Love, Guilt, and Forgiveness*

ELEONORE STUMP

Abstract

In Simon Wiesenthal's book *The Sunflower: On the Possibility and Limits of Forgiveness,* Wiesenthal tells the story of a dying German soldier who was guilty of horrendous evil against Jewish men, women, and children, but who desperately wanted forgiveness from and reconciliation with at least one Jew before his death. Wiesenthal, then a prisoner in a camp, was brought to hear the German soldier's story and his pleas for forgiveness. As Wiesenthal understands his own reaction to the German soldier, he did not grant the dying soldier the forgiveness the man longed for. In *The Sunflower*, Wiesenthal presents reflections on this story by numerous thinkers. Their responses are noteworthy for the highly divergent intuitions they express. In this paper, I consider the conflicting views about forgiveness on the part of the respondents in *The Sunflower*.

I argue that those respondents who are convinced that forgiveness should be denied the dying German soldier are mistaken. Nonetheless, I also argue in support of the attitude that rejects reconciliation with the dying German soldier. I try to show that, in some cases of grave evil, repentance and making amends are not sufficient for the removal of guilt, and that reconciliation may be morally impermissible, whatever the case as regards forgiveness.

1. Introduction

On the Aristotelian ethics that many scholars suppose Aquinas accepts, a moral virtue is a habit which is acquired through practice and which disposes the will to act in accordance with reason in varying circumstances. Given this strong connection between virtue and reason, some scholars see the passions in Aristotle's thought as at best an ancillary to moral virtue and at worst an obstacle to it.

* This paper is a version, tailored to this lecture series, of my paper '*The Sunflower*: Guilt, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation', in *Forgiveness* (ed.) Michael McKenna, Dana Kay Nelkin, and Brandon Warmke (New York: Oxford University Press, *forthcoming*). A detailed study of forgiveness, reconciliation, and satisfaction can be found in my *Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

doi:10.1017/S1358246118000656 ©The Royal Institute of Philosophy and the contributors 2019

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Whatever the truth of this view may be as regards Aristotle's own ethics, it is certainly false, in its central claims, as regards the ethics of Aquinas. Aquinas recognizes the Aristotelian virtues, but he thinks that they are not real virtues. In fact, Aquinas goes so far as to maintain that the passions – or the suitably formulated intellectual and volitional analogues to the passions – are not only the foundation of any real ethical life but also the flowering of what is best in it.[1]

For Aquinas, there can be no moral virtue at all without love. For example, Aquinas says,

> 'It is written: "He who does not love abides in death" (I John 3:14). Now the spiritual life is perfected by the virtues, since it is by them that we live rightly, as Augustine states (*De libero arbitrio* II). Therefore, the virtues cannot be without love.'[2]

Now, on Aquinas's views, love can be understood as a passion in an extended sense. In this sense, a passion is in the intellective appetite or will. As an expression of the intellective appetite, love is a passion or, more strictly, an analogue to the passions. And, for Aquinas, love in this sense is essential to all the real moral virtues; without love, no real moral virtue at all is possible.

In this paper, I want to show what difference it makes to difficult ethical issues if we take love as foundational to ethics in this way. In particular, I want to show what Aquinas's account of love implies for issues of guilt, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

[1] See my 'The Non-Aristotelian Character of Aquinas's Ethics: Aquinas on the Passions', *Faith and Philosophy* 28.1 (2011), 29–43. For a thorough and persuasive argument that Aquinas's ethics is not Aristotelian but in fact takes the second-personal as foundational for ethics, see Andrew Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics: Virtues and Gifts* (New York: Routledge, 2012). See also his 'Gifts and Fruits', in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas* (ed.) Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and his review of Robert Miner's *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions*, Notre Dame Philosophical Review, February 2010.

[2] ST I-II q.65 a.2 s.c.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press

2. Love and forgiveness

We can begin with a brief overview of Aquinas's account of love. For Aquinas,[3] love requires two interconnected desires:[4]

(1) the desire for the good of the beloved,[5]
and
(2) the desire for union[6] with the beloved.[7]

[3] Aquinas uses four words for love; in Latin, they are '*amor*', '*dilectio*', '*amicitia*', and '*caritas*'. (Cf. ST I-II q.26 a.3.) The first of these is love in its most generic sense, which is included in all the other kinds; for Aquinas, even a rock falling from a higher to a lower place can be said to have love for the place to which it falls, in this generic sense of 'love'. (Cf. ST I-II q.26 a.1.) The second, '*dilectio*', emphasizes the element of voluntariness in the love of rational persons; and the third, '*amicitia*', picks out the dispositions of love in friendship. But, for Aquinas, the fourth, '*caritas*', is the word for love in its real or complete sense. Since Aquinas privileges *caritas* in this way, I will focus on *caritas* in explaining his account of love, although I understand his views of *caritas* in light of what he says about the more generic *amor*.

[4] See, e.g., ST II-II q.25 a.3.

