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A Plea for Indifference

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Indifference has its roots in fetal and neonatal aversive experience, which is based in the brainstem and limbic systems. The striatum, in particular, is a primary substrate for both reward and aversion and their associated behaviors. Aversion belongs also to the earliest form of parent–child interactions, accounts of which often wrongly privilege interpersonal synchrony and its affiliative power. What empirical investigations have uncovered, however, is a pattern more dominated by disconnection and asynchrony. What matters more to development is the capacity for child and caretaker jointly to detect and repair ruptures in their social bond. One of the most powerful regulatory behaviors open to the child in these contexts is gaze aversion. Out of early cycles of rupture and repair goes the emergence of reconciliation, which turns into forgiveness at an early age. I explore some of the ethology of reconciliation, which is found widely in the animal world. Forgiveness is explored in terms of its affective, cognitive, and motivational dimensions, as also is the disengagement of infant from caretaker. Indifference also has these dimensions and constitutes a form of psychological distancing. Here Harry Frankfurt's analysis of "care" is brought to bear. I specify the adaptive value of both forgiveness and indifference and finally argue that overlooking indifference as an alternative to both forgiveness and revenge risks substantial damage to human flourishing.

Keywords: aversion, forgiveness, indifference

It is my view that discussions of human practices of forgiveness tend to overlook an important alternative to it, namely "indifference." It is my contention that indifference has deep and ancient roots in human biology, both phylogenetic and ontogenetic. I will be at pains to explore some aspects of both, together with their supporting neural network dynamics. I will also show that human neonates and young infants have rich capacities for responding to certain very ordinary stressors in their early social interactions with forms of disengagement that function as precursors to indifference. I will offer an analysis of forgiveness that seeks to redress the balance by including indifference as an alternative to both forgiveness and revenge. And I will argue that we continue to neglect the subject of

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indifference (understood in a certain way) at our peril. My article thus takes the form of a manifesto that I wish to place in the context of contemporary discussions of forgiveness, but without developing a full theory of forgiveness.

In this argument I will not draw a sharp divide between biology and morality. That is because I am a neo-Aristotelian about ethics and take the subject matter of ethics to be specifying the conditions under which members of our species flourish. Those conditions are usually undergirded and supported by our biology, broadly enough construed to include organic biological processes, social processes, and evolutionary processes. That is, like Aristotle himself, I take it that flourishing, for animals of our type, is largely determined by our biology. That this is so motivates exploring our subject with the aid of relevant contemporary empirical scientific investigations, the richness of which can only be hinted at here. This general neo-Aristotelian perspective implies that what is imperiled by the omission of indifference from our suite of possible responses to interpersonal norm violations is our own flourishing, both as individuals and as social groups. I begin the exploration in the neonatal period of human psycho-social development.

Early Aversive Experience and Early Social Disengagement

It used to be thought that human fetuses and neonates did not experience pain and/or memory of pain. That view was challenged in the 1970s and 1980s and has now been replaced. Preterm infants with average of 32 weeks of gestational age (WGA) give evidence of pain responses in their primary somato-sensory cortex (Bartocci, Bergqvist, Lagercrantz, and Anand, 2006). Neonates also respond to a wide variety of noxious stimuli, as also more generally to stress, and those responses are clearly aversive. Basically all that is needed for such responses is a reflexive pathway in the brainstem and spinal cord, together with their further connection with the thalamus and through the thalamus to other elements of the limbic system. These neural foundations for pain are available from 20 WGA and are indeed developed to adult levels by 24 WGA (Marchant, 2014; Raju, Venkatnarayan, Raju, and Khade, 2017). Generally speaking the human brain develops from the bottom up, from the back forward and from the center outward. The brainstem is thus among the earliest brain structures to be fully functional. The visual system consisting in the brainstem structures of the superior colliculus (SC), the pulvinar nucleus of the thalamus, and the amygdala (AMG), develops early, well before either of the other two (cortically based) visual systems (Cecere, Bertini, and Ladavas, 2013; Haak and Beckmann, 2018; Weiner and Grill–Spector, 2013). The early subcortical visual system will figure more in this essay later. In view of all of these developments, it is no longer possible to hold that fetuses and early neonates do not experience (or remember) pain and do not attempt to avoid it. Such pain is among our earliest experiences with aversive stimuli and implicates

our capacities to register it and try to avoid it. Elements of the midbrain also figure prominently in this development, among them the striatum.

The neural development of the striatum (and especially the nucleus accumbens, hereafter Nacc) begins before 20 WGA. Its structure achieves adult-equivalence by 27 WGA, though both neuronal differentiation and connectivity continue to develop postnatally (Hu, Rudd, and Fang, 2012; Yager, Garcia, Wunsch, and Ferguson, 2015). Basic connectivity of the Nacc is already secure in the prenatal period, notably with the amygdala, which is the basic neural foothold for emotionality and other forms of salience (Cauda, Cavanna, D'Agata, Sacco, Duca, and Geminian, 2011; Graham, Buss, Rasmussen, Rudolph, Demeter, Gilmore et al., 2016; Rogers, Sylvester, Mintz, Kenley, Shimoney, Barch, and Smyser, 2017). Long-range connections of the Nacc (e.g., to the orbito-frontal cortex and the temporal lobes) are in place by 26–29 WGA and stable from 31 WGA (Jakab, Schwartz, Kasprian, Gruber, Prayer, Schöpf et al., 2014; Thomason, Grove, Lozon, Vila, Ye, Nye et al., 2015). The engagement of the Nacc with reward is thorough-going (Kringelbach and Berridge, 2017; Ruff and Fehr, 2014). It is especially implicated in incentive salience (Schmidt, Fenske, Kirsch, and Mier, 2019), and thus facilitates goal-directed behavior and accounts for much of the early human capacity for cognizing social cues and encouraging prosociality and affiliation generally (Floresco, 2015).

The motivational force of incentive salience is driven by the action of dopamine which is pervasive throughout the striatal system and its major connections (Soares–Cunha, Coimbra, Domingues, Vasconcelos, Sousa, and Rodrigues, 2018; Steinberg, Boivin, Saunders, Witten, Deisseroth, and Janak, 2014). This whole system is up and running by birth. The striatal/reward system also supports aversion, both as experienced by and as responded to by the neonate (Ozawa, Ycu, Kuman, Yeh, Ahmed, Koivuma, and Johansen, 2017; Van der Weele, Siciliano, Matthews, Namburi, Izadmehr, Espinel et al., 2018). Dopamine is likewise implicated in both reward and aversive responses, and thus enhances reward–seeking behavior and inhibition of that same behavior, depending on how fast or slow it is released into the striatum (Budygin, Bass, Grinevich, Deal, Bonin, and Weiner, 2020; Danjo, Yoshimi, Funabiki, Yawata, and Nakanishi, 2014). Perhaps most important of all, dopamine in the reward–aversion striatum is also implicated in aversive learning, without which further function of memory rewarding and aversive experience would mean little to the developing child (Hikida, Morita and Macpherson, 2016; Yamaguchi, Goto, Nakahara, Yawata, Hikida, Matsuda et al., 2015).[1] Only by virtue of learning (and long-term memory) does aversion conduce to survival (Olsson, Hall, Haaker, and Hensler, 2018; Ozawa and Johnson, 2018;

[1] Dopamine is not the only neurotransmitter involved in these phenomena, bearing in mind its complex relationship with serotonin, sometimes cooperative, sometimes competitive (Boureau and Dayan, 2011). Both glutamate and GABA also play key roles, according to Faure, Richard, and Berridge, 2010).

Yau and McNally, 2019). The developing neonate, then, comes equipped with a fully functional system supporting the experience of aversive phenomena, as such, and a capacity to respond with behavior appropriate to those same phenomena.

