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## **Forgiveness and Reconciliation<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

Forgiveness and reconciliation are central to moral life; after all, everyone will be wronged by others and will then face the dual decisions of whether to forgive and whether to reconcile. It is therefore important that we have a clear analysis of each, as well as a thoroughly articulated understanding of how they relate to and differ from each other. Forgiveness has received considerably more attention in the Western philosophical literature than has reconciliation. In this paper I aim to give it the attention it deserves and develop an account of interpersonal reconciliation. On my view reconciliation is fundamentally bilateral (whereas forgiveness is fundamentally unilateral). It entails transparency and agreement between the wrongdoer and the victim as to the nature of a past wrong or set of wrongs. And, it requires that moral repair be made between the two parties (which entails that both parties bear proper attitudes towards each other). In making my case I contrast reconciliation with toleration and collaboration, in order to demonstrate that reconciliation also entails forgiveness (though forgiveness does not entail reconciliation).

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## Introduction

Forgiveness and reconciliation are central to moral life; after all, everyone will be wronged by others and will then face the dual decisions of whether to forgive and whether to reconcile. It is therefore important that we have a clear analysis of each, as well as a thoroughly articulated understanding of how they relate to and differ from each other.

Forgiveness has received considerably more attention in the Western philosophical literature than has reconciliation. In this paper I aim to give it the attention it deserves and develop an account of interpersonal reconciliation. On my view reconciliation is fundamentally bilateral (whereas forgiveness is fundamentally unilateral). It entails transparency and agreement between the wrongdoer and the victim as to the nature of a past wrong or set of wrongs. And, it requires that moral repair be made between the two parties (which entails that both parties bear proper attitudes towards each other). In making my case I'll contrast reconciliation with toleration and collaboration, in order to demonstrate that reconciliation also entails forgiveness (though forgiveness does not entail reconciliation).

Two caveats before I begin: first, I'll focus here just on interpersonal forgiveness and reconciliation, rather than political or social practices that obtain between groups. Second, I am not here arguing when, if ever, a victim *ought* to forgive or reconcile with the person who wronged them (though I will explore some of the reasons that might justify doing both). Instead, I am just analyzing what forgiveness and reconciliation are.

## Part I: Forgiveness

Forgiveness is both a practice and an accomplishment – both an action that you undertake and an outcome that you achieve. The traditional or “classical” view of forgiveness says that it is the partially active forgoing of negative emotions for moral reasons.<sup>2</sup> I will briefly unpack that definition.

### Emotions

First, consider the claim that forgiveness involves forgoing a moral emotion. The classical view focuses on resentment or moral anger; to forgive is (in part) to give up your anger towards someone who wronged you.<sup>3</sup> Resentment is not merely one of the passions, arising within us without reference to any particular cause. It is born in response not just to harm, but to wrongful harm (which entails that the harm was committed by an agent or collection of agents, rather than being caused by a naturally occurring event). In short, I feel resentment because some agent or a collection of agents treated me wrongly.

Philosophers writing about anger more generally have argued<sup>4</sup> that it is one method by which we are able to manifest and express self-respect (even if only to ourselves). When I become angry with you for wronging me, I communicate that I am a person of value who deserves to be treated well rather than badly. Furthermore, as P.F. Strawson argued<sup>5</sup>, anger is

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<sup>2</sup> Murphy J.1988.

<sup>3</sup> Butler 1846; Murphy J. 1988; French 1982; McGary 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Frye 1983; Spelman 1989; MacLachlan 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Strawson 1974.

sometimes a method by which I communicate the claim that my wrongdoer is a moral agent rather than a naturally occurring event; I might be angry that a lightning bolt burned down my house but I am not angry with the lightning bolt in the same way that I would be angry with the arsonist who caused the same result. What that means is that feeling moral anger is also a way to manifest and express respect for a wrongdoer, (though respect is not the same as admiration) in so far as I thereby recognize that they are a person who could appropriately be held to a higher moral standard.