[5] Cf. ST I-II q.26 a.4, where Aquinas says that to love is to will good to someone. Cf. also ST I-II q.28 a.4, where Aquinas explains the zeal or intensity of love in terms of the strength of a lover's desire for the good of the beloved.

[6] By 'union' in this connection, I mean being at one with another, where, clearly, the kind of oneness brought about by two or more human beings is a function of what elements of life and psyche they are sharing. A mother shares some parts of herself and her life with her newborn; musically gifted friends composing an opera together share other parts of themselves with each other. Union comes in degrees at least in part because a human being, and a human life, is a composite; and it is possible to share some parts of this composite without sharing others. That is why it is possible to desire union with humanity as a whole: one can desire that all human beings be at one with each other, so that war, injustice, and all oppressive inequality cease.

[7] Cf., e.g., ST I-II q.26 a.2 ad 2, and q.28 a.1 s.c., where Aquinas quotes approvingly Dionysius's line that love is the unitive force. Cf. also ST I-II q.66 a.6, where Aquinas explains the superiority of charity to the other virtues by saying that every lover is drawn by desire to union with the beloved, and ST I-II q.70 a.3, where Aquinas explains the connection between joy and love by saying that every lover rejoices at being united to the beloved. For an interesting recent attempt to defend a position that has some resemblance to Aquinas's, see Robert Adams, 'Pure Love', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 8 (1980), 83–99. Adams says: 'It is a striking

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Aquinas recognizes different kinds and degrees of love between persons.[8] For example, he thinks that it is possible to desire the good for humanity in general and also to desire some sort of union with all humanity – say, in the shared beatific vision of heaven;[9] and so, on Aquinas's account of love, a person can have an impartial love of all human beings. But Aquinas also supposes that some loves are and ought to be greater than others;[10] a person ought to love all human beings, but not equally. She should love some people more than others in virtue of having certain relationships with them which ought to make her love for them greater than her love for humanity in general.

Certain things are also worth noting with regard to the desires of love.

To begin with the desire for union first, whatever exactly the union is which is desired in love on Aquinas's account, the desire for it is not equivalent to the desire to be in the company of the beloved.[11] Other philosophers have remarked that one can love a person without desiring to be in that person's company,[12] and being in someone's company is obviously not equivalent to being united to her. It is manifestly possible to be in the company of someone when one is alienated from her, rather than united to her. So desiring union with a

---

fact that while benevolence (the desire for another person's well-being) and *Eros*, as a desire for relationship with another person, seem to be quite distinct desires, we use a single name, 'love' or '*Agape*', for an attitude that includes both of them, at least in typical cases' (97).

[8] There are many other details of Aquinas's account of love that are important but that cannot be explored in passing here. For a fuller treatment, see my *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), Chapter 5.

[9] If there is a relationship between persons in which it is not appropriate for one person to desire the good for and union with the other, then the relationship is not a relationship of love. Insofar as it is possible to have a general love of humankind, however, then there is no connection between persons which is not also in effect a relationship for which some species of love is appropriate and therefore also obligatory. For some discussion of the claim that obligations and rights are not correlative, see my 'God's Obligations', in *Philosophical Perspectives* 6 (ed.) James Tomberlin (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing, 1992), 475–492.

[10] ST II-II q.26 a.6–2.

[11] For Aquinas's views on the nature of this union, cf., e.g., ST I-II q.28 a.1, where real union is described as a matter of presence between lover and beloved.

[12] David Velleman, 'Love as a Moral Emotion', *Ethics 109* (1999), 353.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press

person might not include a desire to be in that person's company, at least not now, as that person currently is.

With regard to the first desire, the goodness in question is not to be identified with moral goodness only. It is goodness in the broader sense that encompasses beauty, elegance or efficiency, and metaphysical as well as moral goodness.[13] Furthermore, because Aquinas holds that there is an objective standard of goodness, the measure of value for the goodness at issue in love is also objective.[14] Given Aquinas's ethical views, then, the good of the beloved has to be understood as that which truly is in the interest of the beloved and which truly does conduce to the beloved's flourishing.

With this brief summary of Aquinas's account of love, it should be clear that it has implications as regards the nature of forgiveness.[15] That is because, whatever exactly is required for forgiveness,[16] it must involve some species of love for the person in need of forgiveness. A person who refuses to forgive someone who has hurt her or been unjust to her is not loving towards the offender, and a person who does forgive someone who has treated her badly also manifests love of one degree or another towards him. So whatever else a person's forgiveness is,[17] it seems to include a kind of love of someone who has harmed her or committed an injustice against her.

[13] The two desires of any love are therefore included under the more general heading of the desire for goodness, as Aquinas understands it. For detailed discussion of Aquinas's views of goodness, understood in this broad sense, see my *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2003), Chapter 2.

[14] The claim that the good desired for the beloved is an objective good therefore results from Aquinas's analysis of the nature of love together with his meta-ethics. It is not itself implied by Aquinas's analysis of love. I am grateful to Ish Haji for calling my attention to the need to make this point clear.

