

Chapter 3

Injustice as Injury, Forgiveness as Healing

Raja Bahlul

Introduction

My aim is to argue that forgiveness may be conceived by analogy to healing. The analogy is not self-evident. Nor will it be of much value unless an appropriate understanding of what healing amounts to is provided. For these reasons, we shall have to discuss a number of apparently unrelated concepts. The discussion, it is hoped, will reveal how forgiveness can be compared to healing in a significant and enlightening manner.

In Section Two I develop analogies between injustice² and injury, on the one hand, and pain and resentment on the other, along three distinct, but related dimensions. The first is a *causal dimension* where injury and injustice are viewed as *causes* that normally produce certain effects. The second dimension focuses on the *effects* which injury and injustice typically produce: *pain* in the case of injury, *resentment* (and other negative feelings) in the case of injustice. The third dimension has to do with *function* (role) played by the outcomes of injustice and injury (namely, resentment and pain)

² I use 'injustice' in a broad sense to mean being 'unjustly treated' or simply 'being wronged', with no specification of the kind of wrong undergone. More on this in Section Two.

Explorations of Forgiveness: Personal, Relational, and Religious

**Edited by
Court Lewis**

Owensboro Community & Technical College
Humanities Division and Fine Arts

Vernon Series in Philosophy of Forgiveness



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in individual and social lives, and the significance of failures in this regard.

In Section Three I present a proposal to view forgiveness of injustice by analogy to the healing of injuries. I present three reasons for thinking that forgiveness may be profitably compared to healing. The reasons I offer are grounded in, but also serve to extend the analogies between injury and injustice on the one hand, and pain and resentment on the other. Finally, in Section Four, I discuss some possible objections to the present proposal, and respond to them.

The present proposal presupposes that overcoming resentment is essential to forgiveness. However, I do not claim that forgiveness *reduces* to overcoming resentment. I shall discuss these matters in Section One, without pretending to offer conclusive arguments. Because my main contribution lies elsewhere, I shall take it more or less for granted that forgiveness is incompatible with harbouring resentment, hatred, anger or indignation, and other negative feelings towards the wrongdoer.

I. Forgiveness and Emotion

Reflection on the many discussions of forgiveness reveals two major junctures at which emotion becomes relevant to forgiveness. The first has to do with the *necessary conditions* for acquiring a standing to forgive or to be forgiven. This can be seen by considering the conditions which need to obtain in order that forgiveness may be *contemplated* or *asked for*. (1) It is typically the case that a culpable act of wrongdoing, an injustice, has been committed. The victim is led to make moral judgments such as “You have wronged me,” “I have endured evil on your hands,” or “You have betrayed me.” (2) The wronged party (a) *resents*, is *indignant*, *angry*, or has other (typically enduring) negative *feelings* in connection

with the injustice. In addition to (a), perhaps as a consequence, it may be assumed that (b) the wronged party may (be motivated to) seek retribution of some kind or other against the wrongdoer.³

It is fairly obvious that conditions (1) and (2) do not purport to say *what it is* that one does when one forgives. But it is not hard to appreciate the extent of emotionality which they bring with them. Condition (1) involves making moral (value) judgments such as “I have been treated unjustly,” or “I have been wronged.” According to some writers, such judgments stand in a causal relation to what we subsequently feel. “When these judgments [of having been wronged] are warranted, our first response is... anger and resentment” (Hieronymi 2001, 530). Other writers make stronger claims about the relation between value judgments and emotions. According to traditional Emotivism, which continues to thrive and prosper in a variety of guises collectively known as “Expressivism,” “moral judgments function to express desires, emotions, or pro/con attitudes” (Joyce 2002, 336-7).⁴ This is by no means a universally held view, for many philosophers continue to insist that moral judgments do manage to *describe* something or other, be it Moral Reality, social norms, or the workings of the human mind. Nevertheless, as one writer says, “virtually no one in the debate over moral semantics thinks that moral content just *is* descriptive con-

³ It must be kept in mind that only typical cases are being considered. Cases where one is wronged but does not judge that one has been wronged, or where one feels nothing but pleasure at the thought of what has been done, are not clearly cases where the wronged person can contemplate forgiveness.

⁴ According to Jeff Wisdom, “moral judgments express propositional attitudes that do not represent or describe the external world” (2009, 285). Cf. Simon Blackburn: “an ethic is the propositional reflection of the dispositions and attitudes, policies and stances, of people” (1984, 310). A particularly good discussion of these matters can be found in Goldie (2009, 94-109).

tent” (Wisdom 2009, 295).⁵ The idea of an emotional dimension in moral judgments cannot be lightly dismissed.

Sub-condition (a) is obviously emotional, because it is about how people typically feel when they perceive themselves as having been wronged, or unjustly treated. Condition (b) may not seem to involve reference to emotions. But the appearance is deceptive. For emotions *motivate* actions. One who is in a state of fear is inclined to flee; one who is in state of anger is inclined to strike; one who is indignant or resentful is inclined to punish, retaliate, or take revenge. The action-motivating role of emotion is rightly emphasized in many contemporary discussions. It has led some to propose an account of emotion in terms of “action readiness.”⁶

Emotion is thus relevant to forgiveness on account of the *conditions* which must obtain in order for one to be in a position to forgive or to be forgiven. But there is another major point where emotion enters into the discussion of forgiveness. On many accounts of *what it is for one to forgive*, emotion is constitutively involved in the very nature of forgiveness. The view is widely held. According to Murphy, “forgiveness is a matter of how I *feel* about you (not how I treat you)” (Murphy and Hampton 1988, 21). Of all the current

⁵ See Bernard Williams (1973, 207-229). Williams argues that description, value, and feeling are irrevocably entangled in “thick” moral concepts.

