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After Harm: The Virtue of Forgiveness in Restorative Justice

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Although forgiveness and reconciliation are not explicit goals of restorative justice (Zehr, 2015), the latter nonetheless provides a privileged space for their cultivation (Blad, 2013; Zehr, 2015). In this article, I argue that forgiveness can be conceived as a moral virtue, manifested in the suspension of blame, the deliberate choice to overcome the harm suffered, and the commitment to repair relationships. From this perspective, forgiveness emerges as both a valuable outcome and a crucial ally of restorative justice, as both are oriented toward the reconstruction of damaged relationships. The concepts of moral repair, reconciliation, and, more specifically, forgiveness as a moral virtue are examined through the lens of virtue ethics and moral psychology, showing how this approach to forgiveness can be coherently integrated within the restorative paradigm, highlighting its theoretical and practical benefits. In this framework, forgiveness is presented as a distinct form of ethical engagement and relational responsibility, whose exercise requires genuine openness to the other—a condition essential for achieving true justice. In this context, forgiveness is not only compatible with restorative justice but also finds in it a fertile ground for cultivating this virtue.

Public Significance Statement

As social beings, we are all exposed to harm and offense, and forgiveness plays a vital role in restoring human relationships and emotional balance. By conceptualizing forgiveness as a moral virtue within the restorative justice framework, this article offers tools for understanding and practicing forgiveness in ways that can support psychological healing, reduce interpersonal conflict, and foster healthier communities.

Keywords: forgiveness, virtue, reconciliation, mercy, restorative justice

Iustitia sine misericordia crudelitas est, misericordia sine
iustitia mater est dissolutionis

—Thomas Aquinas

At some point in life, every individual has been the victim of a wrong, just as they have, in

turn, caused harm to others. Although most people possess an intuitive—albeit often vague—understanding of what forgiveness entails, providing a precise and analytically rigorous definition proves to be an exceptionally complex task. It is

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noncommercial use provided the original authors and source are credited and a link to the license is included in attribution. No derivative works are permitted under this license.

Chiara Palazzolo played a lead role in writing—original draft.

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therefore unsurprising that forgiveness has emerged as the subject of extensive and multifaceted debate, not only within philosophy but also in disciplines such as psychology, criminology, and jurisprudence.

From a philosophical perspective, forgiveness raises complex questions regarding its nature and the role it plays in human relationships. Is it an action, a character disposition, a social practice, or a combination of these elements? On an ethical level, forgiveness prompts fundamental inquiries about how one ought to respond to an injustice suffered. Is it morally right to forgive someone who has wronged us in a particular way? Or is it preferable simply to let go and forget? Is forgiveness a moral choice or a duty, especially when the wrongdoer expresses remorse? These questions intersect with themes in normative ethics: While some reactions, such as anger, may appear morally necessary under certain circumstances, others, like resentment, may seem inappropriate.

Feeling anger in response to a wrong—whether committed by others or oneself—expresses the value we attribute to the person who has been harmed. Conversely, the respect we hold for an individual may, at least in some cases, require us to maintain such an attitude even after being hurt by that same person. In this article, I examine recent philosophical and psychological attempts to conceptualize forgiveness within a moral framework, as well as its role as a moral virtue in restorative justice.

The article is structured as follows: The “Moral Repair” section focuses on moral relationships and the ways in which they can be repaired when compromised by a transgression that causes their rupture. In such cases, moral repair is often exemplified by the act of forgiveness. The “Conditional Forgiveness,” “Unconditional Forgiveness,” and “Conditional or Unconditional Forgiveness?” sections discuss conditional forgiveness, unconditional forgiveness, and the choice between them in light of the restorative justice paradigm. The “Why Is Forgiveness a Virtue?” section examines forgiveness as a moral virtue from an aretaic perspective (Foot, 2002; Pettigrove, 2023), situating it within virtue ethics. The “What Kind of Virtue Is Forgiveness?” section analyzes forgiveness from the perspective of moral psychology, linking it to the philosophical conception of forgiveness as a moral virtue and clarifying what forgiveness is not. Additionally,