Some have argued that the classical view of forgiveness is too narrow and exclusive, as it precludes the possibility that forgiving can sometimes involve giving up other negative emotions as well. Alice MacLachlan, Uma Narayan, and Margaret Walker have all argued that the classical view is incomplete and overemphasizes anger at the expense of other moral emotions or reactive attitudes, such as fear, disappointment, contempt, or humiliation<sup>6</sup>.

I agree that we ought to revise the classical definition to be more inclusive in just this way. What's important for my purposes, though, is that forgiveness can be accomplished by only one party. If forgiveness is about giving up negative emotions or reactive attitudes that I feel towards my wrongdoer, and if I can do that inner work independently of the efforts of others, then forgiveness is fundamentally unilateral<sup>7</sup>; it is something that I can do by myself (at least in principle, if not always in practice). And, since I can feel anger or other moral emotions without others knowing it (if I do not express and communicate my hard feelings to others), I can also forgive without anyone else knowing that I have done so. Reconciliation, on the other hand, is fundamentally bilateral; it always requires both parties, or so I will argue.

### **Forgiveness Is Either Rational or Irrational**

Whether you ought to forgive depends on reasons; it can either be rational or irrational to forgive. A variety of reasons can justify forgiving (as well as choosing not to forgive) in any particular case. If you commit a minor wrong and then work to repair the harm that you've done, you might deserve to be forgiven.<sup>8</sup> Desert becomes less likely in cases of more serious harm, where other reasons better justify forgiveness. For instance, you might benefit yourself by forgoing hard feelings; anger can burn someone up, sadness can enervate, fear can immobilize. All of those are costly outcomes that victims of wrongdoing sometimes bear, and so giving up those feelings can be of real benefit.<sup>9</sup> Forgiving can also benefit compassionate others in the victim's life who suffer with them. And, forgiving can benefit the wrongdoer by releasing them from that status and opening up the space for them to move forward in their moral life.<sup>10</sup>

Some philosophers have denied that we ever bear self-regarding duties.<sup>11</sup> Others grant that

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<sup>6</sup> MacLachlan 2009, 190. See also Narayan 1997 and Walker 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Watkins 2015; Griswold 2007; Holmgren 1993; and Pettigrove 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Some disagree that forgiveness is justified by desert in this way. For instance, Margaret Holmgren agrees that forgiveness can be deserved but denies that forgiveness has anything to do with the wrongdoer's reparative efforts. In virtue of the ability to separate the act from the actor, she argues that unconditional, genuine forgiveness is required of us in all cases. Holmgren 1993, 350-351.

<sup>9</sup> Norlock 2008, 58-64 and 85-90.

<sup>10</sup> Holmgren 1993; Govier 1999; Harvey 1993.

<sup>11</sup> Singer 1959, 203.

we can owe things to ourselves, but deny that the self-regarding duty to increase our own welfare can serve as an appropriate moral justification for forgiveness.<sup>12</sup> For instance, Jeremy Watkins has argued<sup>13</sup> that giving up anger doesn't count as forgiveness if the motivation to do so is self-interest or concern for other third parties who are affected by your anger. Pursuing both lines of argument is beyond the scope of this paper, and I here just take it for granted that the promotion of a person's welfare (regardless of who they are) is always morally salient (though it might not be the most salient feature of any particular situation). If we do in fact owe it to ourselves to increase our welfare, and if holding on to hard feelings decreases our welfare (or the welfare of those that love us and care about us) then sometimes the reason we ought to forgive is not because the wrongdoer deserves it, and not because it will help them to become a better person, but because it will improve the life of the victim or those who love the victim. Each of these types of reasons can trump the others, depending on the case. And, sometimes those very same types of reasons might recommend against forgiving.

### **Forgiveness is Active**

Finally, forgiveness is partially active; it is something that I at least partially do rather than something that simply happens to me. I recognize that I'm angry with you for a way that you wronged me and then I work to give up that anger because I think I have good reason to do so.

Again, that means that forgiveness is fundamentally internal to the agent. Though we often require the help of others to do that inner work (therapists, loved ones, religious leaders, and sometimes wrongdoers themselves), on my view forgiveness cannot be reduced to ritual, nor is it a speech act or performative utterance; me saying, "I forgive you" is not the same thing as me having actually forgiven you (as is made evident by times when someone has claimed to forgive you, but whom you later discover still harbors deep anger towards you).