⁶ For an explanation of emotion in terms of action readiness see Julien Deonna and Fabrice Teroni (2010, 79-80). Action is not foreign to emotion. But this is not behaviorism. It is merely to say that the relation between actions and inner states such as anger, resentment or fear, etc., is not an external, contingent relation. Inner states are expressed through behaviour, which can on occasion constitute conclusive evidence of their reality. Inner states that cannot be manifested in behaviour have as much reality as physical objects which in principle cannot be observed. For a discussion of the relation between inner states and outer actions, see John MacDowell (2009, 75-90).

definitions of forgiveness, says one writer, "...the one that enjoys anything close to a kind of consensus is that forgiveness is the overcoming of resentment" (Newberry 2001, 233). According to another:

Most contributors to the discussion agree... that forgiveness entails the forgoing of resentment. In fact, all too often philosophers see forgiveness primarily as a matter of manipulating oneself out of this unpleasant and potentially destructive emotion. (Hieronymi 2001, 529-30)

In opposition to this widely held idea about what forgiveness entails, some have suggested that forgiveness should be defined in terms of how one should be able to act, rather than in terms of how one should feel. This is substantially the position which Paul Newberry attributes to Bishop Butler, a position that is nicely summed in the words of Mrs. Dale, of Anthony Trollope's *The Last Chronicle of Barset*: "I forgive him as far as humanity can forgive. I would do him no injury" (Quoted in Newberry 2001, 233). Leo Zaibert has also suggested a view according to which A forgives B when "she deliberately refuses to try to offset B's wrongdoing" (2009, 387). This makes it possible for one to forgive but to continue to resent.

Zaibert acknowledges that "it sounds odd to say things to the tenor of 'I forgive you', but I still resent you and blame you for what you have done" (Ibid., 392). But it is actually more than just odd. Continued resentment and ill-feeling cannot be so neatly separated and boxed off from action. They can, and will, motivate actions ranging from merely giving cold shoulder to the wrongdoer, or speaking to him in a certain tone of voice, to outright punishment or retaliation. The rule is for feelings to be expressed in behaviour, not to remain hidden in one's bosom.

But even if we were to reject a close connection between feeling and acting, the oddness of the combination of forgiving and resenting still remains considerable. Try replacing the above statement, with its thin, sanitized 'resent' and 'blame', by a statement which says "I forgive you, but I still hate you on a daily basis for the despicable deed which you have done. I forgive you, but, still, the mere thought of you makes me sick." Most of us intuitively feel that such an attitude is incompatible with forgiveness. It strains credulity to think that one can truly forgive, but at the same time continue to seethe with resentment, hate, and anger. If having too *much* of these feelings is incompatible with forgiveness, then what forgiveness *ideally* requires is the overcoming of these feelings, either completely, or to a considerable degree at least. One cannot forgive and continue to resent.

If what we have said so far is a fairly accurate description of the relevance of emotion to forgiveness, then it will be true to say that forgiveness is an emotional affair from beginning to end. Resentment, anger, indignation and similar feelings play a major role, both in the conditions which make forgiveness possible to contemplate or ask for, and in what is needed to achieve forgiveness, when this is possible at all.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning and role of resentment at both junctures we shall compare resentment to pain. We begin with the situations that give rise to pain and resentment in the first place. In the case of pain, these are (typically) situations of injury. In the case of resentment, these are (again, typically) situations where one is subjected to an injustice or wrongdoing.

II. Two Analogies

In this section a case will be made for the claim that injustice is analogous to injury, whereas resentment is analogous to pain. The analogies will be developed along three distinct, but related dimensions. The first is a causal dimension where injury and injustice are viewed as *causes* that normally produce certain effects. Viewed as causes, injury and injustice

may be conceptualized as species of 'harm', subject to the understanding that this conception subsumes many basic kinds of injury and injustice, but perhaps not all.

The second dimension focuses on the *effect* or impact which injury and injustice have on us: typically, pain in the case of injury, and resentment (and other negative feelings such as indignation) in the case of injustice. As we shall see in due course, it is by no means implausible to conceptualize these effects in terms of the more general notion of "motivating negative attitudes," provided we keep in mind that no understatement is intended by use of the general term 'negative attitude'.

The third dimension has to do with function (or role) which pain and resentment play in our lives, and the significance of failures in this regard.

a. Injustice and injury

Injustice and injury are different notions. This is good news for someone seeking to draw an analogy between them. For if injury and injustice were one and the same, or very similar notions, one could hardly expect to learn much by comparing them.

There is indeed an ordinary usage which allows one to call an act *both* unjust and injurious in one and the same breath, and in a sense which could be either literal or somewhat metaphorical. If somebody succeeds in pushing someone off a cliff with an intention to kill, such an act could be called both unjust (for it is a violation of right) and injurious at the same time. So could an act of burning down somebody's property. It can be called unjust and injurious, albeit the latter in a somewhat extended, but quite important sense.

These are ordinary, acceptable uses of words. But this is not something that we want to start from. We need to build on a more solid basis, one that does not help itself to metaphors and extended usages. Therefore we choose to begin with the idea of an injury as a *physically definable occurrence*, some-

thing which happens when someone stabs someone with a knife, or when someone falls and breaks a hand or a leg. In other words, we begin with a notion of injury in the sense of *tissue damage*, which includes not only injuries caused by “unjust acts” (such as attempted murder), but also injuries caused by accidents or natural processes (such as childbirth).

