Introduction: Forgiveness and Other Elements of Moral Repair

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> Wherever one looks on the globe, it appears that human beings want to be edified by their miseries. It is as if the desire to make human suffering understandable and to turn it to some advantage is one of those dignifying peculiarities of our species, like the ability to cook or conjugate verbs or conceive of the idea of justice. Human beings, unlike other living things, want to go to school if they are miserable. They want to make their suffering intelligible [...]. (Shweder et al. 1997, 119)

1 Forgiveness and the Human Condition

"One who has wronged another person must do something about it" (Radzik 2011, 5)—but what is to be done? One of humankind's oldest problems is the question of how to repair social relations in the wake of violence, negligence, and other transgressions. Since ancient times, the idea that those who use violence must "pay for it" has been practically

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universal in humanity's understanding of an economy of justice (see Lotter in this volume). "Eye for an eye" sorts of rules are intended to restore a victim's status and self-respect, as well as to deter other potential perpetrators from future transgressions (Miller 2006). In this regard, resentment, anger, and other aggressive feelings that drive people to revenge have important positive functions for society, a point that has been argued in a philosophical tradition ranging from Aristotle via Joseph Butler to Jeffrie G. Murphy and other contemporaries. Sentiments of righteous aggression can motivate victims or even outraged bystanders to defend against injustice, even if it would be easier and less dangerous for them to pretend that nothing has happened. If resentment cannot be satisfied, however, then it can also become self-reinforcing and motivate disproportionate revenge, since the involved parties often evaluate justice and injustice very differently depending on whether they are considering their own experience or someone else's. This raises the question of how to react to violence without triggering further violence?

The Greek poet Aeschylus, in the fifth-century BC, gave an answer to this question, in the form of an institution that exists today everywhere on the globe: we can react to violence by impartial justice, pronounced by an independent court. The legal system demands that "payment" be offered, such as providing a victim with some sort of compensation for an injustice, by imposing fines and inflicting suffering. It is assumed, however, that the legal system has the higher authority of objective standards and independent judges, compared with first- or second-party punishment. According to a modern Hobbesian narrative that still shapes Western ideas of civilized life, the "power" to defend ourselves against assault through the legal institution of the state is an aspect of society that frees us from much of the insecurity and unpredictability that would be attendant to living in a world where violence only engendered more violence, and only the stronger party prevailed.

That said, modern law's capacity to administer justice and heal violations of self-esteem is limited; perhaps there is insufficient evidence to convict the perpetrators, or perhaps they cannot be held accountable (whether they are minors or for other reasons). What is more, many violations are not covered by the rules of criminal law, and even in some cases where a given offense might normally be considered criminal, it is possible for a perpetrator's lack of intent or knowledge to result in a more lenient sentence than usual (e.g., murder vs. manslaughter). Moreover, a victim might feel that official legal proceedings are being conducted unfairly and inappropriately; conversely, an alleged perpetrator might feel unjustly accused and sentenced and then seek revenge.

Even in the clearest cases, though, wherein an act of violence leads to criminal proceedings and to a conviction that both satisfies the victim and is not seriously disputed by the offender, there will generally remain a dirty residue of violations that cannot be translated into the criminal justice code nor, therefore, punished—that is, repaid—accordingly. A person, for example, who has suffered permanent physical and psychological damage through violence and deep humiliation may find his or her suffering disproportionately worse than the few years that the perpetrator must suffer in prison. And even if the victim feels that the punishment is adequate, this satisfaction is not always enough for psychological healing. (I avoid the overly-stretched term "trauma" here, since its concept creep has now made its meaning less precise.) As a result, the victim of an injustice may harvest resentment and anger, which can take on a destructive momentum of their own. Even larger problems arise in societies after civil wars or unjust regimes where ordinary criminal prosecution is often impossible; in such cases, the promise of amnesty is often the operating condition for the society's transition out of violence and chaos and toward a new justice system.

So, the question now is: if justice in the legal sense is not possible (or would not help in any case), how can the wounds of the past be healed without violating justice or the victims' self-respect, so that further resentment and anger would not make peaceful coexistence impossible?

If you have been raised in a Western setting, the magic word *forgiveness* comes to mind. Hannah Arendt has famously described the human "faculty of forgiving" as the "possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility—of being unable to undo what one has done" (Arendt 2018, 237). Granted, even forgiving cannot remove facts from the realm of history, nor from the memory of mankind (Pettigrove 2006). However, what forgiving can do, according to Arendt, is to free men from being mentally enslaved by past injustices:

> Only through [...] mutual release from what they do can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new. In this respect, forgiveness is the exact opposite of vengeance, which acts in the form of re-acting against an original trespassing, whereby far from putting an end to the consequences of the first misdeed, everybody remains bound to the process, permitting the chain reaction contained in every action to take its unhindered course. (Arendt 2018, 240–1)

Arendt here does not interpret forgiveness in terms of a moral economy of repayment, but rather as a force that *liberates* us from it—the "exact opposite of vengeance," as she explicitly states:

> The act of forgiving can never be predicted; it is the only reaction that acts in an unexpected way and thus retains, though being a reaction, something of the original character of action. (Arendt 2018, 241)

Consequently forgiveness, in the Arendtian sense of the term, cannot be subject to moral rules, nor can it be demanded, nor be understood as a deserved reward for compensation payments.