in light of recent research by Freedman (2025) and Song et al. (2025), it is shown how forgiveness can foster empathy even when such empathy is undeserved. The “Is the Virtue of Forgiveness Dependent on the Virtue of Justice?” section reflects on whether the virtue of forgiveness depends on the virtue of justice. The “Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Restorative Justice” section analyzes the distinction between reconciliation and forgiveness within restorative justice. The “Forgiveness at the Roots of Restorative Justice” section examines the role of forgiveness in the genesis of restorative justice, exploring the principles from which it emerged and the virtues on which it is founded. The “Forgiveness as a Supererogatory Act?” section discusses the relationship between forgiveness as a virtue and forgiveness as a supererogatory act. The article concludes with Section “Final Remarks,” emphasizing that forgiveness constitutes a complex response to wrongdoing, a moral choice involving intricate psychological dimensions and, at times, considerations of a legal nature. This underscores the need for a multidisciplinary approach to fully understand the nature of forgiveness, integrating perspectives from multiple fields of knowledge.

Moral Repair

What should we do when we suffer a serious wrong? Should we forget and move on, severing all ties with those who have harmed us, or should we seek to rebuild the relationship? The issue of moral repair, in the context of damaged relationships, concerns the way we live in the world and care for the moral fabric of our connections with others. More precisely, moral repair is a process aimed at restoring balance in relationships that have been disrupted by injustice. If virtue ethics prompts us to ask, “What is a good life?” and Kantian ethics urges us to ask, “What ought we to do?,” then reflection on moral repair introduces an additional, equally fundamental question: “What ought we to do once the harm has been done?” (Walker, 2006). This question shifts the focus to our responses to harm and injustice. A wrong always occurs within social and moral relationships. As Walker (2006) noted in *Moral Repair*, morality is not an abstract system of principles but rather a concrete dimension of human experience, grounded in trust and mutual,

responsible expectations. Being morally responsible entails recognizing the consequences of one's actions and taking responsibility for them, while expecting others to do the same toward us. Trust, therefore, underpins relationships—not only among acquaintances but also among strangers. Boarding a train, ordering a meal at a restaurant, or undergoing surgery all presuppose a basic trust in others.

We generally do not consider that the train driver might deliberately cause an accident, the chef might poison a dish, or the surgeon might intentionally compromise an operation. Without this foundational trust, social life would be impossible, for trust is intrinsic to human relationships. But what happens when this trust is betrayed by a wrong, whether between acquaintances or strangers? The bond is compromised, if not outright broken. "Evils transform the moral relationships among those who become perpetrators, bystanders, beneficiaries, or victims" (Card, 2002, pp. 167–168). According to Card, evils generate moral powers in survivors; obligations in perpetrators, beneficiaries, and bystanders; and new possibilities for many. An injustice implies the existence of an identifiable victim, and such an injustice alters moral relationships, that is, it modifies the moral bond between the parties or what they owe to one another (Card, 2002).

According to Card, a wrong is in a sense analogous to incurring a debt, as it creates obligations that the wrongdoer has toward the victim. Unlike a financial or material debt, however, what the wrongdoer owes is not money or goods, but rather apology and reparation. Just as a creditor has the right or power to demand repayment or to release the debtor from the obligation, a wrong similarly confers upon the victim the normative moral power to forgive.¹ It is predictable that, among those who choose to forgive, the negative impact of the wrong will vary depending on the severity of the offense. In some cases, one might simply conclude, "No serious harm was done. I misplaced my trust in this person, and I will try not to repeat the mistake." In other cases, however, the experience may lead to deeper consequences: a total loss of trust in others. Such a loss can have significant effects, prompting not only a reassessment of the relationship with the wrongdoer but also a reconsideration of the expectations underlying our interactions with others and our own conception of justice. To forgive, the forgiver must

believe at least to some degree that the wrongdoer will not repeat the same mistake in the future because they are also capable of doing good, regardless of whether the relationship will be restored. In this sense, Pettigrove has argued that the belief in the wrongdoer's goodness is necessary for forgiveness, but this belief need only amount to Kantian respect for persons as persons (Pettigrove, 2012). However, for reconciliation, trust is essential; it is a *conditio sine qua non*. Trust is also relevant in the forgiveness process, but it is not a necessary condition.