What about the other part of the analogy? The notion of injustice is considerably more problematic. Fortunately, the discussion of the nature and possibility of forgiveness (which is our main goal here) does not require a deeper, or more exact understanding of injustice than what is readily available to commonsense. Thus we should not find much disagreement if we were to say that we are talking about a moral notion, one that has to do with rights and allotments of goods, and violations which may be committed in regard to them. Suffice it to say, then, unjust acts are those that violate one’s rights, or what one is entitled to. It does not matter to us whether the rights in question have to do with distribution of goods (distributive justice), or retribution (assuming that a person who is unjustly treated has a right of redress in the form of compensation or infliction of punishment on the wrongdoer).

Unlike the notion of injury, the notion of injustice necessarily involves humans affecting other humans wilfully and consciously, directly or indirectly. Unjust acts or arrangements for which human beings are responsible stand to have an impact on us which could be physical (such as when someone pushes us off a cliff) or more or less intangible (such as when someone spreads false rumours about us, or when social arrangements leave us with no opportunity to take care of ourselves). Thus an injury which is the result of a human *act* of injuring can be a subject of justice and injustice, whereas injuries which we suffer through nature or through accident are never a subject of justice and injustice.

In view of this, one may wonder whether it is possible at all to draw an analogy between injustice and injury, seeing that

the two notions belong to different domains of discourse. But I think this is possible if we can find a feature which is common to both unjust and injurious acts or occurrences. Both types of occurrence, I want to suggest, change the state of the human being (who is at the receiving end) to the worse: in both cases (subject to a certain qualification to be explained presently) it is appropriate to speak of *harm*, or *being harmed*.

The move towards subsuming the notions of injury and injustice under the notion of harm, which is what we need to get the analogy going, raises at least two objections, one on behalf of the notion of injury, the other on behalf of the notion of injustice. Let us begin with the one which is more obvious and, apparently, more effective. It could be said that injury cannot always be viewed as a kind of harm, at least when we define injury the way we have chosen to define it—namely, as *tissue damage*. Medical surgery almost invariably requires injury in this sense. So do many kinds of ritual in certain cultures. The same could be said of childbirth, natural or not. All such cases involve tissue damage, and thus could be called ‘injurious’ in the present sense of the term. But it could hardly be said that medical surgery and childbirth involve *harming* the person who undergoes them.

None of this, I believe, need entail that we have to reject the idea that injury is a kind of harm. For it could be insisted that the cases mentioned above, and many others like them, *do* involve harm, but one that is either relatively minor, temporary, well-controlled, or (more importantly) done and endured for the sake of a greater good. In fact, our willingness to think of *greater goods* (and/or *greater evils*) when we submit to such injuries is an admission that leaving the person in a non-injured condition would have been *better*, had other things been equal. But it is precisely because other things are not equal, because greater goods are to be had, and greater evils are to be avoided, that we are not inclined to think of such injuries as cases of harm. But considered *in and of itself*, that is, in abstraction from everything external

to it, a C-section, an open chest, or an amputation of a limb *is* a case of harm. It is not something that we welcome for its own sake. Not only are such cases of tissue damage painful, but they also expose the body to all kinds of dangers. This is why protective measures (such as sedation and antibiotics) are taken when somebody undergoes such kinds of injury for the sake of a greater good.

The case against subsuming injustice under the concept of harm faces other kinds of difficulties, more ill-defined and rather inconclusive. It may be doubted that the notion of a “harm of injustice” (the harm which injustice *constitutes*) is a serviceable notion, given that the notion of harm itself is relative, both in time and place, with different cultures having different ideas about what constitutes harm.

This is indeed true, but then the same could be said about injustice. We have chosen to understand the latter notion in the broad sense of “violation of right,” but the notion of “right” is as much subject to the relativity of time, place, and culture. The question which we have to ask here is whether giving an account of forgiveness requires a full account of such notions as justice, wrong, and harm. It is not obvious that this is the case. We know that a discussion of forgiveness will inevitably bring in notions of wrongs, harms, resentment, violence, and damage done to relations between people. We also know of paradigmatic examples of wrong, injustice, harm, and injury. Such knowledge goes some way towards justifying belief in cross-cultural meanings, even if there is much indeterminacy around the edges. For example, it would be perverse to wonder whether an act of imprisoning someone against their will, or forcing them to work under inhumane conditions, does or does not involve injustice or harm. Our pre-theoretical understandings of such notions should be sufficient to get the discussion of the nature and possibility of forgiveness off the ground.

Thus we propose to say that injustice resembles injury in that both can be viewed as species of harm, however precisely we may end up defining these notions. The question which

we must now deal with is the *impact* which injustice and injury have on us, and our reactions to them. As we shall see presently, the discussion stands to shed further light on (and strengthen) the analogy between injustice and injury viewed as species of harm.

b. Pain and Resentment

The analogy between injury and injustice has a companion analogy, one that holds between pain and resentment. As before, an analogy between pain and resentment will hold in virtue of some features which they have in common, features under which they can be subsumed. Before we look for such features, we make two brief remarks about how pain and resentment are related to injury and injustice, and the consequences which an analogy between pain and resentment might have for the analogy between injustice and injury.

Injury is typically associated with pain in the sense that, other things being equal, injury causes us to feel pain. Injustice (being wronged), on the other hand, typically arouses feelings of anger and resentment. The association between injustice and resentment is not unexceptionable (nor, for that matter, is the one between injury and pain), but we can in general say that suffering an injustice will be accompanied by feelings or resentment, anger, and a desire to retaliate.

Now for the consequences of establishing an analogy between pain and resentment: suppose we find a feature which pain and resentment have in common. Call this feature "F." Resentment will then be F, and so will pain. But because injury is experienced as painful, and painfulness is a kind of F, it follows that injury can also be experienced in terms of F. Similarly, because injustice is experienced as something-to-be-resented, and resentment is a kind of F, it follows that injustice, too, can be experienced in terms of F. By simple logic, it follows that both injury and injustice will involve experiences of F. Which is to say that injury and injustice will have in common, not only being species of harm, as we explained in the previous sub-section, but they will also have F

in common. This means that the analogy between injustice and injury becomes stronger, with the addition of one more feature.