Given all this, and given also that the system has to operate in the various social niches to which human infants eventually belong, we may also expect to find the system senswitive to aversive faces (e.g., angry or fearful faces). And that is just what we do find. Thus, infants show a marked bias regarding fearful faces, which seem to be treated neurally as equivalent to some form of social threat (Leppänen, Cataldo, and Enlow, 2018; Peltoa, Hietanen, Forssman, and Leppänen, 2013). Infants orient faster and more persistently to fearful faces than to happy or neutral ones. The subcortical visual system by which they detect such faces thus also operates as an "alarm system," alerting infants to the presence of threats in the near environment, starting earliest with threatening faces (fearful, angry, or both), and eventually working towards more general external threatening phenomena (e.g., snakes, spiders). But faces go together with voices, so we may also expect to find sensitivity in this system to adverse voices (angry or hostile). And such sensitivity to voices has been found in very young neonates (Cheng, Lee, Chen, Wang, and Decety, 2012; Zhang, Chen, Hou, and Wu, 2019; Zhang, Zhou, Hou, Cui, and Zhou, 2017). We might also expect that the system responds very fast, taking advantage of its subcortical foundations in the amygdala and its connections to the superior colliculus–pulvinar visual circuit. For, in some situations it will be very important to become aware of threats as quickly as possible, even for a neonate whose motor repertoire is very limited. And, once again, that is just what we do find: neural processing of angry, fearful, or hostile faces can begin as early as 25 ms following stimulus and be completed in 90 ms. The speed appears to depend chiefly on the role in this network of the superior colliculus (Garvert, Friston, Dolan, and Garrido, 2014; Lanius, Rabellino, Boyd, Harricharan, Frewen, and McKinnon, 2017; McFadyen, Mermillod, Mattingley, Halasz, and Garrido, 2017; Soares, Maior, Isbell, Tomaz, and Nishijo, 2017). We might also expect "attention capture," that is, that angry or fearful faces/voices might seize and hold attention quickly and automatically, for such capture can also serve the purposes of speed. This also is what we do find: angry or fearful faces are noted for their power to capture and hold attention (Lin, Murray, and Boynton, 2009; West, Anderson, and Pratt, 2009). Such attention need not depend on conscious awareness of the threatening stimulus, and the superior colliculus–pulvinar–amygdala network also appears to be responsible for non-conscious processing of threatening or hostile faces (Almeida, Pajtas, Mahon, Nakayama, and Caramazza, 2013; Anderson and Britton, 2019; Troiani, Price, and Schultz, 2014). Finally, and given the relative immaturity of neonatal motor repertoires, we might expect infants not yet capable of sitting upright, much less standing upright and walking, to use what limited motor capacities they do possess (eye gaze, head movements, trunk movements and motion of arms and hands) to avoid or otherwise modulate

aversive stimuli. The automaticity of these movements, in turn, arises from their neural basis, where connections between the amygdala, the superior colliculus, the pulvinar and the periacqueductal grey (PAG) region of the brainstem, all play large roles outside of conscious awareness (Arico, Bagley, Carrive, Assareh, and McNally, 2017; Assareh, Sarrami, Carrive, and McNally, 2016; Tovote, Esposito, Botta, Chaudan, Fadok, Markovic et al., 2016).

For a species like ours, whose children experience protracted altriciality, automatic aversion to threats arising in the social environment is a virtual necessity. The early developing subcortical "alarm system" has served us well over evolutionary time. Moreover, it is clear from comparative studies that a similar system is to be found widely across primate species and indeed the whole mammalian world (Hayes and Northoff, 2011; Kobayashi, 2012). We now have evidence that the tendency to avoid aversive phenomena can evolve in as little as 30–40 generations (Dunlop and Stephens, 2009, 2014). Fast and automatic detection of threats, including hostile faces or voices, sustained attention to same, appropriate salience-marking of them, and possession of adequate behavioral responses to them, represent, then, an evolutionarily conserved solution to a universal problem for living things: how to deal with dangerous ecological stimuli or conditions, whether actual or probable. Human infants could avoid having such a system only by not being biological entities at all. Aversive behavior and especially gaze aversion play important roles also in early child–caretaker interactions. To understand this more fully I need to treat the issue of interpersonal synchrony, which colors much of the discussion of these early social interactions.

Here are two recent definitions of "synchrony," one of them more clearly aimed at social interactions and the other rather more abstract and general:

> … the dynamic and reciprocal adaptation of the temporal structure of behaviors and shared affect between interactive partners. (Leclere, Viaux, Avril, Achard, Chetouani, Missonnier, and Cohen, 2014, p. 2)

> … a timed relationship, whether concurrent, sequential or organized in an ongoing patterned format, between two or more events that cohere into a single process. (Feldman, 2007, p. 329)

The emphasis is on timing and creation of units of coherent actions or events. There is also an emphasis on matching of behaviors, affects, and biological rhythms (for general reviews see Chetouani, Delaherche, Dumas, and Cohen, 2017; Feldman, 2016; Keller, Novembre, and Hove, 2014). Leclere's comments are suggestive of a certain normative view of the value of synchrony:

> Better mother–child synchrony is associated with familiarity (vs. unknown partner), a healthy mother (vs. pathological mother), typical development (vs. pathological development), and more positive cognitive and behavioral outcomes among children. (Leclere et al., 2014, p. 1)

This reflects what Tronick (2007) calls "the synchrony model" for such interactions:

> … in the synchrony model, the interaction was seen as having high levels of positive emotions, and little anger, sadness, or distress. Thus "optimal" mother–infant interactions were typically in sync and emotionally positive. (Tronick, 2007, p. 278)

It is common, then, in this model to suppose that deviations from synchrony are pathological, or at least maladaptive. I call this the romantic view of early parental–infant interactions; it is very widely found in the literature on early social interactions. Before turning to some of the model's limitations, I will trace the outline of its early ontogeny (regardless of the model applied to it).

Testing six times during gestational weeks 20–38, DiPietro and her colleagues found evidence for synchronization between fetal motor activity and maternal autonomic reactions to it, i.e., changes in the mother's skin conductance and heart rate in response to fetal movements (DiPietro, Caulfield, Irizarry, Chen, Merialdi, and Zavaleta, 2006; cf. Feldman, 2007). It is more commonly held (because more readily evident to testing methods) that some forms of synchrony are available at birth, as for example audio–visual temporal synchrony allowing for matching of facial expressions and vocalizations (Lewkowicz, Leo, and Simion, 2010). As the child ages, she exhibits increasingly sophisticated and reliable forms of temporal synchrony (and associated sensitivity to asynchrony), including by two months of age responsiveness to timing in music (Trehub and Hannon, 2006). Neonates can differentiate synchrony from asynchrony with delays between signals of five seconds; but three-month-olds can manage the same task with delay of only three seconds between stimuli (Filippetti, Johnson, Lloyd–Fox, Dragovic, and Farroni, 2013). All this appears to manifest a general mechanism for detecting correlations between signals in different sensory modalities (Parise and Ernst, 2016). Audio–visual temporal synchrony (especially with social stimuli) is also known to attract infants' attention and to sustain that attention longer than asynchronous stimuli (Curtindale, Bahrick, Lickliter, and Colombo, 2019; Hyde, Flom, and Porter, 2017). Both three-month-olds and seven-month-olds are able to use the onset of asynchrony to group and segregate speech sounds, thus generating an elementary form of auditory scene analysis (Oster and Werner, 2018). Early infancy, then, demonstrates considerable capacity to respond to and make cognitive use of both synchrony and asynchrony, especially in audio–visual terms. The infant appears to be, by about three months of age, highly attuned to these qualities in its general social environment.

Synchrony promotes affiliation, both between individuals (Cirelli, 2018; Rennung and Göritz, 2016) and in large groups (Von Zimmermann and Richardson, 2016). Moreover, synchronous behavior and affect have strong reward outcomes (Kokal, Engel, Kirschner, and Keysers, 2011). These effects, which are exceptionally well documented, may be partly responsible for the rise of the romantic view of mother–infant synchrony and the synchrony model. However, synchrony can

also facilitate deception in social interactions (Dunbar, Giles, Bernhold, Adams, Giles, Zamanzadek et al., 2020; Duran and Fusaroli, 2017). It follows that synchrony in behavior and affect is not invariably affiliative. So, we need to take a closer look at the normal pattern of maternal–infant interactions.