Conditional Forgiveness

In the forgiveness literature, two main accounts are generally distinguished: conditional forgiveness and unconditional forgiveness, the latter presented in the following paragraph. The key distinction between them concerns whether the victim should expect the offender to meet certain conditions (such as apology or repentance) before they forgive. Proponents of the conditional account answer affirmatively, whereas advocates of the unconditional account deny that such conditions are necessary. Two main versions of conditionalism can be identified: one centered on the agent's actions and another focused on their moral status (Cowley, 2023). Among the most influential proponents of the action-based view are Jeffrie Murphy (in J. G. Murphy & Hampton, 1988) and Griswold (2007). According to more refined formulations of this position, the idea of *deserving* forgiveness should not be confused with possessing a *right* to be forgiven. The satisfaction of certain moral conditions is said to generate a kind of normative expectation, rather than a strict obligation, on the part of the wronged person. Consequently, even when such conditions are fulfilled, forgiveness would still retain an element of freedom. This limited discretion preserves the possibility of viewing forgiveness as a supererogatory act, though its moral worth might appear somewhat diminished insofar as it arises as a fitting response to normative pressure.

¹ A similar conception is found in Thomas Aquinas, for whom evil, or wrongdoing, is a *privatio boni debiti*—that is, the absence of a due good: a privation, therefore, that is not a substance. See Thomas Aquinas, *De malo*, q. 1, a. 1, *Res.* (D'Aquino, 2012); *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 48, a. 3 (Aquinas, 2017).

However, as we will see in the “Forgiveness as a Supererogatory Act?” section, understanding forgiveness as a supererogatory act proves to be problematic (Cowley, 2023), and even more so when it is conceived in terms of a virtue (Heyd, 2015). For the purposes of the present discussion, however, we shall set this issue aside. As for what those conditions might be, apology is usually mentioned first, but philosophers have proposed various alternatives and have debated which of them should be regarded as fundamental. Some emphasize repentance, others apology, reparation, the explicit renunciation of the wrongdoing, a demonstrable willingness to reconcile, or a commitment to avoid repeating the offense. Repentance, understood as an inner transformation, is generally assumed to manifest itself in one or more of these outward expressions (Cowley, 2023, pp. 209–210).

However, I will not discuss this matter in detail here. The conditionalist view of forgiveness raises an important concern: If forgiveness merely responds to repentance, it seems to lose much of its moral significance. A truly repentant wrongdoer may no longer need forgiveness, having already grasped the moral meaning of their actions. Still, forgiveness retains some value, as it acknowledges the transgressor’s repentance and expresses hope for their moral growth. Another key intuition of the conditionalist account considers cases where the transgressor refuses to repent and has therefore not earned forgiveness. If the victim forgives under such circumstances—perhaps due to misunderstanding, low self-esteem, fear, or a desire to please—we would see this forgiveness as morally problematic. Unearned forgiveness can send the wrong messages to the transgressor, suggesting condonation or that the victim deserves no better. This concern becomes even stronger in cases of repeated transgressions, where continual forgiveness can perpetuate harm and undermine prior repentance, as in situations of chronic abuse. In such cases, forgiveness may be blameworthy rather than virtuous.

So far, we have considered the action-focused conditionalist view, which addresses what the transgressor must do in order to earn forgiveness. In contrast, a status-based perspective emphasizes who the transgressor is—for example, whether they have suffered sufficiently or what their prior relationship with the victim was. In this context, forgiveness might occur “because they

are family” or “for old times’ sake” (J. G. Murphy & Hampton, 1988). The victim’s motivation is crucial: If forgiveness is self-interested, aimed merely at avoiding embarrassment or preserving utility, it does not constitute genuine forgiveness. However, if it is motivated by the value placed on the meaningful relationship and, at least in part, for the sake of the other, then it counts as forgiveness and can be admired.

Unconditional Forgiveness

The unconditionalist account offers an alternative to conditionalism, drawing in part on widely shared interpretations of Christian teachings. Prominent proponents of unconditional forgiveness include Holmgren (1993) and Garrard and McNaughton (2003), while Derrida (2001) presented a markedly different perspective. Gamlund (2010) further suggested that unconditional forgiveness is typically supererogatory. As Calhoun (1992, p. 81) observed, forgiveness is inherently connected to supererogatory acts of generosity and charity: It is an elective response to culpable wrongdoing, something granted rather than owed, hoped for rather than demanded. Derrida similarly argued that conditional forgiveness is merely transactional, shaped by social norms.