Let us see then how the analogy between pain and resentment can be developed. (It will become presently clear that we have in mind a free-standing analogy, one that makes sense apart from any considerations that have to do with injustice and injury.) The analogy has two legs to stand on: *motivational role* and *function* in the life of the organism.

Pain, it is commonly accepted, is a motivating state. This means that being in pain *moves* one to do something in order to make it cease, or to shield oneself from further pain. This remains true even when we decide to *tolerate* pain because it is necessary for the sake of a greater good, such as when one submits to the extraction of a life-threatening foreign object from one's body in the absence of anaesthesia, or when the would-be mother tolerates labor pains because it means the birth of a child. Of course, pain (as it is universally acknowledged), is cognitively mediated, in the sense that it can be felt as tolerable or not depending on a variety of cognitive factors (Hardcastle 1997, 381-409; Clark 2006, 177-197; Radden 2008). But none of this gainsays the fact that pain, in and of itself, is (to use the homely but expressive description employed by Pitcher) "awful," something that we'd rather not have (Pitcher 1970, 481-492). Wincing, withdrawal, nursing, or just plain help-seeking are all proof of the fact that pain is a motivating state. Being in pain puts us in a state of mind which is "negative," or more precisely, aversive—we have a "con" attitude towards being in that state, and towards whatever we conceive to have been the cause of it.

What can be said about resentment? I think it can be viewed as a natural reaction to perceived injustice, as pain is a natural reaction to injury. The correlation between injustice and resentment has instinctive beginnings in our animal nature. Perception of danger arouses fear in the case of humans as well as animals. Similarly, threats to, and violations of vital sphere (and interests) typically arouse anger, as we

commonly observe in animals and small children. Long before children develop a sense of justice and injustice, they are able to react with anger, aggravation, as well as aggression and physical resistance, to actions which violate their physical integrity (such as provocation or physical irritation), or deprive them of something that they have gotten hold of (a toy, or a chocolate bar).⁷

In saying that resentment may be viewed as a natural reaction to perceived injustice I do not mean to imply that it is a purely natural response, which nurture has nothing to do with. A raw emotion such as anger is transformed to indignation, or moral wrath, once normative considerations of right and wrong enter the picture (Zinck 2008, 18). Similarly, one may venture to aver that a realization of one's inability to change the situation which gives rise to justified anger can subdue the feeling of indignation and turn it into resentment.

It is true that we do not understand the *physical basis* which underlies our feelings of anger and (much later in our lives) resentment, to the degree that we understand the physical basis which underlies the feeling of pain. But for purposes of developing an analogy between pain and resentment, it is sufficient for us to note that there are regular, naturally-cum-socially explainable patterns which relate our emotional states to the way we are faring in the world.

It may thus be plausible to claim that our sense of justice and injustice develops from such simple beginnings; that emotions which eventually develop into what we call feelings of resentment, or indignation are there from the start, in our first encounters with situations which we experience as in-

⁷ According to empirical research cited in Alexandra Zinck and Alber Newton (2006,17), infants begin to exhibit anger at the early age of 4 to 7 months.

volving violation, or as being attractive or repellent (Johnston 2001, 183), comfortable or distressing (Zinck 2008, 11).

More can be said about resentment, in addition to its being a development of natural (emotional) responses to invasions and violations. Resentment, of course, is not exactly like pain. It does not have the urgency characteristic of pain. But like pain, it can be more or less intense, and it is certainly cognitively mediated, perhaps to a greater degree than pain is. Its intensity corresponds to our perception of the extent of injustice, and it can increase or diminish, depending on many cognitive factors, such as apology or knowledge of extenuating circumstances. And, like pain, there are times when it is so intense as to be unbearable.

When we consider resentment in and of itself, however, it is not hard to see the motivational aspect which it embodies. It is common knowledge that resentment can, and often will, lead to doing things—revenge, retaliation, or other types of behaviour aiming at modifying the circumstances that led to it in the first place. This is not to mention expressions which fall short of being actions—expressive actions, so-called, such as tone of voice, facial expression, or picture-burning. Like pain, resentment is experienced as an unpleasant state, one that we would rather be free from. Like pain, resentment *clamours* for changing the world. It is associated with desires that have a world-to-mind “direction of fit,” meaning, they aim at the changing the world so that it “fits” what we want. It can be characterized by the negativity, the very same “con” attitude which we find in the case of pain. For these reasons, we may conclude that resenting is similar to being in pain: both are negative states of mind that motivate us to act. (See Greenspan 1992, [293] on the aversive character of certain emotions). This is point at which the present analogy is driving.

The other leg on which the analogy between pain and resentment stands has to do with the function which both play in the life of the organism. Broadly speaking, the function is one of protection. Pain is protective in a fairly obvious and straightforward sense: it motivates us to pull back from

harmful, or potentially harmful stimuli, and to seek help when the damage is done. Pain is also good at teaching lessons of what to avoid, which is why it works so well in the form of negative reinforcement.