Forgiveness is not essentially aimed at reconciliation with the wrongdoer; I *might* choose to try to forgive you because I want to reconcile with you, but I might also want to forgive you because doing so would, in itself, improve my life; sometimes holding on to anger or other hard feelings can be costly, even devastating, and I might want to let go of those feelings towards you but not want to reconcile with you.

That forgiveness is fundamentally about letting go of hard feelings towards one who wronged you does not mean that it is an all or nothing affair; instead, forgiveness can come in degrees. If a victim has given up some of their hard feelings towards their wrongdoer, they have partially forgiven. In cases of serious wrongdoing it is often impossible to fully let go of one's hard feelings and there is no guarantee that complete forgiveness can be achieved, but that shouldn't obscure the fact that if I am less angry with you today than I was a year ago, I have partially forgiven you.

### **Should 'Forgiveness' Be More Inclusive?**

Before moving on to analyze reconciliation, it is worth noting that there are alternative definitions of forgiveness that one might have good reason to adopt. For instance, Walker has not only argued (as stated earlier) that we should understand forgiveness more inclusively to apply to

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<sup>12</sup> Murphy J. 1988, 24.

<sup>13</sup> Watkins 2015, 24.

other reactive attitudes than resentment, but also that forgiveness itself should be understood to mean different things in different contexts, including “restoring relationships” and “setting a wrong to rest in the past”.<sup>14</sup> One might ask, then, whether it makes sense to employ a restrictive definition of forgiveness rather than a more inclusive one that moves beyond the inner life of the victim, and is instead based on the state of the relationship between the victim and wrongdoer. Just as we ought to be more inclusive with regard to the attitudes and emotions one might forgo in forgiving, so too should we be more inclusive with regard to the actual practice of forgiveness itself.

It is important that our terms not only correspond to and cohere with philosophical intuition, but also match up with actual usage, out in the world. And, surely it is the case that in ordinary language we use the term ‘forgive’ in a variety of ways; we talk of forgiving debts and mean that the debtor is released from the obligation to repay what they owe. And, sometimes we say things like, “All is forgiven” to mean not just that the victim no longer harbors hard feelings towards the wrongdoer, but that the relationship itself has been repaired and that all is well between the relevant parties.

Despite that common usage, there are good reasons to hold on to a more exclusive conception of forgiveness, the most important of which is that doing so allows us to distinguish between forgiveness and reconciliation. As an illustration of the various factors that make that distinction important, I will rely on several examples from the “Not Alone” public art project.<sup>15</sup> The “Not Alone” quilt runs the length of several city blocks. It is composed of squares made by many different contributors and features the testimony of survivors of sexual assault. As a way of illuminating what is entailed and is not entailed by the classical concept of forgiveness, I will focus on three anonymous quotes in particular. The first square says simply:

*“I forgive you, I forgive you, I forgive you, I forgive you, I forgive you, I forgive you, I forgive you, I forgive you, I forgive you, I forgive you, I forgive you, I forgive you, I forgive you, Me.”*

Though there are different ways of interpreting the author’s meaning, when using the classical definition of forgiveness, two things come to light. The first is that it is clearly important to the particular survivor of sexual assault who authored the panel that they have given up hard feelings toward the person who wronged them. It is also clearly the case that the author’s statement does not entail that they would be willing, for example, to have the wrongdoer in their life, to normalize or restore relations with the wrongdoer, to make up with the wrongdoer, or to work towards some shared goal with the wrongdoer – all common understandings of reconciliation.<sup>16</sup> That is not to say that the survivor of assault would not have good reason to do any or all of those things; it’s possible that they might. The point is that the question of whether they have forgiven is distinct from whether they have reconciled or ought to reconcile; the one tells us nothing definitive about the other because though one might have decisive reason to forgive in the classical sense, one might also have decisive reason not to reconcile.

We ought to be careful not to conflate the inner work that the classical account of forgiveness entails with the outwardly observable, fundamentally collaborative work of restoring

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<sup>14</sup> Walker 2006, 153.

