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## *The Charitable Perspective: Forgiveness and Toleration as Supererogatory*

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'May one be pardon'd and retain the offence?' asks King Claudius in his tormented monologue in *Hamlet*. Forgiveness appears incompatible with the retention of the offence, both in the sense of enjoying its consequences (Claudius's arrogation of the Queen and the Kingdom of Denmark) and in the sense of the subsistence of the attitude which underlay the offensive act (his cold-heartedness and ambition). There are, however, views which allow for, even admire, an attitude of forgiveness towards people who have 'retained' their offense in some way. This idea of forgiveness is harder to justify, since no change (like repentance) has taken place in the agent. We suggest that the concept of toleration can serve as an illuminating clue in such an analysis. The tolerant attitude involves a certain kind of reconciliation with people who not only have done something wrong in the past, but insist on sticking to their objectionable conduct in the present and the future. Tolerance, in other words, is not conditioned by repentance or by commitment to behavioral transformation; it is a kind of unconditional 'forgiveness' in advance.

Nevertheless, we often want to attribute to forgiveness a special moral value by viewing it as supererogatory, indeed a paradigm case of supererogation. Again, the analogy between forgiveness and toleration may prove illuminating: like forgiveness accorded to the unrepenting party, tolerance of the persistent violator of some standard of behavior cannot be regarded as a duty; like such 'undeserved' forgiveness, tolerance may be viewed as supererogatory.

The three concepts of supererogation, forgiveness and toleration have separately received substantial philosophical attention in the past few

decades. The connection between forgiveness and supererogation has often been noted. In this paper we wish to develop the analogy between forgiveness and toleration, which has been almost entirely ignored. This analogy will lead to the characterization of toleration in some typical contexts as supererogatory, which too has hardly been noticed or elaborated in the literature.

A note of methodological caution should be made before embarking on the detailed analysis. Unlike the concept of supererogation, which is theoretical and typically confined to philosophical discourse, the ideas of forgiveness and tolerance are widely appealed to in everyday discourse. Thus, the concept of supererogation is well defined, often in a theory-dependent way, while forgiveness and tolerance suffer from blurred conceptual contours and their scope of application is controversial. By suggesting an analogy between tolerance and forgiveness and by arguing for the supererogatory nature of both, we by no means wish to deny contexts in which our analysis does not fit everyday usage. We shall, accordingly, mention the contexts and views which hold both forgiveness and tolerance as obligatory or forbidden. But it is hoped that the analogy will capture some important dimension in their deontic characterization and source of moral value.

### *1. The Paradox of Forgiveness and Toleration*

The fundamental similarity between forgiveness and toleration lies in their apparently paradoxical nature. Genuine forgiveness can be shown only when real offense has taken place. Similarly, tolerance in the strict sense is granted only to people whose behavior is held as objectively wrong. Though the paradoxical nature of toleration has often been noted, that of forgiveness has not received much attention. Part of the reason may be due to the slogan 'Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner' ('To understand all is to forgive all'). This catch phrase is misleading. Strawson reports: 'Incidentally, the best comment on this familiar slogan I ever heard was made by J.L. Austin. He said: "That's quite wrong; understanding might just add contempt to hatred."<sup>1</sup> The analogy between forgiveness and toleration supports the intuition of Strawson and Austin.

But if this is so, what could be the basis of forgiveness and tolerance? After all, the wrong involved in the offensive act gives good reasons for resentment (in the former) and for active intervention (in the latter).

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1 P.F. Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism* (London: Methuen 1985), 37 n.5

These reasons may even be seen as imposing a *duty* of adopting a hostile attitude or taking preventive measures. On the other hand, we all seem to believe in the general superiority of the conciliatory alternative that is associated with forgiveness and toleration. Strictly speaking, then, it seems that the duty to tolerate applies only when there are good reasons not to tolerate; and true forgiveness can be shown only when there are good reasons for maintaining a hostile attitude. In that sense, toleration and forgiveness seem to be 'impossible virtues,' in Bernard Williams's terminology.<sup>2</sup>

There are two common strategies for dispelling the paradox in the two cases: one can either deny the existence of good reasons for continued resentment or interference in the behavior of others, on the one hand; or reject the value (even the legitimacy) of the moral indulgence associated with forgiving and tolerant restraint, on the other. The first strategy appeals to a wide range of possible considerations that might justify the tolerant and forgiving reaction, that is to say, the overcoming of the original good reasons for a negative attitude: mitigating circumstances, the ideal of public peace, moral skepticism and value relativism, or pragmatic considerations relating to the price of continued resentment and persecution. The general idea would be that the conflict between justice on the one hand and forgiveness and tolerance on the other is only apparent, since the latter are appropriate only in those circumstances in which they are *required* by justice. Thus, for example, the just reaction to a one-time offense by a friend calls for *condonation*; or the rights of minorities to maintain their cultural identity demands that the majority *respect* them. This strategy reduces forgiveness and toleration to justice, thus missing their uniqueness. By bypassing the air of paradox involved in the two concepts, it ignores a kind of tension that we find inherent to them.

