hard feelings has to be carried out for the sake of the relationship with the wrongdoer (Bell 2019, p. 36). I will elaborate on Bell's argumentation of this idea.

The core of Bell's idea is that wrongdoing impairs our relationship with the perpetrator. This is because, following the author, our relationships with adult persons are different from other sorts of relationships (e.g. our relationship with young children or non-human animals), insofar that they ought to be characterised by reciprocity. While, among person-to-person relationships, reciprocity remains as a normative ideal, it still grounds many of the attitudes and behaviours we engage with other adults. Daily activities presume a form of equality and responsiveness between the different parties that engage in them. Even so, despite the fact that reciprocity remains the normative ideal when engaging in activities with other persons, this does not mean that all relations are therefore reciprocal (Bell 2019, p. 33). When wronged, the attitudes expressed by the perpetrator can damage the foundations of this presupposed reciprocity. By wronging someone and not expressing remorse —as the conditionalist account might demand— the perpetrator is showing that he doesn't value the victim as an equal and therefore denies being responsive to the victim's needs (Bell 2019, p.33). Therefore, wrongdoing can make it difficult or impossible to engage in reciprocal activities with the wrongdoer because it provides reasons to question the latter's reliability. Following the author's rationale, in order for forgiveness to be possible, the perpetrator has to express remorse to repair the reciprocal normative expectations. Only when the wrongdoer meets this condition forgiveness will be possible.

For these reasons Bell holds that forgiveness can be understood as a process of relational repair. However, authors that defend the unconditional approach have already previously addressed this idea as a way of criticising the conditional view. Garrard & MacNaughton have raised the issue that in order to repair a relationship there has to have been a relationship previous to the wrong (Garrard & MacNaughton 2003). However, a stranger with whom I haven't had a previous relationship can steal my car. Would that entail that if I were to forgive the car thief, I would be repairing a relationship that was previously non-existent? In response to this objection Bell writes, "a stranger's wrongdoing may alter one's basic normative

expectations with regard to that person; under these conditions, one may be unable to engage in basic reciprocal activities with that person" (Bell 2019, p. 34). With this statement Bell, implicitly, joins other authors (Lang 1994, Roberts 1995), into denying that there are any cases in which there is no relationship to restore. Following these authors, everyone on Earth is bears some relationship to each other in virtue of their common humanity.

Another potential objection to Bell's view of forgiveness as relational restoration could be that Bell is confusing forgiveness and reconciliation. Like some authors pose, sometimes restoring a relationship after forgiveness might be dangerous for the victim. This is the example of a battered housewife that does not end the estrangement of her marriage after forgiving her husband (Hampton & Murphy 1988, p. 42-43). However, as a response to this reply, I argue that Bell's relational repair does not necessarily entail reconciliation. Instead, what I understand from Bell's account is that the relational repair allows for forgiveness, without necessarily implying it. Insofar that reconciliation is not possible without previously having redefined the terms of the damaged relationship, forgiveness must precede reconciliation. Following my understanding, Bell's relational repair is a necessary condition a priori to reconciliation, and therefore they are not the same thing.

Having taken a stand for the conditional account, Bell therefore holds, firstly, that forgiveness is a process in which the victim overcomes negative reactive attitudes for the *sake of the relationship*; and secondly, that forgiveness demands that the wrongdoer to express remorse in order to repair the normative reciprocal expectations implicit in relationships. However, as I have mentioned before, the problem with this view is that the dead cannot engage in reparative activities. The dead cannot express remorse nor match our normative expectations about them. Their normative powers get stripped away from the wrongdoer at the moment of death. Nevertheless, echoing Bell, we can still engage in relationships with the dead (Bell 2019, p. 37). However, the relationship between a living victim [either primary or secondary] and a deceased wrongdoer, is fundamentally different from the relationships between two living agents. This is because reciprocity is not a normative ideal that regulates the relationships between the dead and the living. These kinds of relationships are unidirectional. Given these unique characteristics that regulate the relationship between the living and the dead, we cannot apply the same set of considerations that allow forgiveness of living wrongdoers. For these reasons Bell suggests that we cannot compare forgiving the dead with forgiving the unrepentant. Therefore, Bell suggests a different set of considerations for allowing the permissibility of forgiveness of dead persons. But before fully delving into these considerations I would like to briefly explain why Bell holds that we can engage into relationships with the dead so that we can more easily follow her rationale.