<sup>15</sup> I received permission to quote passages from the Not Alone Quilt by email on May 18, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Narayan 1997; Walker 2006; Radzick and Murphy C. 2015.

relationships. The reason why is that it is important that we recognize the needs of victims to be able to forgive on their own, without necessarily having to rely on anyone, especially the one who wronged them. Consider another quote from the “Not Alone” quilt:

*“Forgiveness has nothing to do with absolving a criminal of their crime. It has everything to do with relieving oneself of the burden of being a victim – letting go of the pain and transforming oneself from victim to survivor. - C.R. Strahan”*

This author’s use of ‘forgiveness’ is more transparent. They are clearly not concerned with how the wrongdoer feels about being forgiven or what that would do for their relationship (if they continue to maintain one at all). Instead, the author is concerned with lessening the pain they experience and with thinking about how they will move forward in their emotional life, which is not the same thing as being concerned with how they will move forward in relationship with the person who wronged them.

At the same time, that should not be taken to imply that everyone always ought to try to forgive for self-regarding reasons. Consider one final quote from the “Not Alone” quilt:

*“We were both in eighth grade when he started to abuse me.*

*I don’t believe that I have to forgive or forget to lead a happy, healthy life. It is over a decade since the last time I was raped, and I am still angry, and I have not forgiven him. I have no interest in forgiving him. There is nothing that he did that was justified or okay.*

*I don’t only hold him accountable for what happened, but our society that allowed it to happen.”*

My aim here is not to determine precisely when anyone ought to respond one way or the other but to make the point that negative emotions are the types of things that can be desirable or not, given the particular individual’s constitution, goals, and context. Insofar as we all owe it to ourselves to care for ourselves, whether someone ought to forgo those emotions (whether they ought to forgive in the classical sense) depends in part on how doing so will affect their welfare.

So, one reason to retain the classical definition’s focus on the inner life of the one who forgives (though not its exclusive focus on anger as the sole moral emotion one gives up in forgiving) is precisely because doing so can matter enormously to actual victims of wrongdoing and because it can be of real benefit to victims to be equipped with the conceptual resources to distinguish between, on one hand, letting go of their hard feelings, and on the other, being in relationship with the one who wronged them. I will return to this point (about the need to be able to separate from one’s wrongdoer) in the penultimate section of this paper.

## **Part II: Reconciliation**

As I have been arguing, forgiveness is “first and foremost an interpersonal response”<sup>17</sup>, and one that has enjoyed considerable attention in the Western philosophical literature.

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<sup>17</sup> Watkins 2015, 20.

Reconciliation, on the other hand, has both received less attention, and has been analyzed primarily as a political response between social groups (rather than a moral exchange between a particular victim and a wrongdoer). In what follows, I aim to offer an interpersonal analysis of reconciliation.

At its most basic, reconciliation is taken to be about rebuilding (or building for the first time) a healthy relationship between two people in the wake of wrongdoing.<sup>18</sup> But, that definition is too thin. In order to flesh it out, consider these colloquial understandings of reconciliation (which are reflected in the literature on political reconciliation). Reconciliation is:

- being able to coexist and not do violence to each other;<sup>19</sup>
- the normalizing of relations;<sup>20</sup>
- building or rebuilding trust;<sup>21</sup>
- being able to get along with each other to work towards some collective end.<sup>22</sup>

The trouble with each of these accounts of reconciliation is that they lead to problematic relations between parties that we shouldn't think have reconciled. Have you and I reconciled if I'm simply able to be around you without doing violence to you? Or, consider a relatively powerless victim, who, should they come to have more power would do violence to their wrongdoer. The mere fact that the victim doesn't act violently towards their wrongdoer is surely not enough to say that they have reconciled.