Similar things can be attributed to resentment. Injustice, as we suggested above, can be viewed as a species of harm. Therefore, it makes a lot of sense for a creature to react to injustice with an attitude of anger or resentment, because this prepares the creature for taking measures in order to protect its interests, or whatever it sees as part of its well-being. As I suggested above, instinctive reactions to “encroachments” by outside agents on a creature’s sphere of interest include anger, aggravation, and what (in the case of humans) later develops into a full-fledged emotion of resentment. And while resentment is not as volatile as anger and some other “hot” emotions, there can be no doubt that it plays an important protective function in the life of the human organism that is capable of feeling it.⁸

The analogy between pain and resentment can also be seen indirectly in cases where there is a marked failure of function. In the case of pain, many of the fairly well understood failures are classified as pathological. The incapacity to feel pain the way normal people do is found in such cases as asymbolia, congenital pain insensitivity, as well as cases where people undergo pre-frontal lobotomy in order to relieve chronic pains. As can be expected, radical failures of the pain system lead to shortened life span, due to lack (or

⁸ The “protective” function of resentment is clearly recognized by Bishop Butler. In his Sermon “Upon Resentment and Forgiveness of Injuries,” Butler says, “The natural object or occasion of settled resentment, then, being injury..., it is easy to see, that to prevent and to remedy such injury, and the miseries arising from it, is the end for which this passion was implanted in man. It is to be considered as a weapon put into our hands by nature, against injury, injustice and cruelty” (Butler 2006, 93).

weakness) of the motivation to withdraw from, or avoid harmful stimuli which normal people feel as obnoxious. Far from being a curse, pain is in fact a blessing without which we would not be able to lead a normal life.⁹

We may not be able to say the same thing with the same degree of certainty about resentment. The notion of a pathological *psychic* condition may not sound as scientific as that of a pathological *physical* condition. It is conceivable that people who are incapable of resentment are able to lead what looks like normal lives. Spock seemed to lead a normal life—normal for a Vulcan, at least—most of the time on *Star Trek*, despite reputedly being unable to experience emotions. But the case of a person who is systematically subjected to abuse but nevertheless never shows a sign of anger and resentment is not a sight that many of us would like to see. It indicates that something had radically gone wrong with the individual in question. The individual may not have a shortened life span as an individual who suffers from congenital pain insensitivity, but there can be no doubt that his or her fortunes in the world will decline, that he or she will not fulfil whatever potential they might have otherwise had.

⁹ See the lengthy and touching narrative which Austen Clark quotes about Tanya, a child born with congenital pain insensitivity (Clark 2006, 93): “Tanya, now eleven, was living a pathetic existence in an institution. She had lost both legs to amputation: she had refused to wear proper shoes and that, coupled with her failure to limp or shift weight when standing (because she felt no discomfort), had eventually put intolerable pressure on her joints. Tanya had also lost most of her fingers. Her elbows were constantly dislocated. She suffered the effects of chronic sepsis on her hands and amputation stumps. Her tongue was lacerated and badly scarred from her nervous habit of chewing it.”

III. Forgiveness and healing

If injustice is analogous to injury, and resentment is analogous to pain, questions will naturally arise about what happens after one is injured and experiences pain, and what happens after one suffers an injustice and experiences resentment. Are there ways in which such states do, or can, come to an end somehow, instead of continuing indefinitely?

Before we attempt to answer this question, we should note that there is a sense in which neither injury nor injustice can be undone. There is a certain kind of irreversibility that is characteristic of things that happen and become part of history, an irreversibility which we colloquially describe as “not being able to turn back the clock.” This applies to injury and injustice in a simple way. Injuries often leave scars. It is also often the case that the injured body, or part of it, never goes back to what it was before the injury—it aches, or is more fragile. Beyond this, injuries leave painful memories, which remain alive in the mind for a long time, or are simply never forgotten. Similarly, an unjust act may leave a bodily scar, if it is literally an act of injuring, but it will anyway register in consciousness and memory as a wrongful act which we suffered. Some people may find the notion of “psychological scars” too metaphorical, but surely we must be allowed to speak of long-lasting psychological effects of many unjust acts. Think of the psychological consequences of rape, incest, violent robbery, and betrayal. Such acts are not just done and finished, but often leave the victim psychologically changed for an indefinite period of time. There will be the painful memory, the occasional nightmare, and the uncomfortable sense of *déjà vu* in certain situations, or just the sheer inability to function as well as before.

I do not introduce these similarities between injury and injustice in order to add to the analogies which we have already pointed out. I mention these as part of laying the ground for discussing what may be the more important and hopeful aftermaths of injury and injustice.

In the case of injury, this is, as might be expected, none other than *healing*. The body recovers. The pain ceases. One is able to walk, to work, or otherwise function as before. In some cases as good as before, in some cases not as good. But there is no question that in most cases of injury, healing can, and does take place. Integrity of the body is restored, and, with it, the ability to function more or less normally in relation to other bodies.

Forgiveness, too, I want to suggest, may be viewed as a kind of healing. There are a number of considerations that suggest this. They are related to each other without being equally important, or equally telling. I shall begin by discussing the most conspicuous consideration, one which is easiest to understand. It is based on the analogy between pain and resentment.

Forgiveness, we have been assuming, entails the overcoming of resentment and other retributive emotions, such as anger, hate, and the desire for retaliation. Taken in and of itself, cessation of resentment *is* a good thing. For it is well known, and stands in no need of argument, that feelings of resentment and anger, and the constant nursing of a desire to get even, are *disordering* kinds of emotions (not withstanding their defensive and protective functions which we have sufficiently acknowledged). To harbor them for a long time at a certain degree of intensity can damage one's psychic health as well as one's physical well-being, not to mention harm relationships to other people, and the prospect for happiness after injustice. In a way, such affective states are not much healthier than physical pain, which is well-known for disrupting one's whole being, physical as well as psychological.

Cessation of pain, in and of itself, is also a good thing, and for reasons which we have already considered. But more importantly for the purpose of establishing an analogy between forgiveness and healing, *cessation of pain is also involved in the healing of injuries*. Typically, when an injury heals, it ceases to hurt. This is not to say that whenever pain ceases,

an injury heals. Ceasing to hurt is not a sufficient condition for healing. But this does not gainsay the fact that, normally, an injury that has healed ceases to hurt. Ceasing to hurt is part of healing in that we would not consider an injury healed (at least on a considered view of what healing is) if the subject continues to experience pain in connection with it.