The second strategy perhaps appeals less to our contemporary moral sensibilities. But in the first stages of its troubled history in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the idea of toleration was commonly criticized as a manifestation of moral infirmity, indulgence, and lack of commitment to values. In our own days, political cultures that do not belong to the liberal tradition often find the idea of tolerance alien, even repugnant. Forgiveness is less open to such systematic criticism, but nevertheless is often considered to be a sign of a morally soft personality, a lack of moral backbone. Nietzsche holds an explicit negative view of forgiveness,

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2 Bernard Williams, 'Toleration: An Impossible Virtue?' D. Heyd, ed., *Toleration: An Elusive Virtue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1996), 18-27

which he considers as nothing more than impotent hatred.<sup>3</sup> Tara Smith, in a recent article, offers a radical critique of both toleration and forgiveness as 'well-intentioned compromises,' and argues that they 'often sabotage justice.'<sup>4</sup>

In the present article we wish to take an intermediary path. Unlike the first strategy, which involves widening the scope of the two concepts, we take forgiveness as *analytically* distinct from condonation, mere indulgence, or overlooking; and tolerance as distinguished from compromise, indifference and respect for rights. Contrary to the second strategy, that leaves a very narrow range for the legitimate application of them, we argue for their unique *moral* value. In other words, by narrowing down the scope of application of the concepts of forgiveness and tolerance, we wish to highlight their virtuous nature. But this can be done only by abandoning the territory of duty and justice, that is, by focusing on the particular supererogatory character of both concepts. The rest of this paper is accordingly devoted to two complementary endeavors: first, a *conceptual* analysis of forgiveness and tolerance as analogous forms of reactive attitudes to morally objectionable conduct; and secondly, a *normative* analysis of their deontic status and value. It is hoped that in this double enterprise the paradox of toleration and forgiveness may be explained, though not necessarily resolved.

## 2. From Acts to Persons

Forgiveness and tolerance are reactive attitudes in Strawson's sense:<sup>5</sup> they are responses to forms of behavior considered morally wrong or offensive. Being typically indulgent, i.e. deviating from the deserved negative or critical reaction, they call for restraint. For the offended party, the natural and morally justified response is resentment, anger and dissociation. For the witness of a morally wrong behavior, the reasonable response is criticism or active interference. Forgiveness demands the overcoming of resentment, an effort to avoid continued vindictiveness. Tolerance calls for a similar inner struggle against the moralistic ten-

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3 Avishai Margalit, 'Vergeben und Vergessen,' W. Edelstein and G. Nunner-Winkler, eds., *Moral im Sozialen Kontext* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 2000), 489. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, II, 3

4 Tara Smith, 'Tolerance & Forgiveness: Virtues or Vices?' *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 14 (1997), 31

5 P.F. Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment,' P.F. Strawson, ed., *Freedom and Resentment* (London: Methuen 1974)

dency of imposing one's standards on others, even when others are correctly held to be in the wrong.

The restraint common to forgiveness and tolerance should be understood as clearly distinct from other forms of forbearance from negative response. Forgetting what you have done to me does not mean that I have forgiven you. Feeling utter equanimity regarding people's sexual conduct does not amount to sexual tolerance. The restraint must have a *price*, be associated with some effort (psychological or moral), or involve suffering (as implied by the etymology of the word 'toleration'). Forgiveness and toleration are *intentional* attitudes rather than mere psychological dispositions. Individuals might have a forgiving or tolerant character, but these are just personal qualities which make the intentional response of restraint easier for them. In other words, forgiveness and tolerance are not automatic or 'natural' responses but require some sort of deliberation, a mental process guided by reasoning and decision. Alyosha Karamazov, who in a way is blind to evil, both as done to others and particularly as done to himself, cannot be considered either tolerant or forgiving in the strict sense. The restraint we are interested in must be *principled*, supported by reason, and hence intentionally chosen.

As some contemporary theorists of toleration have shown, the object of toleration must be objectively wrong, that is to say, there must be good reasons to oppose the tolerated behavior.<sup>6</sup> Thus though we may appreciate the psychological effort involved in the racist's restraining himself from suppressing what seems to him obnoxious behavior or life style, we would hardly want to describe this as tolerance. It is merely the overcoming of a prejudice that should not have existed in the first place. A similar condition applies to forgiveness: when an individual erroneously believes that she was maltreated, there can be no room for forgiveness. Forgiveness cannot take place when there is nothing to forgive, and once the subject realizes that she was not really wronged, we expect her to revise her attitude from that of forgiveness to that of apology (a revision equally appropriate to the 'tolerant' party who becomes aware of the groundlessness of his initial objection).