However, these reflections on the human capacity to forgive raise more questions than Arendt can answer. First of all: how to distinguish between forgiving and condoning injustice, the latter of which, experience shows, can hardly be considered a solution in the long term and often even serves as an encouragement for further violence? And how is forgiving different from merely excusing a perpetrator because, for example, she did not know what she was doing or was not free to act differently? Can everything be forgiven? Who can forgive whom? Is it always good to forgive, or only in certain cases? Is forgiveness a private psychological process or a public act? For that matter, how do you distinguish between forgiveness in name only—just words—and "real" forgiveness? What criteria must be met so that the statement "I forgive you" does not remain a mere phrase (much less carry the subtext of an insult)?

The etymology of the term "forgive" means "to give" or "to give up" something. It does not say what exactly is given up. Is it resentment? The right to revenge? The demand for payment or legal prosecution? We can

define a *thin* concept of forgiveness, which is close to the use of the German word *verzeihen*, as distinguished from the more demanding German term *vergeben. Verzeihen* means a giving up of resentment, accusation, revenge, or other negative reactions to wrongdoing. In *verzeihen*, "One no longer [...] charges the offender, one withdraws any claim to compensation or vengeance, no longer accuses him or her of any misdeed" (see Schumacher in this volume). From the thin concept of *verzeihen*-like forgiveness, however, we still cannot deduce the answers to our questions. *Verzeihen* does not disclose why, under which conditions, or in which cases people cease to kindle resentment and anger, nor under which conditions they stop accusing a perpetrator and demanding justice. Even less does it provide an answer to the normative question of when they should and when they should not. Answers to these questions depend on many factors that cannot be derived purely from the necessities (per se) of human cooperation either. On the one hand, they arise from the thick concepts of forgiveness (and other terms with similar or overlapping functions), which have a particular history involving religious and other cultural traditions. On the other hand, the answers vary depending on the nature of the case; obviously, one would have different standards for determining the limits of forgiveness in the case of a spousal dispute or a friendship gone sour, versus, say, in the case of war crimes or genocide.

Furthermore, whenever a term like *forgiveness* takes on an important role in a particular context, it plays out in light of other *thick* concepts, such as blame, guilt, sin, remorse, and contrition, which arise from complex religious and sociocultural traditions—and even within a single cultural sphere of influence, these traditions tend to vary, depending on whether they are being applied for legal, religious, or moral purposes. For instance, the question of when and how to forgive within relationships between people tends to concern itself with re-establishing status and respect, while questions of respect and status do not play the same role in the relationship between man and God (because God is infinitely higher). Accordingly, there are great differences in the understanding of guilt and forgiveness, not only between cultures but also within cultural spheres of influence.

For example, the interpretation of forgiveness as an unpredictable act that does not follow the logic of the economy of guilt may only be understandable to people whose intellectual framework has been informed by Western religious tradition and the concept of penal law as an institution designed less for solving the conflicts of individuals and groups and more for protecting the basic norms and institutions of the state and of society. In this Western context, the idea could arise that forgiveness transcends law and the logic of repayment. However, this is not how forgiveness could be thought of in, for instance, a traditional acephalous African society, where legal proceedings primarily serve to resolving conflicts between parties. In the latter type of context, forgiveness in the sense of a negotiated renunciation of revenge or debt is indeed built into the legal process and the economies of guilt and debt (as Bertram Turner illustrates in his chapter within this volume). It can even (as Turner states) be understood as a form of revenge.

If, on the other hand, in a Western country, forgiveness is addressed in terms of the rich religious concept of *vergebung*, then it may seem in principle that everything can be forgiven (at least if the offender shows deep remorse), because God's grace is supposed to be unlimited:

> Nevertheless, no matter how great our crimes, their forgiveness should never be despaired of in holy Church for those who truly repent, each according to the measure of his sin. And, in the act of repentance, where a crime has been committed of such gravity as also to cut off the sinner from the body of Christ, we should not consider the measure of time as much as the measure of sorrow. For, a contrite and humbled heart God will not despise. (Augustine 1955, § 65)

This religious doctrine, which derives from the notion of a special relationship between God and human beings, is applied to the relationship between people as well, even today, and it is often taken as an invitation to unconditional forgiveness.