Because resentment is analogous to pain, it is plausible to think that ceasing to resent is *like* ceasing to hurt. But since ceasing to hurt is part of healing, it becomes tempting to think that *forgiveness is analogous to healing*, because it involves the cessation of something which is analogous to pain, namely, resentment.

This does not yet lay a firm foundation for an analogy between forgiveness and healing, because (it could be said) ceasing to resent, or ceasing hurt, may be part of being (or becoming) completely *oblivious* to whatever it is that caused one to resent or to hurt. After all, we do not want to say that amnesia is analogous to forgiveness, or that general anaesthesia is analogous to healing. But this does not undermine the proposed analogy. Everything is similar to, and different from, an indefinite number of things in an indefinite number ways. Before we abandon the analogy, we should see if it can be strengthened.

The very shortcoming we have just alluded to shows us what we need to do in order to strengthen the analogy. Despite the importance to ceasing to hurt, healing involves *more* than ceasing to hurt, as we shall presently see. Forgiveness follows suit by requiring *more* than just ceasing to resent.

What does healing involve, in addition to ceasing to hurt? The most important thing that healing involves is restoring the body to a previous condition of wholeness and integrity. The broken bone is re-joined, and resumes its function of propping up the body in the usual way; the separated flesh closes up, and resumes its function of protecting the organs underneath it. True, the restoration may not be complete, for in the case of serious injuries, one may not be able to func-

tion as well as before. But for most practical purposes, we can say that after healing, the person (the body) goes about its business *as if* there had been no injury.

Something similar can be said about forgiveness. In fact, much of what contemporary writers say about the psychological significance of wrongdoing and forgiveness fits very well with what we have been saying. Consider, first, the kind of harm which wrongdoing is. It *has* been referred to as “injury.” According to Murphy:

Intentional wrongdoing insults us and attempts (sometimes successfully) to degrade us—and thus it involves a kind of injury that is not merely tangible and sensible. It is moral injury, and we care about such injuries.
(Murphy and Hampton 1988, 25)

The use of the term ‘injury’ in connection with injustice and wrongdoing is well established. We find it in Lucy Allais (2008, 41), Murphy and Hampton (1988, 44ff), Jesse Couenhoven (2010, 150ff), William Young (1998, 108), Paul Newberry (2001, 235), Jerome Neu (2004, 173), and Alice Maclachlan (2010, 428), among others, including Butler, of course (2006, 93). The choice of words seems natural, not because moral injuries cause us to bleed, or because they break our bones (though sometimes they do precisely this), but because they interfere with normal functioning—they render us unable to go about as usual. They cause a kind of malfunction, a breakdown, big or small, in the way we deal with the world. Therefore calling them injuries, I think, is well-justified. It also facilitates drawing an analogy between forgiveness and healing.

Keeping in mind the analogy between injustice and injury, and the idea that the healing (of injuries) involves restoration to a previous condition of wholeness and integrity, the proposal to think about forgiveness in terms of healing begins to

make sense. This is because forgiveness *also* involves repairing, mending, healing, or, as we shall say here, *restoring*. Some writers speak of “wiping the slate clean,” which, to Allais, is “heart of forgiveness” (Allais 2008, 33). Others speak of “re-establishing” the sense of self-worth that one had prior to the offence (Verbin 2010, 617). According to Hampton, the resenter must conquer, in the sense of “transcend,” the fear that that “the insulting message in the harmful action is correct” (Hampton 1988, 148). All of this can be understood, and understood well, in term of the notion of *restoration*.

Restoration can take place at either one of two levels, the *personal* or the *interpersonal*. The first is that of the victim of wrongdoing. Writers who view forgiveness as an essentially *intra-psychic* event that need not involve the offender will treat forgiveness as something that restores, or (at least) involves restoring the *victim's* psyche to a previous condition of wholeness and integrity. Something of this kind is hinted at in Hampton's statement that “The first stage of the forgiving process...involves *regaining* one's confidence in one's own worth despite the immoral action challenging it” (Murphy and Hampton 1988, 83; emphasis add). The restorative dimension is evident here. The offence undermines our confidence in ourselves, but, as we move towards forgiveness, we *regain* that which we had lost; we are *restored* to the way we were.

Hampton wonders whether an act of faith in oneself might not be needed to accomplish this (1988, 148). Others offer a cognitive explanation of how this can happen. Following Roberts's view of emotion as “concernful construal of one's condition” (1995, 303), Verbin claims that the victim has a free choice to make between viewing herself in terms of the offence (in which case she will see her status as reduced), or in terms of her achievements, and how she is valued by people around her, etc. If she follows the second path, then she might well overcome the resentment, which was set off by belief in reduced status in the first place (2010, 608). The victim's psyche reverts to the condition it was in before the of-

fence. It is *as if* she had not been wronged, or morally injured. (The same “as if” notion which we encountered in the case of physical healing is equally applicable here.)

According to Verbin, a victim who ceases to resent thereby bestows forgiveness (Ibid., 609). But she can continue to think that the offender is a morally rotten person with whom she does not want to associate (Ibid., 614). Many philosophers believe this does not qualify as forgiveness, because forgiveness involves an attitudinal change towards the offender. It is, I think, plausible to believe that forgiveness does involve such a change. For if forgiveness were a purely intrapsychic event, then there would be no reason why an end of resentment that is brought about by *any* means should not count as forgiveness. Verbin’s type of cognitive therapy is not necessarily preferable to behaviour modification therapy, or the taking of an anti-resentment pill, should one be manufactured one day.