Someone defending this account of reconciliation might agree and modify it to say that reconciliation is not just about whether people happen not to be able to do violence to each other. The defender of the view might then make the account counterfactual and say that two people have reconciled if they wouldn't do violence to each other even if they could. But this reply also is unsatisfactory, since someone might be a member of a religious or cultural tradition that strongly encourages pacifism. I might not want to do violence to you, not because you and I have reconciled, but because I am simply committed to peace. In that way, my choice not to do violence to you isn't born from anything between us, but wholly from within me. Even though you are able to trust that I will treat you respectfully and without violence, that isn't what we are after when we claim that two people have reconciled, but is instead the result of a general principled commitment on my part. Instead, what I do in such a case is *tolerate* you. Because of my commitment to principle, I choose not to enact violence towards you, but we have not reconciled.

Next, consider a divorced couple that continues to work together in order to raise their child. That shared goal is the only reason they engage with each other at all (if they didn't have that shared goal they wouldn't be a part of each other's lives). Indeed, they have no more reconciled than mortal enemies who would do violence to each other but who must work together to escape a dangerous situation. What we do in such a case is *collaborate* or work as allies, but alliances are contingent on their having a shared goal and once that goal is accomplished (or is no longer possible) the alliance itself disappears.

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<sup>18</sup> Watkins 2015, 21; Murphy C. 2010, 8; Radzik 2009, 80.

<sup>19</sup> Watkins 2015, 22.

<sup>20</sup> Poe 2007, 89.

<sup>21</sup> Govier and Verwoerd 2002, 185.

<sup>22</sup> Watkins 2015, 22.

Toleration and collaboration resemble reconciliation but are importantly different; we often mistakenly say that two people have reconciled when really they are tolerating or collaborating with each other. That's not to say that toleration and collaboration are bad; sometimes they are fitting within the situation. It is to say, however, that one of the things that separates reconciliation from toleration and collaboration is how the victim feels about the wrongdoer. In both toleration and collaboration the victim continues to bear hard feelings towards the wrongdoer; they have not forgiven. Reconciliation, on the other hand, requires that I give up those hard feelings (or at least some of them) towards the person who wronged me - that I forgive them. Otherwise, we're still just talking about toleration or collaboration. So, one reason for thinking that reconciliation entails forgiveness is that how the victim feels about the wrongdoer is one of the features that distinguishes reconciliation from other, similar practices and relational states.

Returning to the list of colloquial understandings of reconciliation, you might think that what we should mean when we say that two people have reconciled is that they have normalized relations. But, that also fails to capture the robust meaning of reconciliation. If I learn that my partner has been cheating on me but I decide to let it go and move on, we have not reconciled if they never know that I discovered their wrongful act. I can forgive their past action - remember, forgiveness is unilateral and so can go unexpressed - but we have not reconciled. Part of what is essential to reconciliation is that the wrongdoer takes ownership for their action and identifies what they did, creating the opportunity to further deal with it. It is, in other words, bilateral; it requires change in and action by both parties and not just the victim.<sup>23</sup> If I normalize relations with my partner for a wrong they have kept secret, we have not done any of those things; instead, our situation lacks truth and transparency which reconciliation requires.

What I hope this discussion to have shown is that reconciliation is bilateral and requires (1) that you and I reach adequate understanding of the wrong, (2) that we be properly oriented towards each other attitudinally and affectively, and (3) that we have repaired or are in the process of repairing morally the damage done to our relationship. Like forgiveness, reconciliation is both a practice and an accomplishment - both an action that you undertake and an outcome that you achieve. Though we might try to reconcile for some instrumental goal, reconciliation is not contingently dependent on that goal, once genuinely achieved. (You and I might realize we need to reconcile because it's going to be very difficult and painful for us otherwise. But, once we achieve genuine reconciliation, it's not merely that collective goal that keeps us together.) All three of these points need to be unpacked.

The first point is epistemic: reconciliation requires that the victim and wrongdoer understand the nature of the wrongful action, the context in which it was performed, what motivated the wrongdoer to commit the wrong, both parties' current attitudinal and affective orientation towards each other, and perhaps most importantly, the nature of the harms sustained by the victim. All of this requires significant communication and transparency between the two parties; it cannot be done in a vacuum or purely from a place of imagination. Instead, both parties must engage with each other to share significant portions of their inner lives with regard to the wrong in question and its subsequent harms.