Insofar as genuine remorse and contrition, in conjunction with inner transformation, are considered prerequisites for forgiveness, the Christian concept of forgiveness apparently does offer a solution to the problem of how to avoid condoning evil: a former evildoer who has repented and undergone a thorough inner change will not misunderstand forgiveness as an invitation to commit further crimes. At the same time, the religious concept of forgiveness does not exclude secular punishments. Moreover, it seems to offer a solution for healing psychological damage and self-esteem: the perpetrator's humiliation, which is linked to self-reproach, removes the burden of humiliation from the victim and thus restores equality. Understood in this way, such forgiveness may be taken as a special form of vengeance, of getting even (Lotter in this volume). Also, the decision to grant forgiveness can offer an opportunity for victims to empower themselves, and thus even serve as a remedy for the psychological injuries that the experience of victimization—and its attendant powerlessness—has induced.

That said, it is rather difficult to transfer the religious idea of God's unlimited forgiveness to the realm of human conflict, without this being tantamount—not in intention, but in result—to condoning the evil. Nonetheless, today, even in cases in which the perpetrator does not repent, forgiveness is often recommended for the sake of the victim's healing. Psychological advice books promise healing through unconditional forgiveness, sometimes as if this were simple—such as in the very title of the book *Unconditional Forgiveness: A Simple and Proven Method to Forgive Everyone and Everything* (Grieco 2011). However, unconditional, universal forgiveness is hardly a satisfactory answer to the question of how to avoid condoning socially offensive or injurious behavior, not to mention the truly evil.

2 The Global Career of an Inconsistent Idea

Meinolf Schumacher has drawn attention to the fact that the thin notion of forgiveness, which is involved in the daily practices of modern Western societies, does not contrast as sharply with the ancient Greek ways of handling guilt as is often claimed (Schumacher in this volume). However, the *thick* bundle of ideas that today make up what is discussed as "the" Western meaning of forgiveness is quite different and not without inner contradictions, as the French philosopher Jacques Derrida has pointed out (Derrida 2001).[1] On the one hand, forgiveness is understood as an

un-coded and unconditioned human possibility outside of the reciprocal economy of guilt, morality, and law. On the other hand, forgiveness is associated with a special set of psychological and moral conditions that the wrongdoer must fulfill in order to be forgiven. These include a confession, repentance, contrition, and inner moral transformation. Thus, the idea of forgiveness encompasses two mutually exclusive ideas, which have somehow jointly come to represent the idea of forgiveness on a global level:

> It is important to analyse at its base the tension at the heart of the heritage between, on the one side, the idea which is also a demand for the unconditional, gracious, infinite, aneconomic forgiveness granted to the guilty as guilty, without counterpart, even to those who do not repent or ask forgiveness, and on the other side, as a great number of texts testify through many semantic refinements and difficulties, a conditional forgiveness proportionate to the recognition of the fault, to repentance, to the transformation of the sinner who then explicitly asks forgiveness. (Derrida 2001, 33–4)

If we look at this deep inconsistency, it seems no wonder that during the last 30 years, Western notions of forgiveness have become the subject of hot and controversial debates in philosophy and cultural studies. However, even though forgiveness cannot be both conditional and unconditional at the same time, the two ideas are nearly always mixed up when it comes to a real case of forgiveness. According to Derrida, this confusion is unavoidable, because neither form of forgiveness can be dispensed with (Derrida 2001, 44). Forgiveness in the real world can never be purely unconditional if it is to function; it must always take into account the economy of guilt and debt. Nonetheless, the inevitable mixing of the idea of conditional forgiveness with the religiously informed notion of unconditional forgiveness leads in many cases to the softening of the concrete conditions that we place on forgiveness, which may be helpful in some situations but also prove dysfunctional in others. The idea that the social ills of violence and injustice can be easily solved through forgiveness—as though it were a miracle cure—has, on occasion, proved unable to deliver what it promises.

Perhaps it is just this unresolved and irresolvable inner tension, however, that makes the modern Western ideas of forgiveness so fascinating. For better or worse, and thanks to their appeal (as well as through cultural dominance and enforcement), Western concepts of forgiveness have emerged as a global export that often overrides local practices. Today there is a widespread belief that guilt must be overcome through forgiveness. In fact, it is even supposed sometimes that the shining moral example set by a generous, unconditional act of forgiveness (offered by the victimized party) can melt the hearts of the evildoers and change their evil ways. Jesus is often cited as the authority who supposedly preached this type of unconditional forgiveness, as a function of charity:

> Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. *Give* to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, *do not demand it back.* Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. (Luke 6:28–31)

On the other hand, there are three conditions for forgiveness "that are named in the traditional Christian sacrament of penance or confession: the remorseful acknowledgment of the misdeed (*contritio cordis*), the sincere confession without any rationalizing or downplaying (*confessio oris*), and at least a rudimentary attempt at compensation through action (*satisfactio operis*)" (Schumacher 2021). The Western idea that guilt can be forgiven when the perpetrator undergoes a process of moral transformation through deep remorse and contrition has even been applied extensively to historical injustices and collective crimes. An entire nation's self-image can be strongly influenced by this perspective, as can be seen in Germany, where even today there is a certain internally felt need to prove to the world that the national identity has changed since the 1940s for the morally better. Western ideas of guilt and redemption also show up in the ever-expanding practice of political apology and in current global debates aimed at coming to terms with genocide, state-organized crime, and structural injustice (e.g., in the context of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, hereafter "TRC"). As Derrida noted,

the ideas of the Judeo-Christian tradition seem to have become the universal language of the debate on historical injustice:

> One sees not only individuals, but also entire communities, professional corporations, the representatives of ecclesiastical hierarchies, sovereigns, and heads of state ask for 'forgiveness'. They do this in an Abrahamic language which is not (in the case of Japan or Korea, for example) that of the dominant religion of their society, but which has already become the universal idiom of law, of politics, of the economy, or of diplomacy. (Derrida 2001, 27)

In these rituals, the Judeo-Christian idea of overcoming sin through deep repentance is metaphorically transferred from the individual to the collective, for through repentance the subject becomes different from the perpetrator who committed the evil act. True, already in the Hebrew Bible, it is often the Jewish people as a whole who ask for and are granted forgiveness, while, in Hellenistically influenced Christian theology, a collective could never be a suitable vehicle for repentance (since a collective is not conceptualized as having a soul). Regardless, today, doubts about authenticity (Lotter 2021) do not prevent politicians—who have recognized the healing effect of rituals—from employing the narrative of contrition and redemption as a transformative ritual for expressing the renewal of national identity:

> By assuming responsibility for the wrong, apology alters the traditional national narrative so as to integrate the previously excluded moment of wrongdoing into a continuous national narrative; but in identifying the contemporary nation as one that embraces rightful norms (and thus must condemn such wrongdoing), it transforms it into a redemptive narrative. (Celermajer 2009, 20)

A particularly expressive example of such a ritual of collective atonement and redemption is the speech given by then-president Jacques Chirac of France in 1995, two months after his taking office, in which he ended the previous French policy of assuming no responsibility for the actions of the Vichy regime.[2] Simultaneously, he emphasized that the Vichy period

was "an aberration in French history and identity" (Celermajer 2009, 20). In a single gesture, comments Celermajer, "he was both assuming the identity of the wrongdoer and distancing himself (that is, his nation) from that identity [...] moving through the assumption of guilt to redemption, a type of return to what France essentially is" (Celermajer 2009, 21).

The political instrumentalization of these Western ideas of forgiveness has also provoked unease and raised doubts about their suitability for all contexts. After all, the concerns and interests of victims and their relatives (as individuals) might not always coincide with the state's legitimate interests in reconciliation. The instrumentalization of forgiveness as a salve for the purposes of political unity is, therefore, a double-edged sword that can open new resentment, especially when the victims feel powerless to resist the social pressure to forgive.

This became apparent with the political usage of Christian ideas of forgiveness in the context of South Africa's TRC, which was founded shortly after the end of apartheid. The TRC aimed to contribute to the nation's urgent need for reconciliation, moral repair, and the renewal of a sense of security, trust, and hope in a peaceful future. Thus, in a situation wherein it would not have been possible (for many reasons) to deal with all apartheid crimes and injustices under criminal law, amnesty was made available not collectively but for individual perpetrators who fully confessed their crimes and applied for pardon. In the meetings of the TRC, the victims' relatives were gently invited to extend public declarations of forgiveness toward the individuals who murdered and tortured their loved ones. However, this approach by the TRC also meant that a certain moral pressure was built up:

> Virtues of forgiveness and reconciliation were so loudly and roundly applauded that emotions of vengeance, hatred and bitterness were rendered unacceptable. (Wilson 2001, 120)

From the beginning, though, this form of moral manipulation for a good cause triggered strongly polarized responses. On the one side, it was argued that the practice of encouraging forgiveness not only served the commission's aim "to achieve unity and morally acceptable

reconciliation" (Minow 1998, 322), but also helped victims or their relatives to regain a sense of power and control (Minow 1998, 329–330), as forgiveness was supposed to enable victims to "reassert their power over their own lives and to exercise autonomy" (Minow 1998, 322). Also the public exposure of the injustice and the associated public recognition of a victim's (or their surviving loved ones') history of suffering were understood as an important contribution to the healing process. However, on the other side, the TRC's practice of discouraging expressions of anger and resentment was criticized from the outset, especially Bishop Tutu's tendency to describe the moral options as a clear-cut choice between virtuous forgiveness and vicious revenge.

Philosopher Myisha Cherry has called rhetoric like this (e.g., that either we choose forgiveness *or* we choose revenge) the "false dichotomy" problem (Cherry 2018, 85–87). A false dichotomy occurs when it is suggested that there are only two options, a good and a bad one, even though there are more. According to the false dichotomy employed by Tutu in the context of the TRC, negative feelings such as anger and resentment will inevitably result in revenge, which, in turn, is understood as purely destructive, while a socially constructive attitude can only be based on forgiveness. The assumption is that anger and the wish for punishment can only ever take excessive and destructive forms.