This stringent condition of the wrongness of the forgiven or tolerated behavior underscores the paradoxical nature of the indulgent response: why should a genuinely bad act be forgiven or tolerated? The solution we would like to offer involves the separation of acts from persons. The literature on forgiveness is replete with references to this distinction. Thus, for example, Trudy Govier writes that 'forgiveness is something

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6 John Horton, 'Toleration as Virtue,' D. Heyd, ed., *Toleration: An Elusive Virtue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1996), 33

we extend or do not extend towards *persons*; it fundamentally affects the relationships between persons. And yet, it is *deeds* which are said to be unforgivable.<sup>7</sup> Joram Haber also holds that the separation between the wrong act and its agent is central to the understanding of the possibility of forgiveness, as well as that of regret and remorse which are conditions of forgiveness.<sup>8</sup> Jeffrie Murphy quotes the Augustinian distinction between sin and sinner as the basis for both repentance and forgiveness.<sup>9</sup> Since forgiveness consists of the re-establishment of *personal* relations, the possibility of the separation between the deed and the agent is a natural assumption. However, we would like to use the analogous structure of forgiveness and toleration and argue that the same distinction is crucial in the analysis of the latter. We tolerate people, not actions.

A promising new way to understand the distinction between acts and persons operative in forgiveness and toleration is *perceptual*.<sup>10</sup> We may take our lead from the very common visual metaphor used in the context of forgiveness: 'seeing in a different light.' We often urge vindictive or intolerant people to try and look at the situation that gave rise to their resentment or indignation from a different perspective. We usually mean to encourage the offended party to shift her attention from the judgment of the offensive act to the judgment of the offender. A change in judgment may emerge either out of the *replacement* of a wrong judgment by the right one, or by the *shift* from one perspective to another. The former concerns the judgment itself; the latter applies to what might be called 'the medium' of the judgment, the lens through which it is formed. For instance, we might look through the window pane at the landscape, *either* focusing on the landscape, hardly perceiving the glass through which we see it, *or* focusing on the window itself, seeing the landscape at most as blurred specks of colors and contours.

The visual metaphor highlights an important factor in the kind of change we are trying to describe. On the one hand, there is the compatibility of the two judgments in the sense that both are possible, legitimate, or valid; on the other, the impossibility of holding the two judgments and acting on them simultaneously. Forgiveness and tolerance involve,

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7 Trudy Govier, 'Forgiveness and the Unforgivable,' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 36 (1999), 65

8 Joram Graf Haber, *Forgiveness* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield 1991), 104

9 Jeffrie Murphy and Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1988), ch. 1

10 This idea was first suggested by David Heyd in his introduction to D. Heyd, ed., *Toleration: An Elusive Virtue*, 10-17.

we suggest, a *Gestalt switch* of the kind illustrated by the rabbit-duck image or by other examples in standard textbooks of psychology, like that of the window pane.

The perceptual analogy fits some fundamental qualities of both forgiveness and tolerance. Pardon and tolerant restraint by no means imply that the original negative objection to the offense or wrong action was overcome in the sense of being overridden by stronger reasons. The whole point of forgiveness, which to our mind equally applies to tolerance, is that it does not reduce the commitment to those values on the basis of which the initial negative response was made. Tolerance does not express any consent or acceptance of the tolerated behavior. On the contrary, it implies a negative judgment. It consists merely of a shift in focus from the act to the actor, from a legitimate judgmental perspective to an indulgent charitable one. Both forgiveness and tolerance may be easier for a person of kind and lenient disposition, but a decision is necessarily required to adopt one perspective rather than the equally valid other. Similarly in forgiveness, as long as one focuses on the wrongness of the act, the forgiving attitude cannot occur; it is rather the harboring of resentment. This does not mean that once forgiveness is granted, the offense is completely obliterated. The agent can in principle always switch back to the judgmental perspective, that is call forth awareness of the iniquity of the act.

The perceptual model of a Gestalt switch, which we are suggesting here, characterizes the tension between acts and agents as objects of moral evaluation. There is of course a close link between the evaluation of actions and of their agents, the one reflecting the other. Virtuous acts are only those performed by virtuous individuals, says Aristotle, but a virtuous character can only be formed through the performance of virtuous acts. However, despite this circularity, phenomena like forgiveness and tolerance support the need for separating the two, at least up to a certain point, as we shall see. Moral judgment may be either impersonal or personal; it takes as its objects actions and states of affairs, on the one hand, and human agents, on the other. Actions may be judged as right or wrong irrespective of their agents; they are evaluated in terms of impersonal norms and rules. Human subjects are virtuous or vicious, trustworthy or disloyal, in their character, that is in their dispositions, patterns of deliberation, the integrity with which they adhere to their beliefs and principles, etc. The perspectival analysis suggested here enables us to evaluate a given moral principle either *in the abstract*, i.e. in itself, or in the way it has been adopted by an *individual*, the manner in which it coheres with the individual's overall system of beliefs and principles and the weight given to it by the subject.

The idea of a perceptual shift of attention is different from John McDowell's perceptual analysis of virtue. In McDowell's analysis there

is only *one* correct moral reading of a given situation, and in the virtuous mind this perception *silences* all its alternatives.<sup>11</sup> This means that the situation calls for either a negative reaction or, all things considered, for toleration (or forgiveness). No room is left for the paradoxical nature of the two virtues. Our suggestion, based on the analogy to the rabbit-duck case, holds that in forgiveness and tolerance we can and should be able to freely switch from the impersonal perspective to the personal. There are contexts, like the exercise of judicial power by the court, in which the impersonal view should dominate. There are other contexts, such as the exercise of legal pardon by the king, in which the personal perspective becomes relevant. But as in the Gestalt examples, there is no ultimate way of fully integrating the two perspectives. There is no general and systematic way of combining the impersonal negative judgment of the offensive act with the personal acceptance of its agent as a friend or fellow-citizen.