[15] For more detailed discussion of forgiveness in connection with Aquinas's account of love, see Chapter 5 in Stump *Wandering in Darkness*.

[16] There is by now a huge literature on forgiveness, which cannot be dealt with in passing here. A good recent review of the literature can be found in Charles L. Griswold, *Forgiveness. A Philosophical Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). The differences between the account I give and Griswold's are sketched here. My account of forgiveness is not incompatible with the standard account of forgiveness as the forswearing of resentment, but it encompasses also forgiveness as including the desire for union with a wrongdoer.

[17] In fact, although on my view love is necessary and sufficient for forgiveness, it is not the case that forgiveness is nothing but love or that forgiveness reduces to love. Analogously, being risible is necessary and sufficient for being human – anything that is risible is human and nothing that is

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Since love emerges from the interaction of two desires, for the good of the beloved and for union with him, the absence of either desire is sufficient to undermine love. To the extent to which love is implicated in forgiveness, the absence of either desire undermines forgiveness, too.

So failure to forgive can find expression not only in resentment or vengefulness but also in a rejection of the desire for union with the wrongdoer. On Aquinas's account of love, Paula forgives Jerome only if she desires the good for Jerome and union with Jerome even in the face of his bad treatment of her. If Paula lacks either desire of love where Jerome is concerned, she does not forgive Jerome.

It is important to see that, on Aquinas's account of love, it is possible for Paula to forgive Jerome unilaterally, without repentance on Jerome's part, because it is up to Paula alone whether she desires the good for Jerome and union with him.

On the other hand, *the way* in which the desires of love are fulfilled, or whether they are fulfilled at all, will depend crucially on the condition of the wrongdoer being forgiven. When in forgiveness Paula forms the two *desires* of love for Jerome, the nature of the appropriate *fulfillment* of those desires has to be a function of Jerome's state. Whether Paula can and should have any continued companionship of any kind with Jerome, and the character and extent of such company, depends on Jerome's state. If Jerome poses a serious threat to Paula's having what is good for her, then Paula's staying with Jerome or otherwise allowing Jerome to harm her enables Jerome to violate the desires of love for her. But his failure at loving her is not good for Jerome. So Paula is not loving Jerome in letting him harm her or treat her unjustly; rather, she is violating the desires of love with regard to Jerome in being an enabler of his wrongdoing against her.[18]

---

not risible is human – but being human is not reducible to being risible. Risibility picks out human beings by an accident which is had by all and only human beings, but the nature of human beings is not nothing but risibility. It is not part of my purposes here to define forgiveness, and so I leave to one side what else might need to be added to love for a definition of forgiveness. I am grateful to Michael Rea for calling my attention to the need to make this point explicit.

[18] It might appear that Aquinas's account of love succumbs to the same problems as those that seem to some people to afflict an ethics of care. If the value of loving others or caring for others is the fundamental ethical value, then it is not easy to explain why it is morally acceptable to withhold care for others in the interests of pursuing one's own projects. And yet if there is no morally acceptable way of doing so, caring, or loving, can become deeply destructive, dreadfully unjust, with regard to the one doing the caring or

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press

For Aquinas, then, a person can forgive unilaterally, as she can love unrequitedly. But the desires of love in forgiveness, like the desires of love generally, are inefficacious by themselves to bring about what they desire. A person who forgives, like a person who loves, has to be responsive to the person who is the object of her desires; and so she cannot have what she wants, in love or forgiveness, just by wanting it. Paula's *desire* for the good for Jerome cannot be fulfilled if, in self-destructive impulses, Jerome refuses the good offered him. And Paula's *desire* for union with Jerome cannot result in any kind of union with him as long as his state of character and current condition keep her from being close to him.

Finally, as I explained at the outset, on Aquinas's account, love is obligatory, in the sense that, for any person, the absence of love is morally blameworthy, and the presence of love is necessary for moral good or excellence.[19] Given the connection between love and forgiveness, it follows that forgiveness is also obligatory in the same way and to the same extent. It does *not* follow that any given wrongdoer has a right to forgiveness from any person whom he has hurt or against whom he has committed an injustice. On Aquinas's view (as also on many contemporary accounts), rights and obligations are not correlative.[20] Paula can have an obligation with regard to Jerome even

---

loving. So, for example, Virginia Woolf describes the 'angel in the house' who loved others totally, who cared for them completely, in this way:

> 'she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others…I did my best to kill her. My excuse, if I were to be had up in a court of law, would be that I acted in self-defence. Had I not killed her she would have killed me'. (From 'Professions for Women', quoted in Jean Hampton, 'Feminist Contractarianism', in *A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity* (ed.) Louis Anthony and Charlotte Witt [Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993], 231.)

In my view, considerations similar to those showing that Paula is not loving Jerome in enabling him to harm her apply also to the case in which Paula allows herself to be harmed by myriad others. She is not loving others in allowing them to hurt her, even if the harm done to her takes the actions of a whole group to accomplish.