There are good arguments against this kind of logic, which were formulated in a long philosophical tradition. Aristotle, in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, described the cause of anger as "perceived injustice" (EN 1135b25-9). Thus, someone who felt no anger, even at a genuine wrong, is considered a slavish character incapable of recognizing and thus reacting appropriately to injustice. Moreover, as mentioned above, Joseph Butler in the eighteenth century argued against the Christian mistrust of anger (which goes back to the Stoics), asserting that emotions like anger and resentment fulfill an important function in our lives. For

> the indignation raised by cruelty and injustice [...] is by no means malice. No, it is resentment against vice and wickedness: it is one of the common bonds by which society is held together. (Butler 1969, 125)

Butler even called anger a "fellow-feeling which each individual has in behalf of the whole species" (Butler 1969, 126). Thus, according to Butler, forgiveness is rather an antidote to the excessive and potentially destructive forms of resentment that our natural egocentrism can cause, and these excesses indeed must be contained by the cultivation of a willingness to forgive. (With regard to Joseph Butler, see also the chapter by Oliver Hallich in this volume.) Contemporary social psychological experiments, such as those conducted by the economist Ernst Fehr (Fehr and Gächter 2000), confirm Butler's view that the normative order of the social world cannot function without resentment-motivated social sanctions. Thus, it can be assumed that resentment and anger play a constructive role in processes of moral repair, too.

Returning to the debates about the TRC, the Commission was also accused of espousing a Christian-inspired moral vision in its encouragement of forgiveness; as such, some victims' relatives did not find their own perspectives adequately represented (Bhargava 2000, 61). Others found it unjust that offenders were forgiven who, apart from expressing regret, did not offer adequate compensation. In his book *Wounds not Healed by Time*, the Jewish Studies scholar Solomon Schimmel describes the reaction of a rabbi who had attended a meeting of the TRC:

> Thus, a white police officer who had murdered 12 persons by setting their houses on fire was freed from any legal obligation to the families of his victims. When he lamented how much he regretted his action audience members began to weep and gave him a standing ovation and the rabbi was outraged. As he told: "'I am sorry, but this is ridiculous,' I called out... 'You can't sadistically murder 12 innocent people by burning them alive and just say 'I am sorry!'" (Schimmel 2002, 8)

At the same time, Schimmel's interpretation of the rabbi's attitude reveals a widespread but somewhat clichéd notion of the difference between Jewish and Christian understandings of forgiveness: "He saw the Christians' embrace of the officer as a gross injustice, while the Christians felt it their duty or virtue 'to embrace him in brotherly love'" (Schimmel 2002, 8). Thus, according to this cliché, what may be regarded virtuous from a Christian point of view may look rather like a condoning of evil

from the Jewish perspective, although forgiveness is strongly associated with repentance in both traditions. As Jewish Studies scholar Francoise Mirguet stresses, however, there is not really a rigid contrast between "the" Jewish and "the" Christian way of thinking; there is, in fact, a wide range of positions in both traditions. Nor would it be mandatory for Christians to forgive in a case like that of Schimmel's example. The decision rather depends on one's intention: the desire to bring justice to the victims or the desire to reintegrate the "poor sinner" into the community.

That said, for Christians, there is perhaps less of a rule for resolving this conflict than for Jews, since the clash between absolute, unconditional forgiveness and conditional forgiveness seems rather atypical of Judaism; Schimmel has drawn attention to the fact that, in modern Judaism, forgiveness depends much more on the nature of the crime and cannot be granted by proxy. He illustrates this distinction through the different reactions of some Jews and Christians to an episode in Simon Wiesenthal's book *The Sunflower*. In the memoir, when Wiesenthal, then a forced laborer in a concentration camp, was brought to a young SS man who had been mortally wounded, the officer confessed to him that he had committed atrocities against Jews and asked Wiesenthal to forgive him, as a Jew. Wiesenthal refused. Later he was overcome with doubts and asked some Jewish and Christian acquaintances what they thought was the right answer. Schimmel comments:

> [It is] remarkable [...] how, with but a few exceptions, the Jewish and the Christian respondents differed in their views on when forgiveness is appropriate [...] Most of the Jews felt that only the victim of a crime has the right to forgive the perpetrator and that in the absence of repentance as defined in Jewish Tradition, which includes remorse, confession, apology, and reparation, there is no *obligation* to forgive. Most of the Christians felt that a third party could forgive a sinner, especially if he had confessed and expressed remorse for his deeds, even if he hasn't made reparation or apologized to his victim, and that Christian love mandated forgiveness by a victim, even where the perpetrator hasn't repented. (Schimmel 2002, 8)

However, one cannot necessarily deduce from these ideological differences regarding forgiveness-by-proxy and unconditional forgiveness that

Christians in general *are* more forgiving. First, there is a difference between believing that it is virtuous to forgive and being able to forgive (even emotionally). Secondly, the reasons for granting forgiveness are largely the same for Jews and Christians. And thirdly, to forgive is regarded as a duty in Judaism (under certain conditions) while for Christians it seems to be something more supererogatory.