Affective and behavioral disruptions or mismatches are very common in these interactions. Tronick estimates, for example, that they take up 70% of interaction time, with mother and child being in sync only about 30% of the time (2007, pp. 155–156, 179). Mismatches occur on average in his investigations once every two to four seconds (pp. 171, 202). What is normal is a dynamic according to which coordination of affect and behavior is followed by mismatched affect or behavior (or both), and that in turn is followed by re-matching or re-coordination. Mismatches are regularly repaired within one second and at the very next step in the interaction (pp. 281–282). Thus one of the major tasks facing the developing infant is to regulate her own emotional responses to such disruptions. Since frustration is a form of psychological pain, the infant has to come to terms with such pain and to learn how to manage it (Trevarthen and Aitken, 1994; Tucker, Luu, and Derryberry, 2005). Here's a useful analogy: "… a child and an adult walking together (and having to adjust their stride to each other) do not mostly move in perfect synchrony ('absolute' coordination), but rather *relatively* coordinate, meaning that they move into and out of zones of high synchronicity" (De Jaegher, Peräkylä, and Stevanovic, 2016, p. 4). Moving out of such a zone occasions frustration, howsoever slight, and maintaining the walk requires the frustrated partner to tolerate that condition and also to remedy it. Once again, Tronick has seized the main point:

> …we need to see synchrony or reciprocity or matching as the outcome of an active process of infant and mother coping. While its achievement marks the success of that process, it is the process of interactive mutual regulation, the process of coping and repairing mismatches, that is critical to the infant's development. …Thus there is no singular universal optimal form of mother–child interaction in which deviations are considered pathological as implied by the synchrony model. (2007, pp. 162, 280)

Synchrony of behavior and affects, as such, is not an end in itself (Trevarthen and Aitken, 1994, p. 622). Indeed, there can be too much synchrony, for where it dominates parental–infant interactions, it can impede the development of autonomy (Galbusera, Finn, Tschacher, and Kyselo, 2019). The infant's capacity to disengage from the interaction is part and parcel of that autonomous development, and of special interest in this regard is the infant's use of gaze aversion.

Talk of the neonate and young infant as an active agent in their own developmental processes tends to make one forget how limited is the motor repertoire of infants. Their movements are very restricted and engage primarily eyes, mouth, head, trunk, and limbs. It is especially notable that neonates can control their eye movements sufficiently to use gaze aversion effectively. "Gaze aversion," reads one

investigation, "and attention manipulation are the first regulatory mechanisms that allow neonates to control exposure to outside stressors, and these behaviors are associated with less distress and negative affect" (Pratt, Singer, Kanat–Maymon, and Feldman, 2015, p. 1200). Another goes further: "Gaze aversion is one of the more powerful interpersonal regulatory behaviors, especially for the neonate whose repertoire to approach and withdraw is limited" (Nagy, Pilling, Watt, Pal, and Orvos, 2017, p. 12). Gaze aversion often functions to reduce stress, and infants become adept at using it for this purpose (Field, 1981). This works, at least partly, by simply shifting the focus of attention away from the over-stimulating person or object, and towards some other, less stimulating one (George and Conty, 2008). The effect, in cases where the eyes of another are the source of over-stimulation, may be amplified by the relative size of the human sclera, which in direct gaze is substantially larger appearing than in other primates (Mayhew and Gomez, 2015). Gaze aversion may also be effective in reducing the cognitive load made on the infant by the social situation as a whole (Doherty–Sneddon and Phelps, 2005). Reduction of stress is regularly marked by and accompanied by changes in vagal tone, with corresponding changes in heart rate and respiratory rhythms (Provenzi, Casini, De Simione, Reni, Borgatti, and Montirosso, 2015; Ritz, Enlow, Schulz, Kitts, Staudenmayer, and Wright, 2012), indications that the autonomic nervous system is in play and which can be tracked empirically. Repeated cycles of rupture and repair also build up an expectation in the child that repair is reliably forthcoming, and this expectation itself can also help relieve the stress of disruption (Pratt et al. 2015, p. 1199). These dynamics come into their own in the still face paradigm.

The still-face paradigm (SFP) was devised by Ed Tronick in the 1970s. It has since become a fixture in scientific investigations of early psycho-social development, having been applied to a wide range of ages, from birth to adulthood, and in various forms. The standard form is three, three-minute phases, in the first of which the mother (or other adult) simply plays normally with the child, in the second phase of which the mother (or other adult) ceases to interact and assumes a "still face," neither expressing any emotion nor communicating in any way with the child while still gazing at her. The third (reunion) phase is resumption of normal social play. The entire episode, then, represents a cycle of match, mismatch and rematch, or rupture and repair. Infants undergoing the SFP often spend 40–66% of the entire time in a mismatched condition, and this mismatch can carry over into the reunion phase also (Coppola, Aureli, Grazia, and Ponzetti, 2016). In some versions the phases last only two minutes, but the same sequence is always involved. Investigators observe very closely the responses of the infant (for reviews since Tronick, 2007, see Mesman, Van Ijzendoorn, and Bakermans–Kranenberg, 2009; Montirosso, Casini, Provenzi, Putnam, Morandi, Fedeli, and Borgatti, 2015). Infants normally find the still face phase distressing, and will commonly respond with efforts to elicit a return by the mother (or other adult)

to her previous mode of relatedness. These include gaze aversion, head turning, turning the trunk away, or even complete postural collapse and weeping. Infants may also change the frequency of their "social bidding," which is the combination of direct gaze and smiling at the parent, normally used to elicit responses from them, and which declines markedly as the still-face episode continues (Ekas, Haltigan and Messinger, 2013). The point for us is that gaze aversion and varying degrees of social withdrawal are *entirely normal* in the SFP (Tronick, 2007, pp. 184–185). Aversive behavior in the SFP also has the function of preserving (and even enhancing) the autonomy of the child, who retains some capacity to alter the distressing still-face condition (Benus, Bohus, Koolhaas, and Van Oortmerssen, 1991). Of all the aversive responses in the SFP by far the most common and most immediate is gaze aversion. And, given its power in ordinary circumstances to capture and hold the attention of caretaking adults, this is not surprising. What can and often does really surprise the child is the failure of gaze aversion to terminate the still-face episode. This is a blow to the child's sense of self-efficacy and that is part of why it must not last too long. Gaze aversion can thus be deployed in different social settings for somewhat different purposes, but retains a common goal: to protect the child while preserving the possibility of a renewed or repaired relatedness with important and valued partners. In normally developing children and parents, the reunion phase genuinely does repair the rupture, and the child will return to a calm and engaged state (Busuito and Moore, 2017). The two partners will, indeed, have successfully coped with their mutual distress (Sravish, Tronick, Hollenstein, and Beeghly, 2013).

The effort at repair by infants in the SFP is often very much at their initiative. This may also involve other initiatives such as increased social bidding, changes in the duration and frequency of vocalizations, changes in the duration of pauses between vocalizations (as if to communicate to the parent: "OK, proceed, it's your turn now"). Whether at three months of age or at six months, little or no difference was found in the degree of infant initiative in attempting to repair the social rupture (Bourvis, Singer, Saint–Georges, Bodeau, Chetouani, Cohen et al., 2018). Another study found that infant patterns of response to the SFP were very stable from three months of age to nine months (Barbosa, Beeghly, Moreira, Tronick, and Fuertes, 2018). Infants are highly active partners in these matters, and part of what they do on their own initiative is to withdraw or disengage.

Geva and her colleagues write that "…humans are programmed for social behavior at a period *preceding* social encounters" (Geva, Sopher, Kurtzman, Galili, Feldman, and Kuint, 2013, p.163). That programming includes (but is not limited to) the capacity to engage in prosocial relationships, the capacity to disengage from them, and the capacity to repair ruptures in those same relationships. This last capacity entails further capacities of memory to hold the relationship in the mind and thus retain the possibility of relational repair and a return to previously enjoyed levels of cooperation and intimacy and to recognize when these have

occurred. An important variable in how synchronous and asynchronous effects develop is the interactive combination of infant reactivity (the degree to which, for example, ruptures cause distress) and parental sensitivity: "… synchronous processes are dyad-specific and are shaped by the personal attributes of each partner" (Pratt et al., 2015, p. 1199). This applies whether it is the mother or the father who is engaged with the infant (Braungart–Rieker, Zentall, Lickenbrock, Ekas, Oshio, and Planalp, 2014), and even in the case of strangers (Mesman et al., 2009). It remains the case, however, that infants regularly and predictably use gaze aversion and other aversive forms of behavior to try to control what happens in their most intimate social interactions from birth onwards (Nagy, 2008; Nagy et al., 2017). And it remains the case, also, that they are often effective in those endeavors, experiencing themselves thereby as effective agents of change in these relationships. Such "effectance" adds to their developing sense of autonomy and shows that they are not merely helpless in the face of the vicissitudes of those relationships.[2] On the contrary, they can and do regularly play a very active role in preserving these highly valuable relationships. It is reasonable to believe, then, that this early relational matrix of parents and child, with its fundamental dynamic of rupture and repair, may well be the deep biological footing for what will emerge a few years later as forgiveness, a set of practices which retain also the capacity for disengagement (though, of course, neonates disengage only temporarily). Before treating the phenomenology of forgiveness and the role of indifference in it, a little more about its biological foundations is in order.