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<sup>23</sup> Many who write about political reconciliation understand it to be bilateral in this way; it is not something that can take place without both parties' involvement. See, for instance, Krog 2008; Poe 2007; Watkins 2015; Murphy C. 2007.



Note that this epistemic requirement is not all or nothing. It is possible for two parties to understand enough (though they do not understand all that there is to understand) about the other's inner lives, the nuance and extent of the effects of the wrong, or the ways in which the wrongdoer's context played a role in their perpetration of the wrong. In other words, it makes sense to say that the victim and wrongdoer each know enough about the other's experience of the wrongful act, and that both the victim and wrongdoer agree that they each know enough, even though neither knows everything there is to know about what was going on for the other, for them to reconcile.<sup>24</sup> Were we to hold them to the standard higher and say that perfect or complete understanding must be achieved, we would of course rule out the possibility of reconciliation for all non-omniscient beings.

The second and third points are moral and affective or attitudinal: reconciliation requires that the wrongdoer repair her wrong in light of that collectively achieved understanding. That will involve not just understanding the nature of the wrong and the effects that it had on the victim, but also understanding what it is the victim wants or needs in order to be able to trust the wrongdoer and to feel as if adequate reparation has been made. If the wrongdoer tries to repair the wrong in a way that the victim does not want, not only is their effort likely to be unsuccessful, it might also be experienced as an additional violation of the victim's will.

One might think that adequate understanding of the wrong will entail that the wrongdoer would not make such a mistake. Indeed, there might be some situations where the victim and wrongdoer must communicate explicitly about what form reparation must take, while there are others where it does not. My point is just that if reparative efforts are not successful, such that the victim does not feel as if the wrong has been adequately addressed and does not trust the wrongdoer, then they have not yet fully reconciled.

Note that this allows for the possibility that the victim might ask for much more than is actually fitting or deserved; if I break a relatively inconsequential promise to you and you demand millions of dollars in return, I ask for too much, more than what reparation requires. Even if the victim asks for more than is reasonably owed, it is still the case that they have not reconciled with their wrongdoer if they believe reparation has not been achieved. Though the victim doesn't determine entirely the content of what reparation entails, if they believe that reparation has not been made, the two parties have not reconciled. Furthermore, adequate reparation entails appreciation for the nature of the harms and the reasonableness of the methods of redress. But not all victims will make such claims (especially those who have deeply internalized feelings of inferiority or self-hatred) and so it is important to further specify that, even independent of what the victim calls for, if the wrongdoer fails to bear the proper attitudes towards the victim, reconciliation has yet to take place.

So, though reconciliation does entail reparation, it does not telegraph in advance what form reparation will take in any particular context. Determining all of what it means to satisfy the reparation condition very often will require both parties to actively engage with the wrong within the confines of their particular relationship and then determine what reparation will amount to for them. Here again it is clear that reconciliation is bilateral; it requires both parties to play an active role, whereas it is possible for one to forgive without reparation having taken place.

Furthermore, if either party does not bear the proper attitudes towards each other, then they have not reconciled. Part of what reparation entails is that the wrongdoer is repentant and genuinely remorseful for their action, that their wrongdoer shows them adequate respect, and that

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<sup>24</sup> Walker 2007, 171-173.

they not be inclined to repeat the action again in the future. If the wrongdoer views the victim as an appropriate target of future exploitation or abuse, or as someone who is not owed respect and care, then they have not engaged in moral repair and they have not reconciled. And if the wrongdoer views the wrong or its harms as minor (or nonexistent), or if the wrongdoer resents the victim for the form that they claim reparations must take, then they have not engaged in moral repair and they have not reconciled. On the other hand, if the other conditions are satisfied but the victim continues to feel enormous amounts of anger towards the wrongdoer, (if they have not forgiven the wrongdoer) then the two have not reconciled; reconciliation requires forgiveness.

I said earlier that anger can be a form not just of self-respect but of respect for the wrongdoer. As Strawson argues<sup>25</sup>, it is often the case that when I become angry with you for what you've done to me I recognize that you are a person, you're a moral agent who is the appropriate target of praise or blame. But, that it is often a method of demonstrating respect for another does not mean that it always is.