3 Further Controversies on Forgiveness

Given the long history of conflicting viewpoints on forgiveness, it should come as no surprise that the appropriateness of forgiveness is still hotly debated within philosophy and within cultural and religious studies. Some discussions revolve around the question of whether there are crimes, like those committed by the Nazis, whose perpetrators must never be forgiven. Hannah Arendt herself famously took the view that one can only forgive what one can punish or excuse, and that real evil can therefore not be forgiven. And following Vladimir Jankélévitch's angry pamphlet, which railed against the rapid return to a supposed normalcy in Germany and France after the Holocaust (especially without people's having genuinely confronted their own complicity in German crimes and/or the assistance of the Vichy regime [Jankélévitch 1996, 552–572]), various interventions have been directed against forgiving what is considered unforgivable.

Another discussion turns its attention to the importance of anger for self-esteem and self-respect. Philosophers Jeffrie Murphy (Murphy 2003) and Thomas Brudholm (Brudholm 2008), among others, have argued that vindictive emotions like anger, resentment, and the desire for revenge are not only socially useful (which Butler had already pointed out) but also serve as a defense against attacks on one's self-esteem. This topic has long been neglected in modern discussions of forgiveness, presumably because the concept of forgiveness was modeled on the sinner's relationship with a forgiving deity, whereby self-esteem is not really an issue because God is infinitely higher. While the sinner's self-respect is not violated by repeating to God the words "I am not worthy," such a confession, if made to fellow human beings, might be humiliating. In fact, the

question of when and how to forgive in interpersonal relationships concerns re-establishing status and respect. Self-respect is of crucial importance when forgiveness is understood as part of a process of moral repair that plays out between individuals in the social realm. This becomes obvious as soon as one looks at conflict-resolution processes in antiquity. The legal scholar William Ian Miller has stressed the dimension of honor and respect, which, after having been violated, cannot be easily re-established by a mere psychological act of forgiveness. Revenge serves in such cases to bring the relationships of respect back into balance (Miller 2006). Furthermore, the classical philologist David Konstan (2010) has shown how in Greek antiquity (e.g., in Homer), perpetrators resorted to excuses—not to evade their responsibility nor their duty to make amends, but instead to make it clear that no disrespect for the victim was intended.

Of course, the conditions that make forgiveness appropriate also depend on the kinds of processes or actions we are referring to when we talk about forgiveness. Does forgiveness simply mean that we cease to harbor certain reactive moral feelings, such as resentment and anger (Butler, Murphy)? Is it largely about the renunciation of claims to revenge and compensation, or does it rather aim at a full restoration of the perpetrators' civic respectability, even after serious crimes? Does forgiveness demand forgetting the injustice altogether, or is it compatible with remembrance and the demand for compensation, justice, and punishment? Just as importantly, *who* may forgive—and for what purpose? Does one forgive in order to grant the perpetrator an unencumbered future, or is it rather a matter of freeing oneself from victimhood and the burden of the past? And finally: can forgiveness, if exercised by the wrong person, for the wrong reasons, also be an illegitimate act?

These questions cannot be answered purely by looking toward the religious norms of the person doing the forgiving, nor by explaining the values that form the basis of a thick concept of forgiveness in general. Whether or not an act of forgiveness genuinely promotes moral repair or is instead merely an expression of one party's powerlessness is also something that depends on the balance of power between the parties. It could be that the forgiver had no choice (The situation of Jamal Kashoggi's sons comes to mind, who had to publicly forgive their father's alleged murderers.). However, even if a victim or her relatives are not forced to forgive

on pain of death, they might nonetheless feel pressured to forgive in light of other cultural influences and norms—in which case we might still conclude that the forgiveness was unjust, for it may well be that a given cultural practice of forgiveness, however well-established, is unjust or is practiced in a dysfunctional way.

For example, Alice MacLachlan has pointed out that the moral expectations regarding a readiness to forgive are not imposed equally upon women and men; rather, they serve to support an unjust distribution of social roles in terms of power and autonomy (MacLachlan 2009). In many contexts, women are expected to forgive their husbands for behavior that their husbands would not forgive them in return. In fact, forgiveness itself is traditionally, strongly associated with feminine characteristics, such as motherliness.

For all these reasons, the question of whether forgiveness is appropriate cannot be answered without considering the broader social context and the power relations between offenders and victims. In each situation, we must ask how far the forgiveness goes in rendering justice for victim and perpetrator alike, and therefore whether it can suffice to create genuine trust and hope for the future (Radzik 2011). While a free-will ability to choose forgiveness can restore a sense of personal power to a victim, philosophers Alice MacLachlan and Myisha Sherry have cautioned that cultural or social expectations—or even explicit requests—that victims forgive, especially within contexts where they lack power and status, may further lessen their feeling of control and thus render them vulnerable to further victimization in the future.