Thus, forgiveness and toleration do not *silence* the judgmental attitudes of resentment and criticism but rather *suspend* them. Like Coleridge's 'willing suspension of disbelief,' they involve putting aside one perspective without denying its legitimacy and without blocking the way to revert to it at any time (by a simple act of will). Moving from the 'realistic' perspective to the 'fictional' is grounded in good aesthetic reasons (without it there can be no theatrical experience), but it does not reduce the validity of the realization that 'this is only fiction,' that the characters on stage are 'just' actors. Reality and fiction cannot be simultaneously experienced, but they are mutually dependent. So are forgiveness and tolerance, whose point and value derive exactly from the 'willing suspension' of the otherwise valid judgmental point of view.

The separation of the personal from the impersonal perspective applies to the forgiving and tolerant *subject* too, not merely to the forgiven and tolerated party. This is a separation between action and mental attitude. But it is interesting to note that this separation takes opposite forms in the two cases. While in forgiveness, one can act in a negative manner toward the wrongdoer (e.g. punish him) and simultaneously adopt a forgiving attitude to him, in toleration one objects to the other's practice but refrains from acting in a hostile way. Whereas toleration involves practical acceptance (on the level of action) combined with a negative judgment, forgiveness adopts a positive attitude which is compatible with some form of punitive action.

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11 John McDowell, 'Virtue and Reason,' *Monist* 62 (1979), 335

Finally, forgiveness applies exclusively to actions done in the past (there is no forgiveness, not even a promise for forgiveness, for actions which one plans or intends to carry out in the future). Tolerance, however, is exercised towards actions both present and future. The whole point of a tolerant attitude is that it is declarative with regard to future responses to certain practices (otherwise it would not have much political value in managing on-going social relations). The difference between the two kinds of restraint is due to the ad hoc nature of forgiveness, which operates on an *individual* one-time basis, and toleration, the objects of which are *types* of action or practices. Thus I forgive my neighbor for the noisy party which she held last night, but I tolerate her repeated attempts to enlist me to her wrong-headed political cause.

### *The Deontic Status of Forgiveness and Toleration*

The analogy between forgiveness and tolerance exposes the variety of normative evaluations in various contexts. Deploying the traditional three-fold deontic classification, the two attitudes may be viewed as either obligatory, permissible, or prohibited. The difficult philosophical problem is how to draw the lines between the three. Our argument in this article is that although both tolerance and forgiveness may sometimes be seen as a duty and both have limits beyond which they not only lose their particular value but become plainly forbidden, they are essentially of a *supererogatory* nature. That is to say, they are permissible admirable attitudes based on personal discretion, and as such are of a special moral value.

## **I Prohibition**

As we have shown the most typical cases of both forgiveness and tolerance take as their object behavior that is objectively offensive, bad, or unjust. If that is the case, then the borderline between the tolerable and the intolerable, the forgivable and the unforgivable, might alternatively be drawn in terms of the degree of 'badness' of the behavior in question: practices which are socially harmful in a way which makes them criminal are typically intolerable; the behavior of Nazi officers was so atrocious that it can never be forgiven.<sup>12</sup>

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12 See Govier for a comprehensive discussion of unforgivability, referring to Martin Golding and to Jean Hampton.

There may be all kinds of reasons for treating an act as unforgivable or intolerable. But one reason that is particularly pertinent to the view presented in this article is that some acts so intimately reflect on the badness of their agent that the separation of act from agent cannot take place.<sup>13</sup> Systematic torture of children is not only a monstrous practice, but reflects on the overall pathology and corruption of the perpetrator's soul. We do not forgive our friends when their offensive deed makes us realize that they are completely different people from what we thought they were. On the social and political level we find that behavior intolerable which manifests a personality with whom we do not wish to live in the same community.

The ultimate case of the inseparability of agent from action, which makes forgiveness and tolerance impossible (rather than forbidden), is the *reflexive* attitude: the reason why we find it difficult to apply tolerance and forgiveness to ourselves is due to our identification of what we do with what we are. I cannot tolerate my own behavior when I judge it to be wrong, because by so judging it I sincerely commit myself to change my ways.

Finally, there is the interesting issue of the prohibition of forgiveness in the name of others. In the standard case, the forgiver must be the offended party, the one who suffered the harm. One is not in a moral position to forgive another for an injury perpetrated on a third party. However, there are controversial cases in which, for example, children of the victims may exercise the power of forgiveness. These can be treated as 'secondary' victims, close enough to the primary victim to claim to have been harmed and hence be in a position to forgive. Although this condition is not usually mentioned in the context of toleration, it seems to have an analogous application. Tolerance is shown only by those who stand to lose something by restraining themselves from intervening, those who 'suffer' from the behavior of the tolerated party. Their suffering is a function of their being members of the same community as those who directly suffer from the wrong. Thus people who believe that abortion should be allowed in their society, and might even one day need one, can be said to suffer from pro-lifers' aggressive behavior, although not as directly as women whose entrance to an abortion clinic is obstructed. It is only too easy to show tolerance towards others with whom we have no contact, no common social interests or mutual relations.