Reconciliation Among Animals: Evolutionary and Logical Issues

The process of rupture and repair that is characteristic of infants' earliest social interactions with their caretakers finds its place in an overarching parental strategy to nurture infants into a condition of relative autonomy and eventually (if all goes well) into biological adulthood. In a recent discussion of it, autonomy is defined this way: "… autonomy involves self-governance in accordance with personally meaningful goals and commitments" (Mullin, 2019, p. 231). Personally meaningful goals (and their associated values) may arise endogenously in the developing child, or may be learned from family or the wider cultural framework. Pursuit of such goals remains, throughout the lifespan, compatible with dependence and social alliance-formation. Sponsoring development of such autonomy becomes a major challenge for caretakers, especially after the first full year of postpartum life and extending through adolescence (Kuczynski, Pitman, and Twigger, 2018; Van der Kaap–Deeder, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, and Mabbe, 2017;

[2] The term was introduced by White, 1959, pp. 321–323, to name the motivational aspect of competence. See further discussion in McClelland, 2010a, pp. 104–105 and compare Tronick, 2007, p. 181.

Villar, Ochieng, Staines–Urias, Fernandes, Ratcliffe, Purwar et al., 2020). It is, of course, also a challenge for the developing child. Failure to achieve an appropriate degree of autonomy, at almost any age, is often implicated in various forms of severe psychopathology (Ryan, Deci, and Vansteenkiste, 2016). Repair of ruptured social relationships, extending well beyond those with primary caretakers, will be an almost constant accompaniment of this process. A capacity to repair relationships with social partners thus becomes an essential part of the toolkit for human flourishing. That capacity very quickly becomes what we customarily recognize as forgiveness.

I will pursue delineation of what we mean by "forgiveness" later in this section. For the present, the following description may suffice:

> At the interpersonal level, the essence of forgiveness is that it creates the possibility for a relationship to recover from the damage it suffers from one person's transgressions against the other. Forgiveness is thus a potentially powerful prosocial phenomenon. It benefits human social life by helping relationships to heal. (Baumeister, Exline, and Sommer, 1998, p. 79)

On this view of it, forgiveness is characteristically or typically a social interaction between two individuals, one of whom has been harmed by the other. Its main aim is reconciliation, and often reconciliation is so tightly conceived with forgiveness that one term is sometimes substituted for the other (e.g., Golding, 1984, p. 134), though, as we will see, reconciliation is, strictly speaking not the same as forgiveness. Here is a further treatment emphasizing the compound nature of forgiveness:

> Our best accounts of paradigmatic cases of forgiveness will be *composite*, involving a variety of changes to one's emotions and private commitments. …[T]he paradigmatic cases of forgiveness are those in which there is a *mesh* or *harmony* between the private and overt aspects of forgiveness. (Warmke, 2016, p. 691)

The language here is impressionistic, but the composite character of forgiveness can be teased out further and will concern us more below.

The emergence of forgiveness in normal development occurs around age three years. It is closely bound up with emergence of sensitivity to and adeptness at operating with social norms. Some elements of social norm-behavior appear even earlier, as for example the expectation found in seven-month-olds that members of social groups will act alike (Powell and Spelke, 2013). A closely related preference for prosocial behavior by others emerges between three and ten months (Hamlin, 2014; Holvoet, Scola, Arciszewski, and Picard, 2016). By 17 months children expect that in-group members will be supportive of them and one another (Jin and Baillargeon, 2017). By about two years of age this latter expectation becomes much more sophisticated, such that children expect in-group support to override fairness when resources are scarce (Bian, Sloane, and Baillargeon, 2018). Two and three year olds have a well-developed sense of what is fair in

social exchanges and are prepared to enforce norms of fairness in their social groups (Decety and Cowell, 2018; Hardecker and Tomasello, 2017; Rakoczy and Schmidt, 2013). In the period three to five years, most children further develop their emotional and behavioral responses to norm violations and are prepared to punish offenders and to teach others to do the same (Göckeritz, Schmidt, and Tomasello, 2014; Hardecker, Schmidt, Roden, and Tomasello, 2016). They also understand that conformity to group norms is a viable strategy for belonging to the group and strengthening group ties (Cordonier, Nettles, and Rochat, 2018). It is thus not surprising that forgiveness behaviors in the face of norm-violations emerge by around age three years and become well established by age four or five (Oostenbroek and Vaish, 2019; Van der Wal, Karremans, and Cillessen, 2017).

In the ethological literature forgiveness is commonly treated under the rubric of "reconciliation behavior." Such behavior is found widely across the animal world (reviewed in Aureli and De Waal, 2000). It is especially common among our fellow primates, including chimpanzees, bonobos, orangutans, gorillas, and both Old World and New World monkeys (Cordoni, Palagi, and Tarli, 2006; Fraser, Stahl, and Aureli, 2010; Silk, 2002; Webb, Baniel, Cowlishaw, and Huchard, 2019). Much of this primate behavior is startlingly similar to what occurs among humans practicing forgiveness. Reconciliation has also been found outside the primate clades, among dogs (Cools, Van Hout, and Nelissen, 2008), horses (Cozzi, Sighieri, Gazzano, Nicol, and Bargli, 2010), ravens (Fraser and Bugnyar, 2011) and dolphins (Yamamoto, Ishibashi, Yoshida, and Amano, 2016). Reconciliation is thus a strategy deeply embedded in the world of highly social animals. We may infer that it has considerable adaptive value across numerous species and ecological niches.

Now, strictly speaking, forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same thing. One group of ethologists define reconciliation as "… a friendly reunion between former opponents soon after an aggressive conflict" (Aureli and De Waal, 2000, p. 6; note that friendliness among some primates often takes sexual forms). Reconciliation is thus the result of forgiveness, and not the process of forgiveness itself; and it is possible to have one without the other. It is, however, understandable that ethologists would talk this way (perhaps as a kind of metonymy). Their focus is on external behavior, especially in social contexts, and not on internal psychology. Indeed, for the most part, modern ethological science eschews any view about the psychology of non-human animals. Certainly overt behavior is far easier to observe and to quantify objectively. The emphasis here on the nearness in time of reconciliation to transgression is also notable, for, as we will see, forgiveness among humans is often delayed and such delay (within limits) is itself often a condition of successful forgiveness.

A variety of specific fitness gains have been identified in the ethological literature on reconciliation (as here understood). A very widely held thesis is the

"valued relationship hypothesis" according to which the main goal of social repair is to preserve valued relationships (for recent empirical tests of the hypothesis see Ohtsubo and Yagi, 2015 and Smith, McCauley, Yagi, Yamaura, Shimizu, McCullough, and Ohtsubo, 2020). Others have posited that reconciliation has the main function of preventing or extinguishing conflicts within groups that are damaging to the group's cohesion and survival (Agren, Davies, and Foster, 2019; Flack, Girvan, De Waal, and Krakauer, 2006). A study by De Waal (1993), for example, shows that the likelihood of conflicts being renewed is vastly reduced (up to seven-fold) when the first occasion gives rise to effective reconciliation behavior. These hypotheses are not incompatible with each other. All have as their ultimate aim the healthy cohesiveness of the social groups and/or social alliance, whether extending to dyads or larger collections of group members. And, as we know, humans and other animals owe much of their evolutionary success to such group dynamics. Keeping alliances alive and well is one very powerful way to insure biological fitness, both of groups and of individuals (Henrich, 2016; Sterelny, 2012). We can see how robust is human reconciliation, in so far as it is preserved even in very severe forms of human psychopathology, e.g., autism spectrum disorders (Ostfeld–Etzion, Golan, Hirschler–Guttenberg, Zagoory–Sharon, and Feldman, 2015) and even in schizophrenia (Rozya, Sawicka, Zochowska, and Bronowski, 2019; Ruffie, Chabrol, and Mullet, 2019).

One might expect to find that such a well-evidenced adaptation would be supported in humans by a distinct neural network dedicated to these forms of social repair. But this proves not to be the case. Rather, reconciliation/forgiveness is widely distributed over human brain regions, though prominent roles are played by the superior temporal lobe, the temporoparietal junction, areas of the prefrontal cortex, and evolutionarily older (and earlier developing) regions such as the insula and the cingulate cortex (Billingsley and Losin, 2017; Patil et al., 2017). These areas generally support theory of mind and other forms of social cognition, all of which clearly belong to reconciliation. Among the prefrontal areas of special import is the dorso–lateral PFC which acts to inhibit impulsive retaliatory motives and behavior (Brüne, Juckel, and Enzi, 2013; Maier, Rosenbaum, Haeussinger, Brüne, Enzi, Plewnia et al., 2018). Rather than a distinctive module for reconciliation/forgiveness, what we find, then, is that social cognitive networks have been recruited in the course of natural selection to support reconciliation.