[19] For more discussion of this claim, see Stump 'The Non-Aristotelian Character of Aquinas's Ethics: Aquinas on the Passions'.

[20] I have argued for this claim at length in 'God's Obligations'. To see the point here, consider, by way of analogy that if Paula were a very rich tourist traveling in a very poor country, she would be obligated to give some of her money away for charitable purposes in that country if she

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press

if Jerome does not have a correlative right with regard to Paula. So even though Jerome has no right to Paula's forgiveness, on Aquinas's views Paula would be subject to appropriate moral censure if she refused to forgive Jerome. In refusing to forgive him, Paula would be unloving towards him; and in being unloving, Paula would be worthy of moral disapprobation. On this account of forgiveness, it is a mistake to suppose that repentance and making amends are necessary for forgiveness. Nothing on the part of the wrongdoer is necessary for forgiveness of him.

3. The Sunflower

With this summary of Aquinas's account of love and forgiveness, we can now turn to a complicated case involving guilt. It is often thought that the remedy for guilt is forgiveness and that repentance and the making of amends on the part of a wrongdoer are both necessary and sufficient for forgiveness. The making of amends is generally considered to have two parts, namely, reasonable reparation of any damage done by the wrongdoer, and then also something extra, some penance, that compensates for the injustice in the wrongdoing. On this view, a wronged person should not forgive the wrongdoer without his repenting and making amends; but if the wrongdoer has repented and made amends, then the wronged person is unreasonable if she refuses to forgive the wrongdoer. If she does forgive him, then the wrongdoer is relieved of his guilt; and since his guilt is removed, nothing stands in the way of her reconciliation with him and his restoration to his usual place in the human community.

But consider Simon Wiesenthal's book *The Sunflower: On the Possibility and Limits of Forgiveness*.[21] In that book, Wiesenthal tells the story of a dying German soldier who was guilty of horrendous evil against Jewish men, women, and children, but who desperately wanted forgiveness from at least one Jew and reconciliation with that Jew before his death. Wiesenthal, then a prisoner in a camp, was brought as a representative Jew to hear the German soldier's story and his pleas for forgiveness. In the story as Wiesenthal presents it,

---

were solicited to do so; if she refused all such solicitations, she would be subject to appropriate moral censure. But it would not be the case that any particular recipient of her donations would have a right to her money.

[21] Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower: On the Possibility and Limits of Forgiveness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1960).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press

it seems that the German soldier was completely and genuinely repentant. Because he was dying, there was little that the soldier could do to make amends; but his broken-heartedness over his evil and his self-excoriating confession of it to Wiesenthal was as much reparation and penance as was possible for the soldier then. In the circumstances, in remarkably admirable ways, Wiesenthal dealt humanely with the dying soldier. But when the soldier's confession was finally complete, Wiesenthal got up and left him without a word. As Wiesenthal understands his own reaction to the German soldier, he did not grant the dying soldier the forgiveness the man longed for.

In *The Sunflower*, Wiesenthal presents reflections on this story by numerous thinkers, many of them noted scholars or eminent religious authorities in differing traditions. He invites these thinkers to consider whether they would have forgiven that soldier. Their responses are noteworthy for the highly divergent intuitions they express.

A number of respondents claim with conviction that the repentant dying soldier should be forgiven. So, for example, the influential former president of Notre Dame, Theodore Hesburgh, C.S.C, says,

> 'My whole instinct is to forgive.... Of course, the sin here is monumental. It is still finite and God's mercy is infinite. If asked to forgive, by anyone for anything, I would forgive because God would forgive.'[22]

But other equally thoughtful respondents report that they share Wiesenthal's reaction. In their view, the soldier's evil was great enough to destroy forever his chance at forgiveness. As they see it, by his monstrous acts, the soldier cut himself off permanently from any reconciliation with other human beings and from any restoration into ordinary human society. And this evaluation of the soldier would not be altered, in their view, even if the soldier had lived to do some severe penance, even if it were possible for there to be reparation for the unspeakable harm that he had done. For these respondents, the soldier should not be forgiven. On their view, there is no way the soldier's guilt can be removed; there is no way the soldier can be restored to any acceptable place within the human community. On their view, it is not the case that repentance, reparation, and penance are sufficient for forgiveness or that these things together with forgiveness are sufficient to remove guilt. Reconciliation may be denied and guilt may remain even where there is repentance with whatever reparation and penance is possible.

[22] Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower*, 169.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In my view, Aquinas's account of love and the account of forgiveness that it implies help us see how to adjudicate these strong conflicting intuitions.

4. The Sunflower and Aquinas on love and forgiveness

To begin with, we should see that on Aquinas's account, forgiveness of the German soldier in the story in *The Sunflower* is obligatory, and it would still be obligatory even if the soldier had not repented.

It does not follow, however, that Wiesenthal's behavior with respect to the soldier should have been otherwise.