Let's say I'm the victim of some serious wrong. My wrongdoer and I have talked and I come to believe that they understand what they did was wrong, as well as how it harmed me. They also have apologized and worked to make amends in other ways that I believe are in fact sufficient forms of reparation. I might still hate the person who wronged me. I think that kind of scenario is not unusual; a victim might say, "Yes, they've done all they could do but I'll be mad at them forever." In such a situation the victim fails to be appropriately affectively oriented towards the wrongdoer; there is a mismatch between their beliefs about what the wrongdoer has done to make up for their wrong and the way that the victim feels about them.

Or, they might not believe that the wrongdoer genuinely understands the nature of the wrong, not because they haven't tried, but because they are a moral monster, or reducible to their wrong, believing that, "He's a killer, or a liar, or a cheater", and nothing more. In that scenario, though the victim feels anger towards the wrongdoer, it is not the type of anger that demonstrates respect for the other as a person, but the type of anger that you feel about a non-agent, or when a terrible event occurs. Here again the victim fails to be appropriately attitudinally oriented towards the wrongdoer, since they view them as a thing, rather than as a person.

Note that I am not claiming that the victim ought to do otherwise; I said earlier that we bear strong, self-regarding duties to care for ourselves and that anger, hatred, and contempt can often be valuable methods by which a victim satisfies that duty. But, genuine reconciliation (rather than toleration or collaboration) requires both parties to be appropriately oriented towards each other, in light of both what was done and the moral status both parties (the victim is a person with rights who deserves not to be treated like a thing, and the wrongdoer is a person who is more than the wrongful action they committed). So, if the victim continues to feel powerful negative emotions towards the wrongdoer - if they fail to forgive - then the two parties have not reconciled. Before concluding, I want to briefly explore some of the reasons that might make it the case that two people ought not reconcile.

### **Interconnectedness and Duties of Self-Care**

I have argued that we ought to build our concepts so as to recognize that, though reconciliation entails forgiveness, because forgiveness is unilateral and internal to the victim, and

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<sup>25</sup> Strawson 1974, 6.

because reconciliation is bilateral and requires active participation from both parties, forgiveness does not entail reconciliation. That claim is in tension with those understandings of forgiveness that tie it closely to reconciliation, such that it cannot be broken apart. Consider, for instance, Antjie Krog's view of both forgiveness and reconciliation which are grounded in what she calls "interconnectedness-towards-wholeness," which understands persons to be importantly interconnected so that, "one can only become who one is, or could be, through the fullness of that which is around one."<sup>26</sup> In short, because we are who we are via our relationships with others, and we are able to grow morally in light of our past mistakes and by way of that interconnectedness, "the notions of forgiveness and reconciliation cannot be separated. The one begins, or opens up a process of becoming, while the other is the crucial next step into this becoming... The deed of asking for forgiveness and forgiveness itself, *needs to lead to recovery, reconciliation, and eventually to a fuller personhood* [emphasis mine]."<sup>27</sup>

Part of what's important about understanding forgiveness as the unilateral forgoing of hard feelings, is that it doesn't entail the interconnectedness with which Krog begins her analysis. This is not a defense of atomism or liberal individualism; indeed, there is much to appreciate about Krog's analysis. Furthermore, I am very sympathetic to the claim that people are mostly socially constructed beings and that we all become who we are always via social connection with others. However, I also recognize that though we might need others in order to become who we are or to become more full and complete persons, that doesn't mean that it is victims of wrongdoing who ought to help their wrongdoers to do so, or that they are even necessarily the one best positioned to do so.<sup>28</sup>

This is perhaps one of the places where trying to analyze forgiveness and reconciliation will lead to different results, based on whether you are approaching them from the interpersonal or the political. Krog starts at the political; her concern is with how groups of people who have survived atrocity are able to be together in community. That is indeed a worthwhile question, since it often is not possible in the aftermath of political violence for victims to escape or be wholly divorced<sup>29</sup> from those who wronged them, or from the political structures that created the opportunity for them to be wronged. But, the fact that it is often not possible doesn't mean that it is never possible, and we should avoid reaching the sweeping conclusion with regard to interpersonal reconciliation that the victim, in forgiving, needs or ought to reconcile with the one who wronged them. After all, sometimes divorce *is* possible, sometimes one *can* leave their wrongdoer behind and not continue to be interconnected with them. We can agree that we are all interconnected with others, and that through that interconnectedness we might be able to become more full and complete people, and deny that any particular relationship (in this case the victim and wrongdoer) is the one that ought to facilitate that growth.