Noting the deep biological basis for forgiveness, I turn next to consider the broad phenomenology of this behavioral suite, including the role in it of disengagement, which has expanded in primates to amount to a behavioral alternative to forgiveness (probably as an element in the general expansion of cortical areas during hominin evolution, on which see Dunbar and Schultz, 2017; Geschwind and Rakic, 2013; Hill, Inder, Neil, Dierker, Harwell, and Van Essen, 2010). I will

argue that this is a much-neglected aspect of the whole subject of forgiveness and one that we continue to neglect at our peril.

Many researchers on human forgiveness have given up on specifying necessary and sufficient conditions for it, preferring to take an "ostensive" approach: describing basic dimensions of forgiveness as it is prototypically instantiated in our species (Allais, 2008; Denham, Neal, Wilson, Pickering, and Boyatzis, 2005; Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1994; Kearns and Fincham, 2004; North, 1987, 1998; Warmke, 2016; see also the discussion of dimensionality in Russell, 2020). There has emerged substantial agreement about what those dimensions are. Several of them have to do with what kinds of *changes* ensue from forgiveness in interpersonal situations. One is change in affect, or how we feel about the transgressor (with corresponding emotional changes in the transgressor). Generally that is rather loosely described as exchanging positive emotions for negative emotions: for example, compassion for anger and resentment, respect for contempt or hatred. A second element is changes in how we think about transgressors and their transgressions, a cognitive dimension. And the third common dimension is behavioral: changing how we act, including our motivations towards perpetrators or transgressors, for example, benevolence and goodwill for retribution. We might describe a fourth dimension as broadly "ecological," that is, having to do with changing the character of our relationship with perpetrators or even the larger social structure in which both forgiver and transgressor stand (Fehr, Gelfand, and Nag, 2010; Kearns and Fincham, 2004). Closely tied to this dimension are changes in the *norms* created by interpersonal transgressions. Forgiveness characteristically alters the victim's right to blame the transgressor, for example, while also changing the perpetrator's owing the victim something (Bennett, 2018; Russell, 2020; Warmke, 2016; and note my earlier point: the ontogeny of forgiveness is closely tied to the development in young children of sensitivity to social norms).

Other investigators are more concerned to demarcate two broad types of forgiveness: decisional and emotional (Davis, Hook, Van Tongeren, DeBlaere, Rice, and Worthington, 2015; Lichtenfeld, Buechner, Maier, and Fernandez–Capo, 2015). Decisional forgiveness has mainly to do with cognitive changes, whether our thoughts about perpetrators (attributions) or our thoughts about the meaning of what happened. In emotional forgiveness, the main task is to replace negative emotions of blame, guilt, shame, and anger (or, in transgressors, contempt and hatred towards victims) with positive emotions generally held to be "prosocial." Both decisional and emotional forgiveness share a large component having to do with intentions to support or encourage the well-being of the transgressor as opposed to retaliation or revenge. The emphasis on change captures the dynamic nature of forgiveness as a process unfolding over time. The types of changes characterizing the dimensions of that process indicate a range of affordances or possibilities that may be realized in a particular instance of forgiveness.

Forgiveness, then, may be conceived as a vector across the space generated by those affordances. Further light may be found by considering some things that forgiveness is *not* (Waldschlagel, 2016).

Lichtenfeld and colleagues (2015) hypothesize that emotional forgiveness encourages forgetting aspects of the original offense or characteristics of the transgressor (cf. Noreen, Bierman, and MacLeod, 2014). It seems right to object to this and to insist that forgiving someone her offense certainly does not amount to or entail forgetting the offense or indeed forgetting anything significant about the offense. As Enright comments: "What is annulled in the act of forgiveness is not the crime itself but the distorting effect this wrong has upon one's relations with the wrongdoer and perhaps with others" (quoted in North, 1987, p. 500). Forgetting only distorts the historical record of what happened and thus violates our basic epistemic duty to preserve the truth about the past in our own thinking and discourse (cf. Golding, 1984, p. 130 on the danger for transgressors of forgetting their offenses).[3] Forgiveness is also not merely a subjective event taking place only in the mind of the forgiver (Waldschlagel, 2016). It has as much to do with altering the objective circumstances of both forgiver and transgressor, especially in relation to one another. It is not merely a subjective matter whether or not a transgressor has been forgiven (or not). Forgiveness changes what can be expected of that transgressor and forgiver, both by them and by others who may be party to or witnesses to the forgiveness (or its lack). The social affordances open to both parties change, whichever way it goes. And while it is true that forgiveness often leads to reconciliation between offender and victim, it does not always do so (some of the conditions under which it is likely not to do so appear below). We are not always going to be able to reconcile, and I will argue that we sometimes have a duty not to do so. Reconciliation may even be prototypical of forgiveness and yet forgiveness does not always result in reconciliation (Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1994, p. 225). Neither does forgiveness entail condoning or excusing the offensive actions of the transgressor, for here, too, we risk failing in our basic epistemic duties with such excuses. It is often merely assumed that forgiveness is primarily a dyadic matter, involving two persons only (e.g., Hannon, Rusbult, Finkel, and Kamashiro, 2010; Rusbult and Van Lange, 2003). But groups can also offend against either individuals or other groups. And individuals can offend against either other individuals or groups. I leave it to the reader to work out the possible combinations, but some of these will concern us later on.

[3] I have similar objections to the notion of so-called reframing, "a means of 'separating' the wrongdoer from the wrong he has done" (North, 1998, p. 23; cf. Allais, 2008, p. 51; and Govier, 1999, pp. 62, 64). This makes some sense in the case of young children and their offenses, but much less in the case of adults whose character is fully formed and which may well be embodied in their offenses. There is entirely too much room here for self-deception on the part of the forgiver. Govier's (1999, pp. 68–71) defense of reframing is not compelling.

Perhaps one of the most pervasive assumptions made in contemporary social scientific literature on forgiveness and its ramifications actually sets a trap for our thinking. It involves sundry false dichotomies that tend to infect much of this literature. Perhaps the most common of these false dichotomies is the supposition that the only alternative to forgiveness is revenge or other retaliatory behavior. Here is one example:

> In social dilemmas that pit the short-term gains of selfishness against the long-term gains of cooperation, evolution favors the organisms that can be vengeful when it's necessary, that can forgive when it's necessary, and that have the wisdom to know the difference. (McCullough, 2008, p. 87)

In another investigation of forgiveness by children, so-called "unforgiving motives" are immediately described as "retaliation and reactive aggression" (Van der Wal, Karremans, and Cillessen, 2017, p. 99). Thus, to be not-forgiving is *eo ipso* to be vengeful. For another leading expert the opposite of forgiveness is holding a grudge (Baumeister, Exline, and Sommer, 1998, p. 80). And in a truly splendid example of misleading dichotomizing we read that "… unforgiveness involves the chronic experience of bitterness, resentment, anger, and fear" (Larkin, Goulet, and Cavanagh, 2015, p. 61). Elsewhere "unforgiveness" is defined as "… a 'cold' emotion involving resentment, bitterness, and perhaps hatred, along with motivated avoidance of or retaliation against a transgressor" (Worthington and Wade, 1999, p. 386). Once again, forgiveness and revenge are simply set off against one another as exclusive and exhaustive alternatives. In all these ways, we are encouraged to understand forgiveness in terms of simple dualities, with only bifurcating decision-trees involved. Fortunately for those of us with interests in this area of psychological life, there is already some push-back against these falsely dichotomous views.

For example, allowance may be made for indifferent relationships (which are emotionally neither positive nor negative), as distinct also from merely ambivalent relationships (which are both positive and negative). "Indifferent relationships are characterized by low frequency of contact, involvement, emotional intensity, depth, or importance" (Methot, Melwani, and Rothman, 2017, p. 1794). There is talk of the importance of unimportant relationships (Fingerman, 2009). We get some hints, also, that the absence of negative emotions and motivations is not merely equivalent to the presence of positive emotions and benevolent motivations (McCullough, Fincham, and Tang, 2003).