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13 We fully adopt Trudy Govier's formulation of this inseparability condition of the unforgivable in Govier, 69.

## II Obligation

The second, more common ethical view of forgiveness and toleration goes to the other extreme on the deontic spectrum, treating them as obligatory. One typical argument in this line is of a 'corrective' nature: forgiveness and toleration, like equity in the Aristotelian sense, are fine-tuning devices, in which the distortions of the application of general rules are rectified. Thus, the process of repentance and expression of remorse create a duty of forgiveness; the recognition of the autonomy of individuals imposes a duty of tolerant restraint. Withholding forgiveness or tolerance is judged as morally wrong and condemnable.

Christian morality has raised forgiveness to the status of supreme, even constitutive value, as liberal democracy has done for tolerance. Divine forgiveness is the model for imitation by human beings, and the unforgiving human being cannot expect to be forgiven by God. Similarly, in the liberal view the separation of the political from the moral requires, as a fundamental principle, mutual toleration by citizens in a heterogeneous society. The feeling is that forgiveness and toleration are not merely virtuous dispositions, but positive requirements for Christian morality and the liberal view, respectively.

## III Supererogation

We have so far examined contexts in which toleration and forgiveness are either obligatory or prohibited. We have also mentioned ethical approaches which consider toleration and forgiveness as wrong *in general* or as a duty *in general*. However, these contexts and approaches are exceptions rather than the rule. Toleration and forgiveness are usually thought of as permissions, i.e. as containing an optional element. But they are not permissible in the neutral sense: in most cases they are treated as morally valuable. In being good and permissible they belong to the category of the *supererogatory*. We would like to argue that the special moral value of forgiveness and tolerance lies exactly in their supererogatory nature, the fact that they lie beyond the call of duty. The categorization of forgiveness as supererogatory has already been suggested in the past.<sup>14</sup> But tolerance has rarely been viewed in those terms.<sup>15</sup>

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14 David Heyd, *Supererogation: Its Status in Ethical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1982), ch. 7

15 An important exception, to which we shall refer shortly, is Glen Newey, *Virtue, Reason and Toleration* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1999), ch. 2.

One possible reason is that unlike forgiveness, tolerance has been traditionally understood as a *political* virtue or attitude, primarily exercised by governments and institutions. But once tolerance is interpreted as consisting of a change of perspective, a kind of Gestalt switch, it comes much closer to forgiveness in being personal in nature. Individuals, unlike institutions which are committed to justice and fairness, may go beyond the universalizable and impersonally applied rules of duty, that is to say, act supererogatorily.

An intermediate solution of the deontic classification of forgiveness and tolerance consists in treating them as requirements though not as strict duties. This is the idea of *imperfect* duties associated with both Kant and Mill. One common characterization of these duties relates to them as duties which have no correlative rights. Thus, I am under a *general* duty to forgive and tolerate (in certain circumstances), but no particular individual holds a right against me to be forgiven or tolerated. In more Kantian terms, I retain discretion concerning the particular instances in which I show forgiveness or tolerance, although it would be morally wrong for me to consistently avoid forgiving or tolerating others. This intermediate solution fits well with the idea of forgiveness and tolerance as essentially of a *corrective* nature, i.e. as a kind of equity. And indeed, as we have seen, there is a sense in which amnesty and pardon, some forms of leniency and turning a blind eye are morally required positions. However, they do not form the main core of forgiveness and tolerance. The moving and noble aspect of supererogatory behavior in general and of forgiveness and tolerance in particular has to do exactly with its lying beyond any kind of requirement.

Haber is attracted to this deontic classification of forgiveness as an imperfect duty. In his view, if the wrongdoer does not repent, forgiveness is completely out of place, but if he does, although the wronged party has strong moral reasons to forgive, the wrongdoer has no right to be forgiven. There is thus an imperfect duty to develop a forgiving character, but there is no duty to forgive in any particular case.<sup>16</sup> In the case of toleration, D.D. Raphael appeals to the same distinction between perfect and imperfect duties, but relates it to the criterion of corresponding rights in a slightly different way. The intolerable is that which involves the infringement of the rights of others. If the behavior of which we morally disapprove does not involve such an infringement, then we

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16 Joram Graf Haber, ch. 4

may tolerate it (and under some conditions *should* do so).<sup>17</sup> The common purpose of all these appeals to the idea of imperfect duty (often referred to by the oxymoron 'supererogatory duty') is the resolution of the paradox of both forgiveness and toleration: why should we restrain ourselves from a negative response to a morally wrong behavior? The intermediate deontic status attempts to do justice both to the desirability of such restraint and to the negative judgment of the behavior which justifies resentment or interference.