4 Diversifying Methods of Moral Repair

What, then, might be the criteria by which an act of forgiveness could be evaluated with respect to its appropriateness (or lack thereof) within a given context? On the one hand, this can only be determined with a view to the goal of reconciliation, or at least non-violent coexistence. On the other, what can be considered "genuine" reconciliation cannot be determined without reference to values such as justice and a good life for all concerned. Thus, in this volume, we do not take sides in the controversies

for or against forgiveness. Neither will we interpret forgiveness only in light of Western traditions of thought; instead, the volume serves both to highlight central problems associated with the Western ideas of forgiveness (Part I) and to compare them with other cultural notions of forgiveness and practices of moral repair in a variety of situations (Part II). By contrasting Western notions of forgiveness with examples from Asian and African traditions, we aim to develop a broader, cross-cultural understanding of the role of forgiveness and alternative strategies for appeasing anger, preventing revenge, and other elements within processes of healing and reconciliation.

If we disregard its internal differences and explore what sets the Western tradition apart most strikingly from others, Western individualism and its related ideas of free will and deep individual responsibility stand out. The modern Western understanding of guilt seems to be intrinsically linked to the idea that people act as individuals, not as mere role-bearers or group members, and that their actions derive from their freely made decisions. This self-determination is often understood as "autonomy," in the sense of ultimate authorship. As the philosopher Susan Wolf has put it:

> I[n] addition to the requirement that the agent have control over her behaviour (that she have a potentially effective will) and the requirement that she have control along the right lines (a relevantly intelligent will), there is a requirement that the agent's control be ultimate—her will must be determined by her self, and her self must not, in turn, be determined by anything external to itself. (Wolf 1990, 10)

Accordingly, in the West, one tends to interpret moral responsibility as being about an issue much deeper than simply whether or not someone has caused a (material, psychological, or social) harm and, consequently, is liable for the consequences; the question is about blame in a "deep" sense, and raises the question of character. (Wolf 1990, 38–40)

This model of thinking pervades Western morality, although it has been controversial within Western philosophy from Spinoza to the present. "When we blame someone for his actions," states the philosopher Thomas Nagel, "we are not merely saying it is bad that they happened, or bad that he exists: we are judging him, saying he is bad, which is different from his being a bad thing" (Nagel 1979, 25). What Nagel meant was that we do not consider the offender to be bad in the sense that one speaks of a "bad dog" who bites when it should not bite; this disagreeable (i.e., biting) disposition is usually not attributed to the dog's malevolence—its moral character—but rather to poor training or breeding. In the case of a human, on the other hand, modern Westerners rather tend to attribute bad actions to a bad moral character for which the actor him- or herself is ultimately responsible. Thus considered, the only appropriate reaction to one's own misconduct seems to be deep regret and the willingness to change one's very character. For the same reason, excuses often have a bad image—because, in offering an excuse, you are seen as not taking your responsibility seriously enough.

This sort of response to bad or unfortunate actions is different in cultures where it is assumed that the reasons for human action are usually more attributable to circumstance and social obligation than to individual character. In such contexts, reactions to wrongdoing are not necessarily laced with the assumption of a deep inner badness; they are more focused on what one *owes to others* on account of the wrongdoing. Even then, remorse and regret are usually expected, but not necessarily contrition or a change of character.

Thus, if we want to know the resemblances and differences between various cultures' territories of moral repair, or how such territories can differ even within a single culture across time, we should not limit our explorations to ideas of guilt and remorse, nor should we interpret forgiveness through a strictly modern Western lens (as philosophers usually do[3]). For the purposes of cross-cultural comparison, therefore, it seems to me that a model introduced by Margaret Walker is more appropriate than the modern Western idea of forgiveness. Margaret Walker has used the more neutral term *moral repair* to describe social processes "of moving from the situation of loss and damage to a situation where some degree of stability in moral relations is regained" (Walker 2006, 6). These processes may take place in the intimacy of family life, but they may also involve the entire society. Since wrongdoings take place within a society (on a macro level) and violate broader social norms, they send a signal to other potential victims as well. As a result, they become a matter both of importance and of consequence to parties beyond the direct perpetrator

and the victim; the community in which a wrongdoing occurs can be both complicit (for encouraging such violations or not preventing them adequately) and victimized (insofar as its norms might consequently erode and the common feeling of security diminish). Thus, the long-term success of processes of moral repair often depends on whether certain concrete demands for justice, such as punishment and compensation, are met. Processes of moral repair also depend on hope, trust, and a willingness to entertain the perspective of the other party.[4] Forgiveness, ultimately, is only one element among various within "the task of restoring or stabilizing—and in some cases creating—the basic elements that sustain human beings in a recognizably moral relationship" (Eisikovits 2010, 23).