I have noted how forgiveness is often dichotomized sharply over and against revenge or other retaliatory behaviors, as if revenge were the only alternative. These discussions often are also redolent of a condescending and wholly uncritical attitude towards the moral value of revenge, i.e., holding that revenge is always and obviously wrong. Others have argued the contrary position but here is not the place to rehearse those arguments in detail. Suffice it to say that though the moral value of revenge is almost always contested, revenge is sometimes not only

warranted (e.g., for practical reasons) but also morally correct (in the interests of justice). Indeed, it is sometimes our duty to take revenge (McClelland, 2010b). Finally, very broad and sweeping criticism of "the mythical number two" and of misleading dualisms in psychological science have begun to appear, though their full import has yet to be felt (Ferguson, Mann, and Wojnowicz, 2014; Melnikoff and Bargh, 2018). One area in which the push-back has not yet been felt is in the treatment of forgiveness and revenge as mutually exclusive and exhaustive opposites. Pushing back false dichotomies in this area encourages a different and more nuanced analysis of possible responses to interpersonal social transgressions. Further pushback arises from the conditionality of the success of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not always at its most effective (in bringing about reconciliation, for example) if it is done right away. Sometimes it is better done later rather than sooner (Frantz and Bennigson, 2005). However, delay must not take too long, as the effectiveness over time of forgiveness declines rapidly. One calculation suggests that the likelihood of forgiveness declines sharply around 25 days after the offense, reaching zero by 100 days after (McCullough, Berry, Luna, Tabak, and Bono, 2010). According to these data, apology-effectiveness is heavily conditioned by the passage of time.[4] An apology is also more likely to succeed when it occurs among friends or members of the same in-group, than among strangers. Shared group identity, values, and cultural norms can make the whole process of repair operate more efficiently and effectively (Brown, Wohl, and Exline, 2008). In a similar way, in cases of spousal betrayal, the strength of the bond between the partners conditions the likelihood of successful forgiveness (Chi, Tang, Worthington, Chan, Lam, and Lin, 2019). Perhaps most significant of all the conditions on successful forgiveness are those having to do with making amends and offering apologies. Even bare but honest apologies make forgiveness more likely (Chaudhry and Loewenstein, 2019; Cowden, Worthington, Joynt, and Jakins, 2018). Apologizers are seen as more trustworthy and likely to be better relationship partners; they also feel guilt more appropriately and are thus perceived as more empathic, cooperative, and honest. All this invites a positive response to their apologies. Apologies that are coupled with amends (that is to say, costly apologies) are especially likely to be effective (Jeter and Brannon, 2018; Ohtsubo, Matsunaga, Tanaka, Suzuki, Kobayashi, Shibata et al., 2018). Making amends or offering compensation can visibly demonstrate the perpetrator's respect for the victim and any relevant wider social group. The issue of cost raises the further matter of what makes signals of this kind honest. The subject is large and

[4] This relationship to time agrees with seeing forgiveness as essentially a process, unfolding over time and not typically (if ever) instantaneous. For this view of forgiveness as temporally conditioned see Allais, 2008, p. 38; Hughes, 1993; Lang, 1994; McCullough and Root, 2005; North, 1987, pp. 505–507; North, 1998, p. 21; Worthington et al., 2000. The temporal structure of forgiveness is one of the concerns in Jaffro, 2018.

controversial, but I take the view of it recently defended by Higham: "… there must be a cost associated with cheating that outweighs its benefits" (2014, p. 10; cf. Szamado, 2011). We seem to have an intuitive understanding of this in so far as apologies for *intentional* offenses rarely succeed (Struthers, Eaton, Santelli, Uchiyama, and Shirvani, 2008). In such cases we do not believe in the apology or in the sincerity of the apologizer, either because we suspect or know that there are hidden nefarious motives at work. In such cases it is better not to apologize, to limit the on-going damage to one's reputation. What is believed by the persons involved in offense-forgiveness dynamics can have other ramifications. Forgiveness is likely to fail of its objectives (whether reconciliation or others) when the transgressor believes that he has done no wrong (Adams, Zou, Inesi, and Pillutla, 2015). Similarly, judgments about whether or not the offender *deserves* forgiveness can heavily condition its offer (Strelan, McKee, and Feather, 2016). And perpetrators who request forgiveness but are denied may take fresh offense and be more likely to re-offend in the future (Jennings, Worthington, Van Tongeren, Hook, Davis, Gartner et al., 2016; this is also perhaps a point at which it is difficult to draw a sharp divide between decisional and emotional forgiveness).

The situation of both forgiver and perpetrator, then, is one fraught with uncertainty. Forgiveness may or may not be forthcoming and may or may not be effective. I accepted earlier that forgiveness is clearly an adaptive response to reoccurring (and indeed predictable) social transgressions, and thus is likely to confer fitness benefits on hyper-social species that are capable of practicing it. There is, moreover, little doubt that forgiveness often confers immediate benefits (especially to mental health) on its practitioners (Rasmussen, Stackhouse, Boon, Comstock, and Ross, 2019; Toussaint, Gall, Cheadle, and Williams, 2020). Nevertheless, it can fail of its promise (there are very few infallible adaptations). And there are yet other conditions attaching to its successful deployment.

Power inequalities can blunt or even eliminate the benefits of forgiveness, especially in the workplace (Zheng, Van Dijke, Naraganen, and De Cremer, 2018). Such inequalities may help also to explain why forgiveness in marriage sometimes increases the chance that the perpetrator of an offense will re-offend in future (McNulty, 2011; compare Sinclair, Hart, and Lomas, 2020 on cases of domestic abuse). This may also be part of why it seems to many observers to be impossible for Holocaust survivors to forgive their transgressors (Auerhahn and Laub, 2018). Blame often has profound influence in these matters, also. Blame is both a cognitive and a social action, and normally carries with it a combined assignment of causal responsibility (culpability) and moral condemnation of the blame-worthy action (Alicke, Buckingham, Zell, and Davis, 2008; Malle, Guglielmo and Monroe, 2014). Not surprisingly, where the degree of intentionality attaching to the offense is heightened, or where the foreseeability of the offense is heightened, the likelihood of forgiveness decreases and the measure of blame increases (Lagnado and Channon, 2008). Forgiveness is one way to bring about a cessation of blame, but not the only

way: excusing the offense, justifying the offense, or just "letting go" of the offense (e.g., by forgetting it), all bring cessation of blame (Brunning and Milam, 2018). When blame is increased beyond its warrant, or remains in play for too long, it can be highly corrosive for all concerned. All of these dynamics further emphasize the conditionality of forgiveness and highlight some of the myriad of ways it can fail.

Forgiveness can also backfire in other ways. Being perceived as too ready to forgive, especially in workplace violations, can cause others to avoid us, damaging our prospects for effective workplace alliances (Adams et al., 2015). A related matter is what has become known as "the doormat effect": if perpetrators fail to act in such a way as to signal (honestly) to victims "that the victim will be safe and valued in a continued relationship with the perpetrator," the risk of renewed or continued exploitation increases (Luchies, Finkel, McNulty, and Kumashiro, 2010, p. 735). Where this condition fails to obtain forgiveness can be positively harmful to the victim, not least in eroding the victim's self-respect. Weighing these risks realistically and accurately is part of being savvy about social transgressions and possible responses to them (Williamson, Gonzales, Fernandez, and Williams, 2014).

Finally, I take death to be an absolute limiting condition on forgiveness (Waldschlagel, 2016, pp. 146–147). We have no ongoing active interpersonal relationship with the dead (even if survival is a possibility). Most particular, we cannot make amends to them for our offenses and they cannot make amends to us for theirs. Much of the difficulty that Holocaust survivors have in even imagining forgiving their killers derives from the simple fact that most of those perpetrators are dead (they are thus "practically unforgiveable," as Lang, 1994, pp. 111–112 puts it). Other barriers to forgiveness arise in such cases, also. The sheer scale of the offense is one of them: not merely some social faux pas, nor even a grave offense like murder, but the offense of genocide. It is simply too large for individuals to forgive in any meaningful way. There is also here a problem of individual sufferers acting on behalf of many others. Surely no single survivor of the Holocaust has sufficient *standing* to act on behalf of all survivors and neither do any of us who did not pass through it have any such standing. In their commentary on the problems of Holocaust survivors' forgiving their perpetrators, Auerhahn and Laub make a highly perspicuous comment: "It is a mistake to think that healing lies in forgiveness only. Sometimes a survivor needs to be given permission *not* to forgive" (2018, p. 69). Lang makes a stronger point: "… the refusal to grant forgiveness may at times be warranted *or even obligatory*" (1994, p. 105; see Satne, 2016 for a defense of such duties).[5]

[5] The Holocaust raises many other issues about forgiveness, among them whether it is possible to forgive a state for its murderous policies and actions (see Lang, 1994, p. 113). Compliance of ordinary citizens with state policies was also essential to the ongoing slaughter (see perspicuous discussions in Browning, 1992; Fulbrook, 2018; and Goldhagen, 1996). Such compliance is itself part of the offense, for without it genocide would not have been possible. Whether any such offenses (and their perpetrators) are *in principle* unforgiveable, and not merely *practically* unforgiveable, is not known to me (a distinction treated by Lang).