An example of unconditional forgiveness is Mandela’s stance, which significantly contributed to South Africa’s peaceful transition from apartheid and the emergence of the “rainbow nation,” fostering cooperation between Black and White citizens (Bash, 2007). As Govier (2002, p. 71) observed, the effects of his unilateral forgiveness—peace, reconciliation, and a nonviolent transition of power—highlight its extraordinary moral and practical significance. Nevertheless, many former oppressors did not repent. While Mandela’s example encouraged some degree of national reconciliation, repentance among key individuals was limited or selective. For instance, former President P. W. Botha refused to appear before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and former Law and Order Minister Adriaan Vlok contradicted evidence given by F. W. de Klerk, who had formally sought forgiveness for apartheid-era actions. Vlok’s testimony revealed that de Klerk had been aware of illegal operations against Black opposition groups while in office, despite previous denials.

This case underscores that unconditional forgiveness can achieve significant societal and moral outcomes even when the wrongdoers

themselves do not demonstrate genuine repentance, illustrating both the ethical strength and the practical limits of such forgiveness. From this perspective, some authors argue that there are strong moral reasons in favor of unconditional forgiveness. Holmgren (1993, p. 341), for instance, considered refusing to forgive to be morally problematic. According to her view, “the appropriate attitude to adopt toward every human being—wrongdoers included—is one of genuine goodwill” (Holmgren, 1993, p. 349).

To withhold forgiveness is to assume that the wrongdoer cannot, will not, or is unable to change, which constitutes a failure to respect their moral integrity and personhood. Holmgren (1993, p. 341) therefore maintained that “forgiveness is always morally appropriate and desirable, regardless of whether the wrongdoer repents and irrespective of what they have done or suffered.” In this framework, forgiveness also represents an act of self-respect: Victims must first work to restore their own sense of self-worth, but once this process is complete, forgiveness remains appropriate regardless of the wrongdoer’s behavior. Other scholars, however, argue that unconditional forgiveness may indicate a lack of self-respect, as it seems to place perceived moral obligations toward the wrongdoer above one’s own needs and expectations.

In some cases, low self-esteem may lead victims to forgive (Swinburne, 1989, pp. 85–87; Haber, 1991, p. 88; Murphy in J. G. Murphy & Hampton, 1988, pp. 24–29). Furthermore, in personal relationships, people sometimes “forgive” simply to avoid confronting painful issues. Such behavior, far from being loving or restorative, is in fact deeply harmful, even if it may not appear so at first. In this context, Bash and Percy’s (2025) observations prove particularly compelling and useful for critically reflecting on the concept of forgiveness. Bash emphasizes that unconditional forgiveness can, in certain contexts, represent the only viable means of overcoming resentment and moving toward an inner reconstruction of the self.

However, he cautions against the risks associated with a conception of forgiveness that overlooks power dynamics and systemic structures of injustice. When forgiveness is treated as a moral or social duty, it risks becoming an instrument of control, compelling harmed individuals to forgive rather than challenge oppressive behaviors or repeated abuses. Bash therefore

urges careful consideration of the context in which forgiveness is exercised, while also acknowledging the legitimacy of resentment as an ethically significant response to violations suffered. In this way, his approach allows us to balance the idea of forgiveness as a virtuous act with an awareness of its limits and the potential negative consequences that unconditional imposition or celebration of forgiveness might entail, especially for vulnerable individuals or those subjected to systemic injustices.

Conditional or Unconditional Forgiveness?