Viewing forgiveness as *inter*-psychic takes (or at least begins to take) forgiveness beyond the realm of the psychological to the social. It allows us as a first step to think in terms of the *attitude of the victim towards the offender*, and then (inevitably) how that attitude will be translated in terms of relations and other modes of behaviour. Here, the phrase ‘wiping the slate clean’ is very much at home. There is a restoration to a previous condition of wholeness and integrity. But it is not the psyche of the *victim* that we are primarily thinking of now, but the *relation* between the victim and the offender.

A relation between two individuals is in the mind before it is in the world. Here, according to Allais, the victim decides not to let her feelings towards the offender be affected by the wrongdoing. Feeling-wise, she is supposed to feel *as if* no offence had been committed. Viewing the offender in the light of how things were *before* the offence means readiness to resume relations.

A few paragraphs back we said that the restoration which forgiveness involves can take place at one of two levels, the personal or the interpersonal. The second level includes so-

cial relations in a general way, but one can also focus on the particular relation between the victim and the offender. Both aspects are worth considering on their own.

With reference to social relations in general, it is not far-fetched to say that every act of wrongdoing constitutes an attack on their wholeness and integrity. The social fabric of interpersonal relations undergoes damage whenever an act of injustice is committed. If it can happen to *her*, then it can happen to *you*: this is how a wrongdoing appears from the perspective of social relations. Conceived in broad terms, wrongdoing constitutes an attack on how people relate to each other. (It is hard to conceive how human association can take place if people are constantly being unjust to one another.)

Viewed from the perspective of social relations, forgiveness can be seen as a personal effort at repairing the damage. The victim, in wiping the slate clean, signifies her readiness to re-enter the scene of social interaction with good will, just *as if* she had not been victimized. For example, she will not let the wrong stand in way of her trusting people, or entering into new relationships. She will not let the memory of the wrong color her perceptions of what people are doing. In some cases, it could be hoped that the victim will resume normal relations with the offender.

This brings us to the second aspect of interpersonal restoration, where the focus is one particular social relation, the one between the victim and the offender. Initially, one might think that forgiveness involves no healing as far as the *wrongdoer* is concerned. But this is not true. It is often the case that an offender realizes the wrong he has committed. He is genuinely repentant. He blames himself. He feels guilty. He *holds it up against himself* that he did this or that. So now he needs forgiveness of two parties, it seems: himself and the victim. Self-forgiveness (which must be distinguished from mere self-indulgence) can be aided by the knowledge that one has been forgiven by the victim herself. As Hampton says:

...a victim's forgiveness of his wrongdoer can communicate the same message, so that the wrongdoer may reason, "If he can see enough in me to welcome me back, then maybe I am not such a hideous person after all. (1988, 87)

This makes it possible for the wrongdoer to forgive himself. He wipes the slate clean on his own behalf, and is thus restored to a previous condition of wholeness and integrity. In a more subtle way, the quality forgiveness may be even more blessed than the quality of mercy has been said to be.

The question of restoring relations between victim and offender in the social setting which was witness to the offence compels one to think about conditions that may have to be met before this happens. The healing aspect that has to do with social relations in general and the relation between victim and offender in particular, depends not only on the forgiver, but on the offender as well. The offender may remain unrepentant, ever so ready to do wrong again. Or it may be that there is no good side to the offender no matter how hard we look. In that case I would say that forgiveness can still take place, but its healing effect will not extend far beyond the forgiver, and the example which he sets for all those who care to see. Still, what forgiveness intends, its *telos* as it were, remains unchanged: according to Roberts, it is "reconciliation—restoration and maintenance of a relationship of acceptance" (1995, 299). The forgiver is *ready* to resume relations with the offender. The damaged social fabric is *ready* to be repaired. But it is not unconditional. The offender has to meet certain conditions, which include genuine repentance and acknowledgment of responsibility, among other things perhaps.

Consideration of what the offender can do in order to facilitate resumption of relations, even the very event of forgiveness itself, finally brings us to the *third* (and last) consid-

eration which speaks in favour of an analogy between forgiveness and healing.

Injuries, as we know, often require *nursing* before they heal. Broken bones need to be re-aligned, cuts need to be bandaged, bleeding needs to be stopped, and so on.¹⁰ If healing can be *aided* by nursing, we can ask if something similar applies to forgiveness. Of course, it is possible that sheer moral virtue may suffice to bring forgiveness about. In other words, it may be possible for a person, out of sheer goodness, to forgive a wrong however immense it is. (Perhaps this is what Jesus of Nazareth did on the Cross.) But it must be acknowledged that more is needed in the case ordinary human beings who suffer injustice. And indeed we can think of many things that facilitate forgiveness, at least in cases where the victim's psyche has not been irreparably damaged by the injustice. Here the offender seems to be the star of the show. Much depends on the offender. Sincere apology, repentance, restitution, and reparation help bring about forgiveness. Apology and repentance have special significance. In Murphy's analysis of forgiveness, the repentant and apologetic wrongdoer takes back the statement, implicit in her wrongdoing, that "I am up here, and you are down there." This does not guarantee, but it can help the victim regain lost pride, and a sense of importance. It is like nursing a wound back to recovery.