It is fortunate, then, that forgiveness and revenge are not mutually exclusive and exhaustive alternatives when it comes to responding to interpersonal offenses and violations of social/moral norms. There is a third option, and to it I now turn.

The Third Way: Indifference

I hope to have shown that aversive behavior is part and parcel of early socialization in humans, pervasive through the neonatal and infant periods. Its biological roots are thus deep and ancient (phylogenetically speaking). It is part of a strategy of the developing child to achieve autonomy while remaining in close relationship with primary caretakers (or their surrogates). It is my further contention that in late childhood, adolescence, and adulthood this may become indifference, understood in a certain way. Definitions of indifference are readily available and can be a helpful starting point for further examination of the concept. According to one recent definition, indifference is:

> … extreme lack of physiological and/or psychological arousal, indicating the absence of attention, interest, affection, or care in relation to a person, topic, event, or object. (Truesdale and Pell, 2018, p. 125)

And similarly:

> … a *subject* (e.g., a person) is indifferent to some *object* (e.g., another person) when that subject displays some non-caring *orientation* (e.g., a lack of attention) to that object in a certain *context* (e.g., while standing next to them on a train). (Lillehammer, 2014, p. 112)

What both definitions underline is the issue of "care," which is in some sense absent or negated in the indifferent state. Here I invoke the perspicuous treatment of "care" by Harry Frankfurt:

> A person who cares about something is, as it were, invested in it. He *identifies* himself with what he cares about in the sense that he makes himself vulnerable to losses and susceptible to benefits depending upon whether what he cares about is diminished or enhanced. Thus he concerns himself with what concerns it, giving particular attention to such things and directing his behavior accordingly…. A person who cares about something thereby incurs certain costs, connected with the effort which investing himself requires and with the vulnerability to disappointment and to other losses which it imposes. (1988, pp. 83, 91)

To be indifferent, then, is to not-care about some person, group of persons, non-personal object, or state of affairs. This means, following Frankfurt, making oneself non-vulnerable to relevant losses and non-enhanced by relevant benefits. Lack of attention, interest, and interaction follow from the lack of care. This can be done in a variety of ways.

One can, for example, *substitute* other objects of care (a kind of replacement strategy). Consider a man who attends the wedding of his former lover to someone else while accompanied by a new love-interest of his own. That will dial down his vulnerability to loss considerably. Or consider behaviorial re-investments (another kind of substitution). Less energy and time, attentional resources and emotional energy or intensity may be given to the old object of care and redirected elsewhere. One stops giving gifts, whether material gifts or gifts of time and attention. A man transfers his financial resources from one custodian to another, perhaps because he is fed up with the bad service he receives from the former custodian (Methot, Melwani, and Rothman, 2017). After that the new custodian is the object of his concerns, attentions, time, and energy. Substitution strategies like these are likely to be more effective if the new object is cared for as much as or more than the old object.

One can also be indifferent in the sense of effecting *cognitive* disconnection: one ceases to (or never starts to) think about the old object of care: "… one may simply choose to put the offender out of one's thoughts" (Allais, 2008, p. 34). However, such putting out of mind is unlikely to actually be a truly simple matter, but rather the subject of a sustained and often costly effort. It may not be achievable without external aids (such as a therapist, a physician, a support group or the like). The result will be that the former object of care no longer has import for the individual, where import is a matter of weight or value and thus belongs to an order of priority. When the old object falls far down the order of priority, or if an object has never entered the order of priority in the first place, one can speak of being indifferent towards that object (compare Lillehammer, 2017, pp.18–19 on "lack of significance"). We may include here *motivational* disconnection also. To care for someone or something is to enter into a kind of alliance with it (with Frankfurt's losses and gains at stake). Not to care is never to enter into such an alliance, or to dissolve a previously existing alliance (e.g., with a mentor: see McClelland, 2009). If we think in terms of approach and avoidance, indifference occupies a middle state: neither actively approaching (to engage), nor actively avoiding (to disengage), while retaining the possibilities of both engagement and disengagement. Indifference can be an ethical relation between subjects but "one premised less on the 'face-to-face' relations of community than on the 'side-by-side' relations of anonymity" (Tonkiss, 2003, p. 298; cf. Riley, 2002). Perhaps above all else and overarching these aspects of the case, indifference is a species of autonomy.

As mentioned earlier, I take autonomy to be mainly a matter of self-government or self-determination in accordance with one's own values, purposes, and goals. The person who cares about another has his goals and purposes intertwined with or even subordinated to those of the other (this often extends also to groups). Consider, for example, how mentees may engage with the goals of their mentors. Or consider how we sometimes adopt the goals of an institution to which we give our loyalty (another form of caring). A person may go very far in giving over to others

the determination of those goals, even when the achievement (or failure to achieve) of these goals may shape the whole course of one's life and last over decades. We can become so enmeshed in goals and values not original to ourselves and not independently adopted as to become genuinely heteronomous. Alliance partners (whether individually or as a group) can demand allegiance to their chosen goals in such ways as to amount to a massive disorganizing intrusion into the life, affairs, and even identity of the individual. When this occurs heteronomy can block creativity (in terms of the out-working of goals in behavior) and this blockage can become so severe as to promote depression in the heteronomous individual (Deprez, Wendland, Brotnow, Gutleb, Contal, and Guedeney, 2018; Guedeney, Matthey, and Puura, 2013). Indifference does allow, however, for adopting the goals and values of others, but not as the default position and only in so far as those goals and values cohere with one's own autonomous goals. In psychological health, the initiative, the locus of control, remains with the self. This seems to me to be true even in so-called collectivist cultures, though one may expect to find that the balance between autonomy and relatedness is struck differently in collectivist cultures than in individualistic cultures (Chen, Vansteenkiste, Beyers, Boone, Deci, Van der Kaap–Deeder et al., 2015; Keller, 2016). But, in the final analysis, the genuinely heteronomous individual is, in an important sense, *lost* to herself, having put someone else (or something else, as e.g., an ideology, an institution or a group) in the place of the determining self.[6] Psychologically speaking, there can hardly be a more profound loss. Likewise, the self-protective function of indifference can be among its most important for the sake of mental health and psychological integrity.

Like forgiveness (and also like revenge), indifference thus has three broad dimensions: affective, cognitive, and motivational. Appropriate forms of behavior emerge from indifference as particular ecological affordances present themselves to the agent. Indifference may be the starting point in a social process. It is, after all, "the default condition for most subjects with respect to most 'things' in the world" (Lillehammer, 2017, p. 29). And it can be the work of years or even decades, especially where there is a prior history of "care" (e.g., persons leaving the totalizing environments of religious cults or abusive relationships or even some political systems) to achieve the state of indifference. The relationship of indifference to time, then, is quite various but essential: indifference, unless it is the starting point of socialization, requires time to properly unfold in practice (much like forgiveness itself). It is essentially oriented to the future: i.e., like forgiveness, it has "strings to the future" (Lang, 1994, p. 109).

We can also think of indifference as a kind of psychological *distancing*. It is common to suppose that four kinds of distancing are available to us: spatial,

[6] For discussion of similar dynamics in cults see Coates, 2012; Feldmann and Johnson, 1995; Rodrigues–Carballeira et al., 2015; and Rousselet, Duretete, Hardouin, and Grall–Bronnec, 2017. These dynamics go far to explain many of the most psychologically destructive effects of cults.

temporal, objective, or hypothetical (Powers and LaBar, 2019). These are all often used to regulate emotions, and thus can weigh in on the side of affective indifference. We can distance ourselves from a former object of care literally, over time or space, thereby lowering the intensity of emotional commitments (for the effectiveness of this strategy see Denny and Ochsner, 2014; Webb, Miles, and Sheeran, 2012). We can also re-imagine the history of an old relationship from a different point of view (e.g., with a different end-point that has not yet been reached). A new and different narrative may then emerge, and this can be a kind of hypothetical distancing. We can also re-imagine *ourselves* in this context of the prior relationship, marking that change linguistically by shifting from first-person pronouns to third-person (from "I" or "we" to "he" or "she") in the course of that narrative. We can also change present-tense verbs for past-tense. This is a form of "objective" distancing and can be surprisingly effective for both emotional and cognitive regulation (Grenell, Prager, Schaefer, Kross, Duckworth, and Carlson, 2019; Moser, Dougherty, Mattson, Katz, Moran, Guevarra et al., 2017; Nook, Schleider, and Somerville, 2017). Such "cognitive re-appraisals" taking object, subject, or context as its primary object can generate appropriate degrees of indifference and can help guide behavior accordingly (Ochsner and Gross, 2008). Indifference, then, is also a *degreed* condition, though so far as I am aware we do not yet have a good metric for those degrees. I do not think that this requires us to consider indifference as a cluster of psychological states, though the concept of "family resemblance" may have some application to it (on which notion see Bambrough, 1960; Ben-Yami, 2017; and Grandy, 1979). It may be further help to consider some of what indifference, as I understand it, is *not*.