It helps to see that, contrary to Wiesenthal's own self-evaluation, nothing about Wiesenthal's behavior implies that Wiesenthal failed to forgive the soldier. On the Thomistic view of love and forgiveness, forgiveness is a matter of desiring what is good – really, objectively good – for a wrongdoer and desiring union with him, not in the sense of joining him but in the sense of being at one with him. These *desires* are what is morally obligatory, and not their fulfillment. And nothing in Wiesenthal's story indicates that Wiesenthal lacked these desires. On the contrary, the details of his dealings with the soldier suggest a humanity and compassion for the dying man grounded in such desires.

Nonetheless, as I will try to show in what follows, even if it were true, contrary to Wiesenthal's own self-assessment, that he did forgive the soldier, nothing about that forgiveness implies that Wiesenthal should have said anything to the soldier to give the soldier what the soldier so badly wanted, namely, a sense of restoration to ordinary human society. Nor does it imply that Wiesenthal should have been willing to be reconciled with the soldier. As I will argue, in cases of grave evil, forgiveness, even with the wrongdoer's repentance and his making what amends he can, may not be sufficient for the removal of guilt or for the moral permissibility of reconciliation. Silently leaving the soldier may have been all that was morally permissible for Wiesenthal to do, as many of the respondents in *The Sunflower* so fervently maintain.

So, on the Thomistic account of love and forgiveness, which I support, those respondents in *The Sunflower* convinced that forgiveness should be denied the dying German soldier are mistaken. Nonetheless, in what follows, I will also argue in support of their vehement rejection of any kind of reconciliation with the dying German soldier. I will try to show that, in some cases of grave evil, repentance and making amends are not sufficient for the removal of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press

guilt. And if guilt is not removed, then reconciliation may be morally impermissible even if forgiveness is morally obligatory.

It follows that forgiveness and reconciliation can come apart. One reason for this fact is that, unlike forgiveness, reconciliation and the removal of guilt cannot be unilateral and unconditional. For the removal of guilt and reconciliation with a wrongdoer, something is required from the wrongdoer; and if the wrongdoer cannot or does not give what is needed to remove his guilt, then reconciliation may be morally unavailable. Consequently, at least in cases of very serious wrongdoing, guilt may remain even after forgiveness is granted.

5. The problems of guilt

It is important in this connection to be clear about guilt. What is guilt? And what problems does it produce for the wrongdoer? It helps to have before us a particular case of grave wrongdoing and also exemplary repentance and reparation. So consider the case of John Newton, the 18th-century slave trader who ended his life as a successful abolitionist of the slave trade.

On three different occasions, when Newton was still a young man, he was the captain of a slave ship; and, on those three ships alone, he was responsible for transporting many Africans. The conditions on the ships were unspeakable. A large percentage of the Africans transported died during the voyage. Their suffering was heartbreaking, but the suffering of those who survived was worse. They were sold into harsh slavery, and their descendants were born into it.

A lengthy religious conversion changed Newton's life dramatically. Somewhere in the course of this conversion, Newton became horrified at what he had done in the slave trade; he became stricken at the suffering he had helped to bring about.

In his fervent repentance, Newton worked hard, in formal and informal ways, to help bring about the abolition of the slave trade in England. Among other things, he wrote a pamphlet *Thoughts Upon the African Slave Trade* in which he presented in great detail to public view the horrible suffering he had visited on the Africans on his ships, and he spared himself no humiliation in revealing what he had done. On the contrary, he held himself up to public shock and revulsion for his actions as a slave-trader. Newton's pamphlet was widely read and highly influential, and it made a great difference to the debate in Parliament over the slave trade.

Newton lived long enough to see his efforts victorious. The Slave Trade Act, which abolished the slave trade in England, was passed in

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press

1807; and Newton died shortly after it passed. Newton's efforts at ending the slave trade were his reparation and penance. In his efforts for abolition, and in his public excoriation of himself in his pamphlet, Newton did what he could to make reparation and do penance for the evil of his slave-trading.

When Newton was in his slave-trading years, one problem for him lay in defective states of his psyche. In that period of his life, Newton thought that slave-trading was acceptable, and he wanted to engage in it. So the first problem for a guilty person lies in himself, in his morally wrong states of intellect and will and the corrupt habits from which they stem or to which they contribute.

Furthermore, these defects of intellect and will do not exhaust the problem in Newton, however important they are. There are also other psychic defects, more subtle but not less damaging to Newton.

For example, there is memory. The very memory of having engaged in a great evil that caused cruel suffering to others diminishes something morally good in the wrongdoer's psyche too. By staying in memory, the evil a person such as Newton did remains part of Newton's present. His remembering his slave-trading is not itself an evil act, but there is something morally lamentable about the continued presence of his evil acts in his memory nonetheless. That may be one reason why people who have done monstrous evil find their memories an affliction.