Many might question if the idea of having a relationship with the dead is coherent. The dead lack qualities that can justify having a relationship with someone — such as intentions, will or judgements. However, the dead cannot be regarded as persons: the dead are ex-persons according to Bell (Bell 2019, p. 39). Nevertheless, the fact that the dead have ceased to be persons, does not mean we can retroactively cancel their past personality. When someone close to us dies, we do not cease to experience the attitudes harboured by the living person (Bell 2019, p. 40). We may therefore coherently harbour emotions for the dead when these emotions are based primarily on qualities that the dead had while being alive (Bell 2019, p. 40). The type of relationship that Bell argues people can have with the dead is not a relationship between a living person and a phantom, ghost, or spirit; instead, they are relationships with ex-persons. This can be said in the sense that death does not obliterate the past actions or character traits that are the focus of the emotions harboured in the relationship (Bell 2019, p. 40). The attitudes and emotions that are present in the relationship with the dead don't necessarily need to "present their intentional object as currently existing" (Bell 2019, p. 40), and therefore they are coherent when they are directed towards someone who are no longer existing persons.

In line with the arguments established above, we can easily imagine a situation in which the perpetrator of a wrong dies without having engaged into reparative activities with the victim, and therefore the victim is left with an impaired relationship to the ex-person. We can also picture cases in which a wrongdoer wrongs another person who is not yet born, and by dying also leaves an impaired relationship behind.

Although the dead lack most features that constitute the relationship between adult persons, Bell holds that we can still have relationships with the dead "insofar we interpret ourselves and others through them in ways that affect our practical identities" (Bell 2019, p. 41). This act of interpreting our relations is what Bell calls 'interpretive activities'. I will present an example to better illustrate this: I can still hold a relationship with their deceased relative. The interpretive activity of seeing this deceased relative as a role model might push me forward into acting like this dead relative. On the other hand, I might picture this deceased relative as morally flawed which can, in turn, motivate me to act better according to my moral standards. Bell claims that these interpretive activities are also present in the relationships between the living, however, in the case of the relationships between the living and the dead, these interpretive activities are unidirectional and mediated by imaginative projections (Bell 2019, p. 41). Going back to the example of 'my' dead relative, I cannot be responsive to his interpretations of me, but I can imagine how this dead relative would have responded based on the perspective of my own

imaginative construction. Although this analysis might seem to be presenting a range of metaphysical issues, Bell is right when pointing out that these matters are fundamentally practical. The relationship with the dead can indeed shape our identities and the relationship with our surroundings.

Having established through Bell's argumentation that the living can indeed have relationships with the dead, let's now analyse how we can have an impaired relationship with them. When our relationship with the dead are impaired, the impairment does not undermine our normative expectations nor threats reciprocity. As I have mentioned before, the dead lack normative powers, they are non-normative. Instead the impairment comes is interpretive: through the relationship victims come to interpret themselves and others in ways they have reasons to reject (Bell 2019, p.42). A victim might object these interpretations out of two reasons:

1) The interpretations may be grossly inaccurate. When a victim is left with an impaired relationship with a dead wrongdoer, she might interpret the wrongdoer in such a detrimental way that this might overshadow the good qualities of the interpreted
2) They may keep the victims from enjoying the relational goods that a relationship with the dead can provide, such as for instance the dead agent being a good role model.

In these ways the victim can come to interpret themselves through the relations with the dead offender in ways that affects their well-being. The victim might feel powerless, vulnerable or be quick to anger when relating with their interpretations about the dead offender. For these reasons, when forgiving the dead, following Bell, we are eradicating the negative interpretations that skew our way of interpreting ourselves and others. This applies too to cases in which the dead offender was a stranger for the victim. When wrong is committed by an unknown dead wrongdoer, forgiveness still involves the eradication of negative interpretations in order for the victim to cease interpreting herself and others through the lens of their relationship with the offender (Bell 2019, p. 42-43).