First and foremost, indifference as I conceive it, is not callousness. That is, it is not an unwarranted disregard of the legitimate interests and concerns of others, including the costs and benefits to them of their own actions, our actions, or actions by third parties (Han, Alders, Greening, Neufeld, and Mitchell, 2012; Lockwood, Sebastian, McCrory, Hyde, Gu, DeBrito et al., 2013). Neither does it entail refusal to bear the appropriate costs of our actions towards others. Carried to an extreme, callousness rests upon a general failure of affective empathy and belongs to psychopathy (Blair, Mitchell, and Blair, 2005, pp. 53–56; Patrick, 2006, pp. 361–366; for the distinction of affective empathy from cognitive empathy see the classic study Shamay–Tsoory, Aharon–Peretz, and Perry, 2009). Neither, then, does indifference equate to emotional coldness or overt hostility; it is not some disguised form of aggression. Avoidance has been described in terms of its self-protective function and as an expression of anger or even a form of retaliation (Barnes, Brown, and Osterman, 2009). But indifference is not the same as avoidance. Indeed, an indifferent person need not avoid the object of her indifference at all, and typically will remain open to the possibility of future engagement. Thus, what indifference opens up between two persons (or between an individual and a group) is a kind of *liminal* space, one in which a wide range of possibilities

are latent and may take concrete shape in the future, but which may remain highly uncertain and unpredictable or even forever unrealized (thus a capacity for tolerating such uncertainty and its associated anxieties is also required: see McClelland, 1993). I argued earlier that this is also the kind of space that opens when the neonate or infant averts their gaze or otherwise disengages from their caretakers: such disengagements suspend interaction temporarily, but retain the possibility of re-engaging. Neither does indifference require that we never allow input — even decisive input — from others to the processes by which we shape, re-shape, articulate, and enact our central defining goals and values. Such possibilities are also included in the liminal space that indifference creates. In general, then, indifference is not essentially but only contingently opposed to relatedness (Kagitcibasi, 2013; Kluwer, Karremans, Reidijk, and Knee, 2020). In the case of offenders or transgressors, neither does indifference mean denying the reality of loss when the relationship changes or ends. Thus, mourning may from time to time belong to the indifferent person without loss of psychological cohesion, organization, and agency. There is probably no foundational human emotion that is genuinely alien to the indifferent person.

Like avoidance, indifference can serve a self-protective function, as I have suggested. It thus reaches back to one of the functions of disengagement (and especially gaze aversion) in early infancy. It also resembles the goal of "reclaiming the self" which is a recurring topic in the literature on women caught in abusive relationships, for whom securing self-agency or self-effectiveness is often a key part of recovery (Baly, 2010; Wuest and Merritt–Gray, 1999). Having a sense of competence, especially in the management of one's own affairs, is a basic psychological need across the lifespan (its loss or the threat of its loss is one of the special challenges for disabled persons or for the very old). Satisfaction of this need, even in its earliest forms, is a source of pleasure, sometimes described as "mastery elation" and which I treat elsewhere as a form of narcissistic pleasure (McClelland, 2010a, pp. 103–106). Indifference can protect the self against toxic emotions associated with the stresses of maladaptive social relationships (whether with intimate partners, in the workplace, in institutional life, or even in civil society at large). This is especially pertinent when neither forgiveness nor retaliation is open to us. There is thus often a third way to resolve transgressive relationships. Indifference can also protect the indifferent agent by opening up developmental pathways not reachable by forgiveness or revenge (this is part of what is latent in the liminal space). Perspectives on the transgressor can be altered, as can perspectives on the self, or perspectives on the situation, as previously noted. I noted earlier also that indifference has a variable relationship to time: our being "selectively indifferent to ethically significant aspects of our social world" can be temporary or permanent (Lillehammer, 2014, pp. 125–126). We may say, then, that we can "take refuge" in our indifference, refuge from our own toxic emotions and self-destructive tendency to ruminate needlessly over past (even long past)

offenses and maladaptive relationships. We can also take refuge from any sense of guilt or shame at our inability to summon positive emotions towards unavailable offenders (e.g., the dead). Seeking what is unattainable can infect our goal-seeking as well, and knowing when to give up on unattainable goals is part of adaptive behavior and good goal management (Ntoumanis, Healty, Sedikides, Smith, and Duda, 2014; Sripada, Swain, Ho, and Swain, 2014). A related virtue is the ability to discern and seize upon opportunities to realize new goals that may fit well with our "nuclear program" of goals and objectives (Shah and Kruglanski, 2003). Such opportunities can enter into our liminal space and become an active element, a kind of "seed" that re-organizes that space and thereby issues in new goals, new projects (i.e., new objects of care), a new overall shape to the nuclear program, even one wholly unanticipated by us (for the phenomenology of such creative states see further McClelland, 1993). But there are yet other benefits conferred by appropriate practice of indifference and these are more obviously social benefits.

Without denying the moral significance of the other person (say, a perpetrator of harm), one may reject the mode of relatedness previously exercised towards or with them, and adopt another. This can amount to an ecological change, for it may put pressure on relational modes exercised by that perpetrator with yet other persons in their ambit. It is even possible that the mode of relatedness is institutionalized or ritualized in an institutional setting (e.g., a certain kind of authoritarianism), in which case rejection may lead to changes in the institution itself and/or the institution's defining procedures and practices (consider, for example, the rejection of colonial authoritarianism by Gandhi and the large social changes that ensued in due course). This can amount to a revolution on the social scene and may be construed as a form of what Lillehammer calls "virtuous rejection" (2014, pp. 114–117). It may redound to the lasting benefit of the society in which it occurs. In a similar way, I hold that indifference, when properly practiced, confers dignity and respect on its practitioner but also on others, for it expects them to be similarly motivated by autonomously chosen and pursued goals that serve the greater good as well as the good of the agent.

Indifference can also result in cessation of blame, without violating any common epistemic duties. We do not have to simply deny what Fred did to Sally in order to be indifferent towards him or towards his action. Indifference, in particular, can encourage us to stop hounding Fred with his past offenses and rehearsing them at every opportunity. I take such hounding (as the term itself suggests) as an ill-concealed form of hostility and aggression, a form of retaliation.[7] Indifference, by contrast, typically involves a certain kind of "letting go"

[7] I am not supposing that blame is always or necessarily hostile or aggressive, especially when it is well-deserved. Even the element of culpability can be dispassionately attributed. Nor does indifference, as I conceive it, always involve "letting go" of blame, but can do so when appropriate. The whole subject merits a separate study, and such a study could usefully start from Coates and Tognazzini, 2013; Malle, Guglielmo, and Monroe, 2014; and Nadler, 2012.

of past offenses and this can substantially reduce the level of toxicity in one's social milieu. In a related fashion, indifference can "let go" by overriding grudges, which are similarly toxic. In all of these ways, then, indifference as a response to social transgressions, can conduce to social welfare and can improve the tenor of social intercourse in dyadic relationships, in individual-to-group relationships and even intergroup relationships. Indifference need not, then, be limited in its consequences to the individual or even the dyad. It may, indeed, expand like the ripples on the surface of a pond, to reach very far across society, culture, time, and space. And now it remains for me to issue my plea for indifference.

Having to forgive transgressors, having to seek reconciliation with them, for instance in cases where revenge is not open to us, or driven by over-zealous religious or other cultural social norms, can be an enormous drain of emotional, social, and other resources (time, energy, money) to no good purpose. Indeed, such demands seem to me capable of blighting human life, even though with the very best of intentions and from the highest motives. Thinking that the only options for responding to social transgressions (on whatever scale) are forgiveness or retaliation similarly distorts our cognitive lives, closing off an alternative that is worthy of our attention, our thought, our imagination, and our emotional embrace. This is logical and epistemic damage, for it is simply not true that forgiveness and revenge are the only options. Embracing such falsehoods will inevitably corrupt other elements of our thinking, our motivations, our emotions, and our behavior, to our great cost and to the great cost of our alliance partners and even our whole society. This does not lend itself to enhancing human flourishing.

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