Then there are the empathic capacities. Most people cannot simulate the mind of a person who commits a morally horrific act; and we give expression to that incapacity by saying 'I can't imagine how a person could do something like that!'. But the perpetrator himself does understand what it feels like to do an evil of that sort and, what is worse, what it feels like to *want* to do an evil of that sort. The hard barrier – the 'I can't!' – that ordinarily decent people have in their psyches against grotesque evil is missing in the perpetrators of great evil; and the elasticity or flabbiness of psyche that is consequent on such evil can remain even if the wrongdoer repents.

Because they are not moral defects in the will, these psychological relics of moral wrongdoing in memory and the empathic capacities are not by themselves culpable or worthy of punishment; but there is something morally regrettable about them all the same.[23]

[23] Not everything that is morally deplorable is also culpable. That is at least in part because it is possible for a person to be in a morally bad condition without being responsible for being in that condition and therefore worthy of blame for it. A man in an isolated area of Mongolia in the time of the Great Khan might have been completely persuaded that wife-beating in certain circumstances was obligatory for him. When he beat his

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press

So defects of psyche in intellect, will, memory, and the empathic capacities are the first problem for a person guilty of serious wrongdoing. The second problem lies in the world, in the effects of the wrongs done. The suffering of the human beings Newton kidnapped and enslaved was horrible, and he was responsible for it. Just restoring Newton's intellect and will to the state and condition of a morally good person, through repentance, for example, leaves unaddressed the suffering he caused. And even if there are no particular victims for a person's wrongdoing, as when someone simply wastes inherited great wealth in trivial pursuits and fails to contribute to society as he might have done, there remains for him the problem that the world is worse than it might have been because of what he did or failed to do.

This second problem can itself be subdivided into two further problems. First, there is the actual harm that a wrongdoer did, by his action or his omission, so that in one sense or another the world is worse because of him. And then there is the injustice of his acting as he did. In most cases, of course, harm and injustice go together, as they do in Newton's slave-trading; but it is helpful to see that they can be disassociated. Seeing their separability helps illuminate the fact that, typically, a wrongdoer such as Newton has two different problems as regards the effects of his wrongdoing on the world. There is the harm he has caused, but there is also the injustice of what he has done. Just fixing the harm he has done is generally not enough to fix the injustice. That is why, in addition to reparation, penance is often supposed to be required for forgiveness.

The consequence of both the first and the second problem of guilt have the further effect of altering the wrongdoer's relations with others in his society, or, as in the case of the dying German soldier, with the whole human community. The state of the wrongdoer's psyche and the facts about the damage and injustice he has done can leave others angry at him and alienated from him. The victims of his wrongdoing may resent or even hate him, and others who learn of his wrongdoing may share those attitudes even if they were not themselves harmed by his wrongdoing. They might nonetheless hate him or turn away from him as someone with whom they refuse to associate, because of what he is and what he has done.

These, then, are the major problems of guilt.

---

wife in those circumstances, his psychic state would have been morally deplorable. But most people would hesitate to consider him culpable or worthy of punishment for that act, because we would suppose that he is not responsible for his morally bad psychic condition.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press

6. The role of repentance, reparation, and penance in the removal of guilt

It is clear that repentance alone can remove some of the defects introduced in the wrongdoer by his morally wrong actions. So, for example, after his repentance, Newton lost the morally wrong states of intellect and will he had during his slave-trading years, and he replaced them with the states of intellect and will of a morally decent person as regards slave-trading. We might also safely suppose that his repentance was fervent enough so that even his dispositions were altered: the corrupt dispositions characteristic of a slave-trader were lost and replaced by morally good dispositions. At once, or perhaps more slowly over a period of time during his conversion, the defects in Newton's intellect and will, including the morally corrupt dispositions that were the deplorable consequences of his execrable actions, were healed. Through repentance, then, with respect to slave-trading, Newton's intellect and will became like those of the abolitionists in his society.

At least in cases of grave moral wrongdoing, repentance alone cannot repair the damage the wrongdoer did or restore the wrongdoer to the place in community he had before his wrongdoing.

Reparation and penance help in this connection. For ease of reference, I will refer to reparation and penance together as 'making amends' or 'satisfaction'. The word 'satisfaction' comes from the Latin term '*satisfacere*', and the etymology of the Latin term comes from '*satis'* (enough) plus '*facere*' (to do). To make satisfaction by reparation (with regard to the damage one has done) and by penance (with regard to the injustice one has done) is to do what one can and by this means to make amends.

After his conversion, Newton joined forces with the English abolitionist William Wilberforce and others to alter public opinion about the slave trade. By the time Newton died, he was not only friends with these abolitionists, he was in fact held in honor by them. And it is not hard to see why. In Newton's passionate efforts on behalf of the abolition of the slave trade, he tried to make reparation for what he had done as a slave-trader. And his pamphlet, which made public revelation of those actions of his of which he was most ashamed, was his penance.

Together these things constituted Newton's satisfaction; and his satisfaction was successful in making him a different man from the man he had been, even from the man he was when he first repented. His repentance for his slave-trading healed the psychic defects in his intellect and will, and his work of satisfaction tried to undo the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press

damage and the injustice for which he had been responsible. In consequence, it also altered his relationships with others. When Wilberforce was friends with Newton at the time the Slave Trade Act passed, Wilberforce was friends not just with a repentant slave trader; he was friends with a powerful enemy of the slave trade.