According to the analysis we propose in this article, forgiveness and tolerance are (at least in their most typical manifestations) supererogatory in an *unqualified* sense, that is to say, fully optional and unbound by any kind of a moral duty. They consist of a radical shift in the way one views a situation which is due neither to any problem in the judgment of the case (as the corrective analysis holds) nor to any fault in the judge herself (as, for instance, the lack of any personal experience of the kind of conditions which made the wrongdoer commit his offense). We suggest that there is a *general* moral reason for the shift from the impersonal, 'judgmental' point of view to the personal, 'understanding' perspective. Such a shift is good and valuable, both for the recipient and for the forgiving and tolerant subject. Furthermore, it is good for the interpersonal relations between the forgiver and the forgiven person and no less for the social relations between individuals and groups that show each other tolerance. The receiver clearly stands to benefit in being left to behave as she wishes or in being readmitted into the previous friendly relationship. The subject is given a chance to show magnanimity, patience and self-control. Interpersonal relations are made smoother, and both forgiveness and tolerance promote mutual trust and friendship on the individual level and solidarity and confidence on the social.

Since forgiveness and toleration consist of the substitution of a sympathetic perspective for the impersonal, judgmental one, the reason for the substitution cannot logically create a *duty*. The whole point of the perspectival shift lies in the suspension of the 'just' assessment of the case for the sake of a higher ideal (the restoration of friendship, respect for individual autonomy, the creation of trust). It is a *personal* attitude in that only the offended or 'suffering' party is in a position to show it without violating the principles of justice. Forgiveness and tolerance involve personal sacrifice, restraint, renouncement of rights. These can-

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17 D.D. Raphael, 'The Intolerable,' S. Mendus, ed., *Justifying Toleration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1988), 146-7. Raphael himself admits that the distinction between perfect and imperfect duties is not easy to draw and rests on moral intuition.

not be exercised by 'third parties,' like uninvolved individuals or the state. The shift to the forgiving and tolerant mode is therefore purely supererogatory, and its exercise may be compared to a *gift*. As in giving, forgiving may be more or less deserved, but it is never due (as a right, as a matter of justice). This is why both forgiveness and toleration are never required by *law* and can never be forced. They are by definition free, optional, at the discretion of the donor. It is controversial whether tolerating others who are themselves tolerant is obligatory or supererogatory, but tolerating the intolerant goes definitely beyond the call of duty. Similarly, forgiving the repentant is often considered as a duty, but forgiving someone who has not shown signs of remorse must be regarded as supererogatory. By repenting, the offender expresses his wish to separate his act from his character; by granting forgiveness to the unrepenting, it is we who project the separation onto the offender.

Going beyond the call of duty is often denied by the virtuous agent of the supererogatory act, who modestly declares that she 'only did her duty.' But such expressions of modesty, typical of heroic actions and sacrifices, cannot occur in the context of the supererogatory attitudes of forgiveness and toleration. The reason is that both assume that the forgiven or tolerated action was offensive or unacceptable and hence the restraint from resentment or interference cannot be viewed as obligatory. This is why forgiving or tolerant forbearance are pure examples of supererogation, in which, unlike heroic actions, no controversy can occur about the borderline between duty and gift and no moral modesty (genuine or false) can be exhibited. Similarly, they cannot be 'virtues of ignorance,' manifestations of innocence or expressions of blessed blindness to human evil. It should also be noted that while forgiveness deserves gratitude (from the forgiven), toleration cannot expect gratitude. This is because the forgiven offender usually acknowledges the wrong he has done, while the tolerated party does not share the tolerator's view of the wrongness of his action (and hence in the long run expects full acceptance rather than mere toleration).

We would like to emphasize that the recognition of forgiveness and toleration as supererogatory in nature does not mean that the deontic framework must be abandoned in order to sustain the analysis. Glen Newey, in his careful and comprehensive account of tolerance as supererogatory argues for an 'aretaic' analysis (which he contrasts to the 'deontic'). In his view, toleration should be understood in terms of the *virtue* of the tolerator, the character of the person who shows tolerance, and this means superseding the deontic characterization which does not solve the paradox of toleration. Our account of supererogation, however, holds that the crucial point in the value of supererogatory behavior (forgiveness and tolerance included) inheres in its lying beyond the call of duty, that is to say, being permissible yet admirable

conduct.<sup>18</sup> Character traits, like patience or kindness, may indeed be instrumental in enabling the subject to make the necessary shift of perspectives, but are not constitutive of it. Unlike Newey, who believes that toleration can be shown even without the awareness of the subject, let alone a deliberative process, we claim that toleration (and forgiveness) involve a cognitive and intentional element.<sup>19</sup>

	<b>Forgiveness</b>	<b>Toleration</b>
<b>Prohibition</b>	The unforgivable, extreme evil or corrupt character	The intolerable, supreme danger to society
<b>Obligation</b>	The religious duty to forgive; correction of undeserved resentment	The necessity of political toleration in pluralistic society
<b>Supererogation</b>	The restoration of friendship, the free giving of personal credit	The creation of communal solidarity, the charitable view of fellow-citizens

*The Principle of Charity*

Tolerance and forgiveness are kinds of gifts. The gift consists primarily of a generous attitude, a sympathetic interpretation of the circumstances of an action which could equally be judged as wrong and deserving a negative response. We would accordingly like to refer to the forgiving and tolerant attitudes as *charitable* perspectives. They ignore the offensive aspects of the action and focus on the way it can be understood, interpreted and explained against the background of the overall scheme of behavior, the life plan of the agent. Forgiveness and tolerance invoke a principle of charity which is not dissimilar to its famous semantic counterpart. In the same way as Davidson's Principle of Charity is the

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18 Cf. Heyd, *Supererogation*, 5 & 163.