We can also think of other kinds of nursing which the victim, and others, can engage in. Public affirmations of value, moral support, and special treatment, can help the victim reach a stage of rising above the offence, and the offender. Certain kinds of therapy can also play a role in bringing re-

¹⁰ I do not mean to take this to extremes. It will be acknowledged in the last section that healing is basically a natural process. Wounded animals often heal without receiving much by way of nursing, unless one takes wound-licking (cleaning) and resting as forms of self-nursing.

sentment under control, or getting rid of it altogether. A cognitive type of therapy might enable the victim to see the wrong doer as a fellow human being who has done wrong; to see wrongdoing as an inevitable part of human life, where one is cast in the role of wrongdoer as frequently as one is cast in the role of victim. One thinks, "there, but for the grace of God, go I." Dwelling on such considerations in a true philosophical spirit may curb one's enthusiasm to cast the first stone.

IV. Objections and replies

We have now explored a number of systematic similarities between injury, injustice, pain and resentment, leading up to the proposal to understand forgiveness in terms of healing. The structural similarities observed at the different levels are too numerous to be lacking in significance.

But the objection will inevitably be raised: there *are* numerous differences between the concepts invoked in our discussion which may render the analogies weak. Unlike an act of injustice, an injury is something that happens in the *natural order*. It is up to the body, as a system of organic processes, how and when an injury heals. Nobody tells blood to coagulate, thereby closing a bleeding wound. Nobody tells the body to replace burnt-off skin, or to sprout a new fingernail in place of one that has been badly damaged. Healing processes have a natural, almost mechanical aspect about them. What *can* happen *will* happen, barring unusual circumstances, such as when the body is robbed of its ability to heal—for example, a wound is so severe that the organism bleeds to death.

Over and above *naturalness* of healing, but intimately connected to it, is the fact that healing fails to give rise to *normative* questions. It makes little or no sense to ask whether it is *right* for a broken bone to mend or not. But it makes a lot of sense to ask if one *ought* to forgive or not. It may be that there are wrongs that are ought not to be forgiven, and one that should to be.

In these ways, it will be said, forgiveness seems different. It is not a physical occurrence or a material process. It is an affective/cognitive affair which takes place in the realm of meanings, intentions, reasons and feelings. There is no air of inevitability about it. One who has been wronged may or may not forgive. One contemplates, agonizes, and engages in emotional struggle. But forgiveness is not an inevitable result. It seems to be a *voluntary* action which one may or may not choose to do.

Nor, it could also be claimed, does the pain-resentment analogy fair any better. Pain is a physiological process subserved in the Central Nervous System in fairly well-understood ways, in function as well as malfunction. Resentment, on the other hand is a psychic affair, one that cannot be understood in physiological terms. It tends to be much more cognitively mediated than pain, and it is under our control to a much greater degree than pain is. Like forgiveness, it gives rise to normative questions which pain cannot give rise to. The question "is it right for him to continue to resent?" makes sense, but there is little sense to be found in the question "is it right for him to continue to feel a toothache?"

But these considerations need not mean that forgiveness cannot be meaningfully compared to healing. To begin with, it is not completely true that normative questions are out of place in the cases of injury and pain. Turning from question of "right" to questions of "good," one can certainly ask "Would it be good for the injury to heal, and for the pain to cease?" These are meaningful normative questions which we tend to answer in the affirmative, because we consider well-being to be a human good. Nor is it true that healing is invariably a purely physiological process, at least in the case of human beings. In many cases, there *is* such a thing as having or losing the will to live, which can have an impact on healing. Psycho-somatic illness and wellness are well-attested phenomena.

Besides, all analogies involve similarities and differences. One does not make an analogy between two perfectly similar things. The real question is whether the similarities are significant enough to render the analogy enlightening, and whether the differences are relevant in a way that weakens the analogy.

Let us consider what, if anything, the differences prove. Recall the similarities between healing and forgiveness: both involve cessation of essentially aversive states; both involve restoration to a previous condition of wholeness, and normal function; and lastly, there is an element of nursing or caring-for that plays a role in both cases.

With these similarities in mind, we can ask: what does it matter that, in the case of (physical) healing, but not forgiveness, the healing process can come about naturally—as a matter of what the laws of nature dictate? Surely, we can imagine that there are two kinds of cases: cases where the restoration is brought about by natural means in the natural realm, and cases where restoration is brought about by other means—ones that involve moral reasoning, emotional struggle, faith, or whatever. There may also be two ways of caring-for, or aiding: one involving bandaging wounds, and one involving giving assurance or moral support. And (finally) there may be two ways in which aversive states may come to an end: one takes a pill, or one comes to realize that one should not feeling that way.

One may continue to insist that the similarity we are trying to capture by talking about “aversive states” (for example) is superficial. It could be claimed that talk of “two ways” in which states could come to an end is uncalled for, because there isn’t some one thing that can come to an end in one of two ways. This criticism can be extended to the other two aspects of the comparison: neither restoration, nor nursing, it could be said, is a substantive notion of something that is common to such different things as suffering a physical injury and suffering an injustice.

Perhaps there is an ultimate clash of intuitions when it comes to thinking about the pairs: injustice, injury; pain, resentment; forgiveness, healing. One can be too impressed by (or one can be of two minds about) the differences to be found between members of each pair. The differences are undeniable. But then so are the similarities which, as we saw, can be elaborated, rather intuitively and naturally, along many dimensions. Add to that the fact that ordinary modes of thinking and speech are on the side of the analogies. We speak of injuries that are physical, psychological or moral (Cf. Murphy and Hampton [1988, 25] and others mentioned above). Pain and resentment are uncomfortable, with some emotional states being every bit as “awful” as pains. Talk of “healing” is also not out of place, as when we speak of people who have been psychologically traumatized by acts of wrongdoing or injustice.

There is thus no call for us to invent new words so that we can call things by different names in the present case. That would only make it easy for us to overlook meaningful analogies and similarities between injury, injustice, pain, and resentment. It is enough for us to acknowledge the existence and importance of differences while insisting on relevant similarities. If we do this, analogy between forgiveness and healing will be sustained.

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