That conclusion is not just a metaphysical point about persons and how they come to be, but a moral point about what obligations persons have to each other. I earlier said that persons not only have duties to promote the welfare of others but also to promote their own welfare. One way to satisfy that duty might be to avoid interconnectedness with those who are harmful. In short, socially-constructed though we may be, we are capable of choosing (at least some of the

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<sup>26</sup> Krog 2008, 355. Krog is here relying on and further unpacking the moral concept of "ubuntu." For very helpful additional analysis of the concept, see Metz 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Krog 2008, 356.

<sup>28</sup> For more on the dual values of interdependence and autonomy see: Friedman 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Govier and Verwoerd 2000, 199.

time) who to be interconnected with and we care for ourselves by exiting those relationships of interconnected that do not promote our welfare.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, here's what we can take from this discussion:

1. Forgiveness is fundamentally unilateral; it refers to the internal work that I do in response to your wrongful action. That's not to say that forgiveness can always take place absent your effort as my wrongdoer; contingently, I might not be capable of doing that internal work without your having attempted to make amends or without our having worked on some collective goal together. But, in that case what is still central is what is going on internally for me and it *could* happen without your ever knowing about it or being involved. So, forgiveness does not conceptually require bilateral action though it might require it in practice.

2. On the other hand, reconciliation is fundamentally bilateral. It is not simply normalizing relations, establishing or reestablishing trust, the ability to coexist and not do violence to each other, or to work on some collective project together. As I have shown, each of those might describe situations that we wouldn't want to call reconciliation but instead are either instances of toleration or collaboration.

3. Reconciliation is not reducible to forgiveness. I can give up my anger for my partner's infidelity without anyone ever knowing about it and we shouldn't think that we have reconciled. Instead, we would simply think that I have forgiven them.

4. The fact that I have reason to forgive doesn't entail that I have reason to reconcile. For instance, I might have self-regarding reasons to forgive (to not be eaten up by anger) but other-regarding reasons to reconcile (perhaps to loved ones who deeply want me to do so). It might be appropriate for me to forgive but not reconcile in any particular case.

5. Reconciliation entails transparency, forgiveness, and the moral repair of the relationship, whereas forgiveness does not entail transparency or moral repair.

6. Toleration and collaboration do not entail transparency, forgiveness, or moral repair.

7. Both forgiveness and reconciliation are scalar practices; neither are all or nothing affairs. If I have already let go of some of my hard feelings towards you, I have partially but not completely forgiven you. The same is true of reconciliation; because each of its component pieces (forgiveness, transparency, bearing the proper attitudes and emotions, and moral repair) might all come in degrees, so too does reconciliation itself. Perfect, complete forgiveness and reconciliation might often be impossible but that doesn't mean that some degree of each cannot be achieved.

8. None of this is to say that reconciliation is quick or easy. Toleration or collaboration might lead to forgiveness and collective engagement with the truth of the wrong that was perpetrated, which could then lead to reconciliation. Just as forgiveness is often active and in process – just as it makes sense to say that you are on the road to forgiving someone even though you have not fully done so – so too is it the case that reconciliation is something that might be underway. It makes sense to say that you and another are reconciling, even if you have not yet completed that process (and even if that process never reaches full, perfect completion). In this way reconciliation is born from the slow and often difficult work of moving forward with the one who wronged you.

9. We are importantly social beings and we cannot become who we are (or grow into who we could be) outside of social relation with others. However, that metaphysical fact does not necessarily secure the moral conclusion that victims ought either to reconcile with or forgive those who wronged them. Those intensely personal decisions must be made within the context in which the victim operates, and in light of the contingent variables that are always at play in the nuanced and often complicated moments of moral life.

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