So, in giving himself to the cause of the abolition of the slave trade, a repentant Newton did all that he could and by doing so made satisfaction for the evil of his slave trading.

7. The limits of repentance and satisfaction[24]

Consequently, repentance and satisfaction, such as that engaged in by Newton, have a useful purpose insofar as they alter both the wrongdoer and the things in the world damaged by his wrongdoing. Certainly, Newton is commendable for the way in which he made satisfaction. But contrary to what these reflections about repentance and satisfaction might lead one to suppose, repentance and the attempts at satisfaction on the part of a person such as Newton are not sufficient to remedy the whole problem of guilt. That is because none of these things is sufficient to change the past, to make it not the case, for example, that Newton did the damage or injustice that he did.

Consider, to begin with, Newton's relations with others harmed by him or alienated from him in his slave-trading years. Newton's repentance and satisfaction are not sufficient to restore these relationships of Newton's to the condition they had or would have had before his wrongdoing.

Someone might object here that the relationship between a wrongdoer and those wronged by him *should* be healed even by the wrongdoer's repentance and satisfaction. When the wrongdoer repents, then, as far as his past morally wrong action goes, he has the beliefs and desires of a morally decent person. And so, someone might suppose, others should adopt towards the wrongdoer the same attitudes they would have had towards the wrongdoer before the

[24] In this section of this paper, I am significantly altering the conclusion I argued for in an earlier paper, 'Personal Relations and Moral Residue', in *History of the Human Sciences: Theorizing from the Holocaust: What is to be Learned?* (ed.) Paul Roth and Mark S. Peacock, Vol. 17 No 2/3 (August 2004), 33–57. I stand by the arguments of that paper, but they now seem to me not sufficient to establish the conclusion. What else is needed, as I indicate in the conclusion of this paper, is a well-worked out theory of atonement.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press

wrongdoer's bad acts, that is, the same attitudes they would take towards any morally decent person.

But this objection rests on the mistaken assumption that a relationship is not affected by the past states of the persons in it, that only their present condition is relevant to the relationship. In fact, however, for Newton and those who were wronged by him or who know his history, Newton's past lives on in memory.

Newton wrote about his slave trading past,

> 'I hope it will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders'.[25]

No doubt, Newton did well to shudder at what he had done on the sea in the slave ships. But if it is always a subject of shuddering for Newton, then it is hard to see that his repentance and satisfaction are sufficient to undo all the morally lamentable effects on his psyche wrought by his slave trading. Something that would have been wholesome and healthy in Newton is diminished and replaced by shuddering in virtue of this memory of his past acts. Furthermore, it is hard not to share Newton's view that he must never forget these acts. There would be something terrible about his forgetting the evil of his participation in the slave trade. In fact, it is not unreasonable to suppose that there is a duty to remember wrongdoing if the wrongdoing is serious enough.[26]

So, Newton's repentance and satisfaction may heal his intellect and will, but they cannot erase the past evil from his memory or remove the correlative elasticity from his empathic capacities either. And the same point holds for his victims and others stricken at the story of his acts in the slave trade.

If Newton's repentance and satisfaction are not enough to remove the problems of guilt for Newton in his psyche and in his relationships with others, are they nonetheless sufficient to remove his guilt as regards the damage and injustice he did? Satisfaction is a matter of doing what one can and so doing *enough*. And Newton is exemplary in having done all he could, so that on this score it seems that he did enough and more. Consequently, it seems that, in this respect at any rate, his guilt is removed, so that his relationships with others can be restored and he can be reconciled with his victims.

[25] See John Newton, *Thoughts Upon the African Slave Trade*.

[26] See, for example, Jeffrey M. Blustein, *Forgiveness and Remembrance*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press

But this optimistic view is not right either, is it? Satisfaction such as Newton's is enough *if* it is considered relative to Newton, that is, relative to what Newton could do. But there is no reason to think that it is enough relative to the victims. How could anything Newton did be enough for those who had suffered from his slave-trading? How did his work of satisfaction help those who had suffered on his slave ships, or whose children suffered in virtue of having been born into slavery? Nothing in Newton's subsequent efforts to abolish the slave-trade in England altered the terrible suffering of those who died on his ships and the even worse suffering of those who lived to be slaves and to see their children enslaved as well. Nothing in what Newton did as satisfaction could make up to *them* the suffering Newton's evil caused them.

Consequently, why should the victims of his wrongdoing, or anyone else horrified at his actions, think his repentance and satisfaction are sufficient to remove Newton's guilt or to restore Newton to the place he would have had in the human community before his slave trading?