As we have seen, authors that align with the conditional view are generally reluctant to accept the forgiveness for the dead. However, Bell holds that we can accept the conditional view, as long as we acknowledge the possibility of forgiving the dead. Our reasons to forgive the dead are vary significantly from the ones we forgive the living for. When forgiving the living we care that the offender to give us reasons to inspire forgiveness — the dead, however, cannot provide us reasons to forgive because they lack the prerequisite normative powers to achieve as much. In forgiving the living we expect the wrongdoers to engage in reparative activities being that our relationships with them are grounded on norms of reciprocity. Our relationships

with the dead, however, are not reciprocal, and therefore it is incoherent to demand reparative action from them. Therefore, Bell's states that "overcoming one's hard feelings for a dead relation only counts as forgiveness if one overcomes one's hard feelings for the sake of one's [nonreciprocal] relationship with the dead offender" (Bell 2019, p. 44). In opposition to the unconditional view, Bell's account is articulated under the premise that forgiveness is carried out for the sake of the relationship. This means that when forgiving the dead we do not operate out of the intention of overcoming hard feelings for the sake of ourselves, but instead we do it for the sake of our [asymmetrical] relationship to the dead. This means that when we forgive the dead, we don't only forsake our negative interpretations —that in turn affect our own interpretations about ourselves— but we also redefine the relationship with the dead. This entails that when we have achieved to forgive a dead wrongdoer we can engage into other activities such as honouring their life or protecting their public image.

In summation, Macalester Bell's account allows us to still maintain a conditional view to forgive the living wrongdoers, and, in turn, thereby permitting genuine forgiveness of the dead. Through this latter form of forgiveness, we are able to overcome our negative interpretations of the dead and redefine our relationships with them.

3.2. Conclusive ideas about the permissibility of generational forgiveness

This last subsection aims to analyse the normative conditions required for generational forgiveness. Firstly, I have considered three potential accounts regarding the permissibility of forgiveness: the pessimist, the unconditionalist, and the conditionalist account. Firstly, on one hand, I reject the pessimist account because of its radicality; and on the other, because forgiveness itself is too important for the sake of our moral experience for it to be relegated to impermissibility. Given the remaining options — I reject the unconditional account because of the normative problems the view drags along with it. These normative problems are firstly characterised as detrimental for the victim, the wrongdoer and the moral community at large; and secondly, if we were to picture the permissibility of forgiveness under the lens of the unconditional account we would struggle to:

a) Distinguish forgiveness from other manners of overcoming negative reactive attitudes
b) Distinguish between forgiveness and condonation
c) We would be unable to frame forgiveness as a form of relational repair

After the rejection of the unconditional account, *modus ponens*[7], would leave us with a singular option for conditional forgiveness: the wrongdoer has to meet certain [reparative] conditions for forgiveness to be morally permissible. However, defenders of conditional forgiveness are usually dismissive of forgiveness of the dead, which might be required for generational forgiveness. Macalester Bell, however, proposes an account that allows for the possibility of forgiving the dead and still adopt a conditionalist approach when the wrongdoer is alive— out the argumentation that the latter have normative powers to assess reciprocity and the former don't.

Therefore, I argue that for the permissibility of generational forgiveness we ought, on the one hand, to adopt a conditionalist view for when the perpetrator is alive — and to adopt, on the other hand, Bell's view on forgiving the dead when the perpetrator is dead. Under these two views we can assess the appropriateness of generational forgiveness. When a victim is wronged by a living wrongdoer, he has to engage in reparative activities in order to inspire forgiveness in the victim. When the wrongdoer is dead it is up to the victim to adopt a stance which is capable of overcoming her negative interpretations of the wrongdoer for the sake of their relationship with the dead perpetrator and themselves.