19 Newey, 54

condition for a linguistic community in which the utterances of others can be interpreted by us, so is toleration necessary for a community of citizens in a liberal-pluralist society in which solidarity and peaceful coexistence is made possible, and so does forgiveness express (even create) personal relationships of friendship and trust.

Now, if we adopt the more restricted version of the Principle of Charity, the point of which is to make the interpreted belief *true* (which is Quine's understanding of the principle), then of course the analogy with forgiveness and toleration breaks down. For, the forgiven or tolerated action is typically considered *wrong* and the tolerated belief — *false*. The Principle of Charity, according to some of Davidson's earlier formulations, also attempts to interpret alien sentences in a way which would make their speakers right, or 'true believers,' whereas forgiveness and toleration do not try to assign any moral truth or justification to the practices which have raised the initial negative response. However, the Principle of Charity can be given a wider sense according to which its aim is not merely to 'interpret so that the objects of interpretation are generally true believers, but rather a collection of all those principles which together regulate the ways in which beliefs, desires and actions rationally connect with each other.'<sup>20</sup> Here we are getting closer to the analogy between the semantic and the moral versions of the charitable perspective. What counts is the rationality of the beliefs or practices, that is to say their internal validity, rather than their truth. And *that* requires a shift from the 'atomistic' (abstract) judgment of the particular belief or action to the holistic interpretation and understanding of the agent. Both in Davidson and in our view of toleration and forgiveness the object of this personal approach is the agent as the source of intentional action.

This wider view of the Principle of Charity (adopted by Davidson in his later writings) is closer to what we are discussing here, since it is compatible with the wrongness of the 'tolerated' object. 'If we can recognize how we, in certain circumstances, would have a certain belief which, in our role as interpreter we think is mistaken, we can, according to the new Principle of Charity, attribute to the interpretee this mistaken belief.'<sup>21</sup> This ability of putting oneself in the other's shoes is equally typical of tolerance and forgiveness, which require imagination and

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20 Simon Evnine, *Donald Davidson* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1991), 110. Davidson himself declares that 'the aim of interpretation is not agreement but understanding' and that this amounts to recognizing 'what constitutes a good reason for holding a particular belief.' D. Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1984), xvii.

21 Evnine, 109

sympathy and enable the tolerator to test the inner coherence, authenticity and sense of the tolerated behavior. The charitable perspective is in its essence holistic. It does not require the truth or correctness of any particular value or belief, although it does assume that *some* of the other's beliefs and values are true and correct (e.g. ascribing to the tolerated person the intention of doing good, acting in her own interests, or promoting well-being in the world). A satanically malicious person cannot, for exactly that reason, be forgiven or tolerated, because such a person cannot be credited with *any* valuable principle or intention; this would be analogous to a baby whose babbling cannot be given any meaning. Indeed, Davidson's point in his version of the Principle of Charity is to insist on there being a shared belief in some fundamental truths (primarily of a perceptual kind or, in the interpretation of action, the belief that one is acting on one's better judgment). But charity applies to that part of the belief system which is *not* shared by the interpreter and the interpretee, or analogously by the tolerator and the tolerated. Here, understanding rather than agreement should be operative.

But instructive differences remain between the two poles of this analogy. While the Principle of Charity is *necessary* for interpretation and translation, since without it we have no reason to treat the other as a rational subject holding beliefs or saying anything, the moral judgment of other people's behavior does not require a tolerant or forgiving attitude. We can hold agents morally reprehensible and responsible for their deeds by judging their actions impersonally. This judgment indeed calls for a Davidsonian principle of charity in the sense that the agents' acts must be interpreted as intentional or voluntary. But our argument was that toleration and forgiveness, beyond their corrective function, amount to more than exempting the agent from responsibility for the act. Toleration and forgiveness are, therefore, purely *optional*. Nevertheless, in the same way as charity is *constitutive* of the possibility of a community of interpreters and rational believers, so is it constitutive of the possibility of a community of citizens in a variegated society (toleration) and of friendship and love (forgiveness). And the limits of the application of the principle are also analogous: robots and babies are not candidates for interpretation as rational agents, since the scope of their behavior is too narrow and restricted; similarly, people in alien cultures are not candidates for our tolerant restraint, since we do not share with them a minimal communal interest or feeling. For instance, Americans may be indifferent to customs such as female circumcision as long as they are practiced in African countries, but once these practices are performed by African immigrants in American society and territory, the issue typically becomes that of toleration (and its limits).