Moreover, if one makes cultural comparisons between different traditions' reactions to wrongdoing, one finds that forgiveness does not always constitute an indispensable or even relevant element of such a reaction. For instance, in an Asian context (an example from Jan-Ulrich Sobisch's chapter in this volume) where the concept of karma—with its emphasis on intentions—has some obvious overlaps with the Western notion of guilt, karma leaves less room for forgiveness to play a dominant role, because victims lack the power to liberate a wrongdoer from the consequences of her past deeds. Also, in the context of Confucianism, as Marchal shows in his chapter on Neoconfucianism, forgiveness plays a relatively minor role because Neo-Confucians, like their Confucian precursors, did not believe that a wise person could injure or be injured by others; consequently, he would not need to forgive them either. Furthermore, as Marion Eggert points out in her chapter, "Practicing Forgiveness in Chosŏn Korea," one of the strategies developed in Korea for dealing with injustices or wrongdoings is not to seek a resolution of the conflict through forgiveness, "but rather to draw productive energy from the resentment engendered by non-resolution."

Thus, the territory of moral repair is broader than what the philosopher Adam Morton has called "the forgiveness territory"—"(t)he bundle of mutually sustaining practices [and] ideas" that involve "resentment-like emotions of the forgiver, abasement-like or repentance-like emotions of the forgiven" (Morton 2012, 4, 7). However, not all cases of moral repair in which forgiveness (in the thin sense of renouncing blame and revenge) plays a role are accompanied by such feelings. If we were to presuppose that guilt feelings and remorse must be considered indispensable preconditions for the possibility of moral repair, David Konstan has argued, we would "commit ourselves to a view that [...] drives a deep wedge between modern and ancient strategies for overcoming the anger and urge to vengeance that arises as a consequence of wrongdoing" (Konstan 2010, 5). A figure like Homer's Agamemnon, who blames the gods (who had allegedly confused his mind) for his unreasonable behavior, does not feel repentance-like emotions, nor does he present himself as a repentant sinner. Nevertheless, as Konstan has pointed out, Agamemnon's excuses—even if they are taken as transparent subterfuge—may fulfill the same function that expressions of remorse and contrition fulfill in modern Western contexts: they neutralize a notion of disrespect toward the person affected by his wrongdoing.

If one takes a closer look at the territories of moral repair, even in a single society, these territories might inhabit more than a single plane; rather, they might be composed of layers, some of which are wholly distinct and some of which overlap, as Bertram Turner points out in the chapter "The Place of Forgiveness in Conflict Management: Scale-Bound Institutional Arrangements in the Moroccan Nomosphere," using Morocco as an example. Moral repair can be practiced in a society by religious authorities, through the legal system, through ritual acts by the king, and even through "legal" procedures that follow local traditions rather than the norms of state law. These different discourses and practices do not all follow the same rules, even though they partly overlap and influence one another. Turner's study of conflict management in Morocco is but one among the case studies presented in this book to establish a sense of the extent to which one can speak of forgiveness across cultures and of how concepts and practices of moral repair might depend on cultural-specific images of man and metaphysics.

Thus, by getting better acquainted with other traditions of reacting to wrongdoing and by exploring the extent to which Westerners differ from people of other cultural contexts, we also realize that we share certain elements which appear different at first glance. To take another example from this volume: in non-monotheistic contexts in which spirits are believed to interfere with human destiny and in which the ghosts of

murdered people—rather than their living descendants—are believed to take revenge, the focus of the moral repair process is not initially on justice but instead on healing the diseases caused by these spirits. In the course of this healing process, however, the search for a guilty person and the construction of a narrative of evildoing and victimization may take on an important role, as Victor Igreja shows in the chapter "Negotiating Truth-Seeking, Ritual Television, and Healing in Mozambique" with regard to traditional forms of healing in the country. Thus, there may be intellectual overlaps with Western ideas of guilt and the overcoming of guilt through the elements of confession and repentance, but these elements are, at the same time, connected to ideas of healing in which forgiveness does not play a prominent part—if any.

Notes

1. Derrida, in turn, draws on Jankélévitch's *Le Pardon* (1967).
2. Cf. www.france24.com/en/20170411-france-role-deporting-jews-political-stances-through-70-years.
3. Hannah Arendt is an exception in that she limited forgiveness to the realm of what can be explained by ordinary human weaknesses, that is, what can ultimately be excused.
4. With regard to the role of emphathy in processes of moral repair and reconciliation cf. Eisikovits (2010).

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Overview of Contributions

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The dual focus of this book—to combine an overview of European philosophical traditions on forgiveness with a presentation of different cultural conceptions of moral repair—is reflected in the two divisions that structure this volume but which, nevertheless, directly refer to one another. Rather than claiming one forgiveness approach more morally superior to the other, the chapters in this book describe a plural and dynamic cross-cultural discourse driven by the question of how to overcome guilt peacefully—the answers to which have always been subject to great controversy, as the articles in this volume also illustrate.

The first part, *Western Traditions of Conceptualizing Forgiveness*, examines the development of various understandings of forgiveness and other practices of moral repair from early Jewish and ancient Greek literature to the early modern period, the Enlightenment, Modernity, and the present. The focus lies, in particular, on the differentiation of these notions and practices within philosophy, literature, and Christian and Jewish

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