Conclusion

This paper aims to assess the conditions needed for the possibility and the permissibility of generational forgiveness. First, I have explored some general considerations related to the topic of forgiveness. In this section we could see that following the standard view, forgiveness entails the overcoming of negative reactive attitudes. Even so, I have argued that this does not suffice in order for forgiveness to be possible. For forgiveness to be possible the victim also needs to have a standing to forgive. Depending on our understanding of the standing to forgive — forgiveness could either be possible through an account that allows for third-party forgiveness or through a victim-only account. In the section where I addressed the possibility of generational forgiveness, I reject the different accounts that defend the idea of third-party forgiveness: they either fail at providing a foundation that grounds the possibility of the same, or, because the authors fail to adequately conceptualise the nature of victimhood and of forgiveness in itself.

[7] Premise 1: unconditional forgiveness (v) conditional forgiveness; Premise 2: no unconditional forgiveness; Conclusion: conditional forgiveness

Having established that generational forgiveness can only work through a victim-only account, I have assessed whether generational forgiveness matches the latter, or, if instead, it is a form of third-party forgiveness. To achieve this, I have delineated between two forms of generational forgiveness: cases in which the harm has ceased and those in which the forgivers claim their standing out of the pretext of identification or kinship; and those cases in which the harm is ongoing.

I conclude that the first set of cases would be a form of third-party forgiveness; whereas, for the second set of cases I have separated those in which the harm is reproduced generationally, and those in which the consequences are felt generationally. After analysing each subcategory, I conclude that the only the cases in which the harm is felt [intergenerationally] through its consequences can truly be considered as forms of generational forgiveness — in these cases, the forgivers are secondary victims. Therefore, generational forgiveness is possible when the affected generation suffers the consequences of the original wrongdoing, thereby receiving the status of secondary victimhood.

Regarding the permissibility of generational forgiveness, I have reviewed three possible accounts: the pessimist, the unconditionalist and the conditionalist view. I reject the pessimist account because of its radicality. The unconditional account is rejected due to the normative problems it entails. Although, the conditional account appeared to be the best suited, it presents problems regarding our extension of forgiveness to the deceased; something which could possibly be a prerequisite for generational forgiveness to be realized. For these reasons, I have explored Macalester Bell's account on forgiving the dead. Through this account we are able to endorse the conditional view while still permitting the space to provide forgiveness to the dead.

In conclusion, on the one hand, generational forgiveness is possible when it is presented for cases in which the secondary victims are agents of a following generation: those who are still affected by the harms of a past wrongdoing. On the other hand, via Bell's approach to the conditionalist account, we may still extend this forgiveness to the dead under specific circumstances.

4. Critique and matters for further research

The issue of generational forgiveness is not a simple problem to analyse. Firstly, it poses questions about the very nature of forgiveness —which is already a hotly debated subject—

and secondly, our conclusions on generational forgiveness may vary significantly depending on the definition of generational forgiveness that we accept. Given the lack of consensus surrounding the idea of forgiveness understood philosophically; I have had to construct my argument from a plurality of stances on the topic. This is due to the fact that, surprisingly, generational forgiveness is a topic that remains relatively unexplored in modern literature. In turn, I have confronted the issue by relying the work of other authors' who have addressed similar themes.

While this may have obfuscated some of my argumentation, I believe that this is more so a consequence of the lack of literature which has been published around the topic in philosophical journals: the very definition of the term remains poorly solidified. The definition of generational forgiveness used in this paper is abducted from the concept of generational trauma grounded in medical research. This may have contributed to a skewed perspective of the issue stretching back to the origin of this analysis. Even so, it is the best way to link the concepts of harm, wrongdoing, and forgiveness, across generations — a sorely needed, and logically possible moral experience.

The definition of *generational trauma* defines the concept as the “passing down of traumatic experiences from one generation to the other” (CITATION NEEDED). By abducting this term for my definition of *generational forgiveness,* I have already taken distance from other potential definitions within the philosophical literature. This argumentative strategy is not without its risks: I may have incurred mistakes while carrying on with my analysis via this route. For instance, in section 2.2, when I distinguish between cases in which the harm is reproduced across generations, and cases in which the consequences are felt across generations — I admit that this distinguish is perhaps insufficiently grounded to surrounding literature on the topic of forgiveness. Despite this fact, being that generational forgiveness treads in [relatively] uncharted territory philosophically, the abduction of its definition should be accepted given the fact that it is very well suited for dealing with the problems at hand.