The analogy to the Principle of Charity accordingly suggests the following conclusion: taking the agent as a rational being is a necessary

condition for interpreting her utterances. It is in this sense necessary or 'obligatory.' But adopting the personal perspective of the agent of a repugnant or offensive act is not obligatory or necessary to being able to interpret and judge the action in question; it is supererogatory. The difference between the two is due to the fact that while interpretation takes place in a universal community of interlocutors, toleration and forgiveness are shown only within a narrower group of fellow-citizens and friends. And the whole point of the morality of supererogation is that there is no *duty* to expand the borders of these restricted groups based on personal relations. In other words, I have no choice in applying the Principle of Charity to speakers in alien and remote cultures (if I wish to understand what they are saying), but I have full discretion to decide whether I want to include someone in the group of people to whom I want to relate personally, in a particularistic way, as a friend or as a member of a community with which I feel solidarity. This discretion makes forgiveness and toleration, unlike the semantic analogue, supererogatory.

Furthermore, since the Principle of Charity is necessary, or constitutive of interpretation in its Davidsonian version, it is not strictly speaking a matter of *charity*! We do no one (but ourselves) a favor by applying it. Its benefit lies in our ability to make sense of the speech of others. But in the moral counterpart, it is the other who stands to benefit from the charitable perspective we adopt in judging his behavior. He gets something he does not strictly *deserve*. As in bank loans, giving credit always involves risk; but the risk in granting charity is different in the two cases: in the linguistic context we may fail to interpret the other or even turn out to be wrong in ascribing to 'it' the status of a rational creature; in toleration and forgiveness our attitude may be frustrated or undermined by reciprocal hostility, intolerance, or indifference to our gestures of friendship. In the former case, we are proved plainly wrong in our charity. In the latter, our charitable attitude does not lose its sense and value; it is still vindicated in some way even when it turns out to be painful and disappointing. On the contrary, such unreciprocated acts of giving express the noblest form of supererogatory behavior. And beyond that, interpreting an alien speaker in the light of the Principle of Charity does not *make* 'it' rational if as a matter of fact it is not, but the forgiving and tolerant attitude may often actively *transform* the other and make her more friendly, grateful and equally tolerant.

Thus, the perspectival analysis we have suggested for forgiveness and toleration *maintains* rather than resolves the tension between the two incompatible judgments of the act and the agent; that is to say, the paradox that has been associated with both attitudes is not simply dispelled. This, in our view, is a clear merit of our account. On the conceptual level, it captures the duality of the impersonal and the

personal aspects of moral judgment, granting the two equal standing. On the normative level, it maintains the duality of the two perspectives by avoiding the deontic reduction of forgiveness and tolerance to either a requirement or a prohibition. By according them supererogatory status, the two attitudes can on the one hand be given the special value we wish them to have, at least in some contexts and conditions, yet on the other hand we can still be committed to the moral justification of resentment and active struggle for the good. If, as we believe is the case, the supererogatory cannot be reduced to any form of obligation, there are two parallel levels of moral judgment: that of justice and duty, on the one hand, and that of free giving and charity, on the other. Neither is reducible to the other or undermines its validity. Although going beyond the call of duty (and justice) is admirable in many cases, it is not always so (for instance in the way a court of justice operates or distributions by state institutions are carried out), and even when it is, it never revokes the force of justice.

This duality between duty and supererogation is exemplified in both forgiveness and toleration. Forgiveness makes sense only when resentment is justified, when retribution would be a justified response. It is moving only because the subject forgoes the negative response which could be both expected and justified. Interpersonal relationships are governed by the complementary dualism of universalizable rules determining the just and the due and discretionary choices to transcend the rules for the sake of restoring previous personal associations. On the more social and group level, we wish to maintain the duality between the judgmental perspective, which involves active criticism and interference, and principled restraint from doing so on the basis of respect for individual autonomy. This duality is essential to the liberal conception which acknowledges the distinction between the evaluation of actions and that of persons. If toleration is to be distinguished from relativism and indifference, the judgmental point of view must be retained even when it is suspended in favor of the recognition of the value of personal freedom in the formation of a life plan.

Isabella in *Measure for Measure* is pleading for mercy for her brother, who in her view too has committed a grievous offense. She is wavering between the two perspectives we have been discussing throughout this article:

There is a vice that most I do abhor,  
And most desire should meet the blow of justice,  
For which I would not plead, but that I must;  
For which I must not plead, but that I am  
At war 'twixt will and will not. (II, ii)

After she asks the duke's deputy to consider the fault rather than her brother who has committed it, Angelo responds:

Condemn the fault, and not the actor of it?  
Why, every fault's condemn'd ere it be done.  
Mine were the very cipher of a function,  
To fine the faults whose fine stands in record,  
And let go by the actor.

Angelo prefers the strict application of the law and to judge the act on its abstract merits. He is committed to an impersonal perspective which might be appropriate to the political management of a community. Only the development of circumstances in the course of the play teaches him the moral lesson of forgiveness and the limits of justice. Having been manipulated to become himself a candidate for forgiveness, Angelo comes to acknowledge the distinction between act and agent and the intrinsic supererogatory value of forgiveness.

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