8. Conclusion

So here is where things stand. The Thomistic view of ethics as grounded in love and the Thomistic account of love and forgiveness provide an insightful resolution of the problem posed by Wiesenthal in *The Sunflower*. Although forgiveness, like love, is always obligatory, even forgiveness of unrepentant wrongdoers, reconciliation does not follow immediately on forgiveness. For perpetrators of grave evil, even their fervent repentance and self-sacrificial satisfaction may not be enough for reconciliation. So it can be obligatory to forgive and nonetheless not morally permissible to be reconciled with a wrongdoer, even when that wrongdoer has repented and made satisfaction. A relationship is an on-going interaction among persons, and it is dependent on the characteristics of all the persons in the relationship. If, because of his past acts, a perpetrator of evil is not now the person he was, then others affected by him or aware of his past evil cannot treat him as if he now were the person he once was. They cannot unilaterally re-form the relationship they had or might have had with him when he was a different person from the person he now is. Consequently, if a person's moral wrongdoing is a great enough evil, it can obstruct or obviate reconciliation with him even if he is genuinely and whole-heartedly repentant. Repentance and satisfaction can make a wrongdoer a different

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press

person from the person he was when he engaged in wrongdoing. But even such exemplary repentance and satisfaction as Newton's cannot remove all the problems of guilt.

The highly divergent views of the respondents in Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower* can therefore all be justified. Those who argue in favor of the forgiveness of the dying German soldier are surely right. Forgiveness of him is obligatory, just as love is. But those who repudiate with fervor any forgiveness of him are also right, if we suppose that under the heading of 'forgiveness' they understand the removal of guilt, reconciliation, and restoration to human community. Even a lifetime's worth of satisfaction, if the soldier had had another lifetime to complete it, coupled with heartbroken repentance, could not remove his guilt or restore him to his former place in human society. The damage and injustice he did were so great that their past effects on others and their on-going effects on the soldier and others who remember what he did put the soldier at a distance of light-years from ordinary human community.

Anselm's account of the atonement of Christ is based on the idea that although human beings owe a great debt because of the evil they have done, they are unable to pay that debt. On his view, that is why Christ, who is both human and divine, pays this debt for them. Because he is human, he is a member of the species that owes the debt; and because he is God, he has the resources to pay the debt. Consequently, as Anselm sees it, only Christ can make satisfaction for the debt incurred by human wrongdoing.

On Anselm's view, the debt in question is owed to God. Elsewhere I have argued against Anselm's account of the atonement, but what the reflections of this paper show is that at least one part of Anselm's account is surely right. In consequence of grave evil, a human being may incur a debt of recompense so monumental that nothing he could do would ever repay it. Only, contrary to Anselm's account, the reflections of this paper imply that the debt is owed to the victims of human evil. If there is an account of Christ's atonement on which Christ's satisfaction removes the guilt of human beings, whatever else is contained in that account, it will have to portray Christ's work of satisfaction as satisfaction made to the victims of human evil. Only human beings owe the debt to the suffering victims of their evil; but it may be true, as Anselm thought, that only God could pay the debt incurred by human evil – a debt that is owed to other human beings, even if it should also be owed to God, as Anselm argued.

In this connection, I want to conclude by pointing out that, on Newton's own view of the matter, the story of Newton's satisfaction

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press

as I have told it here is incomplete. Newton did not suppose that his own efforts at satisfaction were what had removed his guilt or enabled him to be reconciled to others, including even the victims of his slave-trading. As his most famous hymn expresses, Newton believed that it was the amazing grace of God that found and restored him. Newton's work of satisfaction manifests his great gratitude for that grace – and for the satisfaction of Christ, which did what Newton himself could not have done alone to make amends for the evil he had done.

These theological considerations are too complicated to be dealt with briefly in passing. I mention them only to end on a more optimistic note than the preceding reflections might otherwise imply. Aquinas thought that there is no wrongdoing so evil that the wrongdoer cannot afterwards be restored to an even more admirable condition in himself and in human community than he would have had before the wrongdoing. But Aquinas thought so because of the implications of the account of Christ's satisfaction which Aquinas himself accepted. On that Thomistic account of Christ's atonement for human sin, it is right to see Newton as a hero in the history of the slave trade, as many people (me included) do. And, on that Thomistic account, even the dying German soldier can be not only forgiven but in fact restored in reconciliation and in community with all others. But these optimistic conclusions about the removal of guilt even for great evil are grounded in the Thomistic interpretation of the theological doctrine of Christ's atonement. And it implies that what is owed to the victims of human evil and what is needed to heal the psyche of a wrongdoer is provided by the satisfaction of Christ. When Christ's atonement is added to the story of guilt and forgiveness, then it turns out that those who refuse reconciliation with the dying German soldier in Wiesenthal's *Sunflower* story are after all wrong. Christ can make satisfaction for that soldier in such a way that the soldier's guilt is fully and finally removed.

But whether this optimistic conclusion regarding human evil is right, or whether the more pessimistic attitude of those who refuse reconciliation with the German soldier is right rests in the end, then, on theological considerations.

Saint Louis University
eleonore.stump@slu.edu

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000656 Published online by Cambridge University Press