Furthermore, since the philosophical debate on forgiveness lacks consensus between its major figures, much of the grounds for the question at hand had to be synthesised from the work of many thinkers. Being that this paper does not provide the space to adequately engage with each of these accounts, I have had to sacrifice some of the argumentative rigor of my rationale for the sake of clarity and conciseness.

Other conceptual were also faced issues while developing my argument. One of the main issues I faced was clearly differentiating between which conditions regard the possibility of

forgiveness, and which ones regard its permissibility. I believe that this is due to the fact that forgiveness is a concept that is highly connected with deep-seated normative implications. Some issues that affect the possibility of forgiveness can also have a deep effect on its permissibility. For instance, I believe that the question regarding who rightfully holds standing to forgive is not only a matter that can define the possibility of generational forgiveness, but rather, it also affects its permissibility; ultimately, asking which parties hold adequate standing to forgive is at its core also a normative issue.

There are also many issues related to the concept of generational forgiveness that I could not address here. One of the main issues that I had confronted throughout the development of my arguments were the normative boundaries that generational forgiveness can present regarding the temporality of wrongs. This issue presents the following questions: how long until we ought to consider a wrong to still be a valid target of forgiveness? Is there a certain amount of time that will nullify the [moral] responsibility of the wrongdoer? Can we still forgive wrongs that go back to, for instance, the Crusades or the Punic Wars? Although my intuitions lead me to think that the answer to these questions is related to the precision with which we are able to identify a given wrongdoer; I argue that this is an idea which is yet to be sufficiently refined. This is an issue which should be addressed by further research.

Another issue which remains is the relationship between generational forgiveness and generational, intergenerational, and transgenerational trauma. As I explained in section 2.2 generational forgiveness is possible when the subsequent generations suffer from the consequences of past wrongs. I argue that generational trauma matches the definition of these so-called “consequences of past wrongs”; however, I think that the nuances in these cases are much more delicate. These nuances lead to certain issues that appear when trying to analyse generational trauma in the context of forgiveness. Firstly, generational trauma is mostly analysed in a social context. Secondly, given the nature of the psychological and psychosomatic effects of generational trauma, it is much harder to establish a direct causality between the past wrong and its consequences. Lastly the analysis of this phenomena might obligate us to diverge from the philosophical debate about forgiveness, into the more psychological and psychiatric debate on the benefits of forgiveness in its therapeutical setting.

Finally, throughout this work I have intentionally avoided the debate about collective [moral] responsibility of wrongdoing(s). Although I believe that the analysis of this topic might have been very insightful, I think that if I were to have adequately addressed this topic, it would have caused the arguments to drift away from the central problem. Even so, I argue that when we analyse the issue of generational forgiveness, it would also have been valuable to introduce

the question of how collective responsibility of [past] institutions, nations, or empires can be understood through this lens. Being that current institutions are the direct inheritor of prior institutions which have committed wrongs previously — would this entail that these have to engage in reparative activities with its victims? It seems, however, that many cases of historical reparations which are currently underway are realized under this model. Therefore, by extension, I believe that some further analysis on these subjects is required.

In summation, I think that the subject of generational forgiveness is a topic of profound complexity that can lead not only to new insights about how we understand current historical or generational reparations; but also, about forgiveness itself. The reparative powers of forgiveness can be enormous, and therefore, I believe that more refined and nuanced understanding of the topic is invaluable for a world in which people must deal with generational injustice — not only to navigate how we ought to manage generational forgiveness, but also to comprehend the intrinsically political nature of the same.[8]

- [8] For more on the political nature of forgiveness see Arendt, Hannah; *The Human Condition;* 2nd ed., University of Chicago Press; 2018; pp. 236-243

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