As we have seen forgiveness can take either conditional or unconditional forms, depending on the context. However, what appears to resonate most closely with the principles of restorative justice is conditional forgiveness, conceived as an awareness of accountability. According to Zehr (1985), accountability refers to the capacity to answer for one’s actions. It differs both from a full understanding and assumption of responsibility (“to take responsibility”) for the committed wrongdoing and from legal responsibility. The notion of accountability plays a central role in both the traditional model of justice and in restorative justice, though the two perspectives diverge significantly (Meattini, 2025). In the penal system, accountability is achieved when the offender is punished. In restorative justice, by contrast, it is realized when the offender acknowledges their responsibility and takes action to repair the harm caused. Responsibility for wrongdoing is both individual and social: Victims are placed at the center of the resolution process, offenders are called upon to make amends, and particular emphasis is given to fostering and sustaining dialogue among the victim, the offender, and the wider community. Within this framework, a person remains free to forgive or not to forgive, whether conditionally upon the offender’s repentance or unconditionally. For the purposes of restorative justice, however, conditional forgiveness seems generally more desirable, since the approach is grounded in offender accountability; conditional forgiveness therefore aligns more closely with its principles. In this regard, Bash and Percy (2025, p. 156) stated, “Unconditional forgiveness has the feel of injustice to many people because they think that wrongdoers ‘get away with it’ without accountability.” Accountability

in restorative justice enables a genuine encounter between victim and offender—as will be further discussed in the “Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Restorative Justice” section. In this encounter, each party fulfills their own part: The offender expresses remorse and offers an apology, thereby initiating a process of healing and accountability, while the victim, in turn, may offer forgiveness or a commitment to transcend the harm suffered.

Through this mutual exchange, they truly meet one another, and the encounter can become transformative for both (Pelsinger, 2025). By contrast, in the case of unconditional forgiveness, the process tends to be more one-sided, resting almost entirely on the victim.²

That said, even if the offender demonstrates genuine repentance, the victim may still choose not to forgive. Conversely, a victim may feel able to forgive without any expression of remorse, and in such cases, they are entirely free to do so. On this specific point, the observations of Robert Enright have been particularly illuminating, as they guided me toward a more nuanced position mediating between conditional and unconditional forgiveness (Kim & Enright, *in press*).³ Nonetheless, choosing not to forgive does not imply unethical behavior, as the individual is not motivated by revenge but is simply refraining from extending forgiveness. This distinction underscores the moral autonomy of the victim and highlights the ethical subtleties involved in acts of forgiveness.

However, to act within the restorative justice framework is to operate within the horizon of accountability, responsibility and self-responsibility (Wood & Suzuki, 2024)—two conditions essential to this approach, whose significance lies not in material compensation but in the symbolic and relational value of reparation.⁴ While there is no single, universally accepted definition of forgiveness, the conception that appears most suitable from a restorative justice perspective is the following: Forgiveness is the deliberate choice by the victim to transcend the harm suffered, opening themselves with trust to the wrongdoer while being accompanied by a commitment to move beyond the injury endured.

This involves the victim’s abstention from revenge through the overcoming of negative feelings toward the offender (Claessen, 2017, p. 27). In this context requires the active participation of all parties involved and the genuine desire for forgiveness on the part of the wrongdoer, following remorse. From this perspective,

the harmed victim justifiably remains in a state of waiting, evaluating whether or not to forgive. This constitutively distinguishes the act of forgiving from other moral acts, such as acts of generosity, as we will discuss later. Naturally, in the process of forgiveness, the primary stakeholders are the forgiver and the potentially forgiven or offender, whose perspectives—if analyzed in detail—open up two distinct avenues of inquiry. For the purposes of this discussion, we focus primarily on the perspective of the forgiver, while never losing sight of the fact that it is always a perspective in relation to the potential forgiven. Reflection on forgiveness, however, cannot be separated from the broader context of moral relationships, within which it takes shape and meaning. Understanding forgiveness thus requires examining the emotional and relational dynamics that emerge when a wrong disrupts the trust-based bond between individuals.

Moral relationships, however, rest not only on trust but also on our emotional responsiveness to its violation. When we suffer a wrong, it is natural for emotions such as resentment or indignation to arise; these signal the breach of a tacit moral agreement and call for an appropriate response. Strawson (1962) described such emotions as “reactive attitudes”: spontaneous affective responses that nevertheless express our moral sensitivity and our expectations that others will adhere to shared normative standards. Resentment and indignation, therefore, arise not merely from the harm suffered but from the perceived injustice of that harm (Walker, 2006). When someone violates a moral norm, our response is not purely personal; it often seeks public acknowledgment. We desire that others also condemn the act and reaffirm the validity of the violated norm. This mechanism lies at the heart of the moral cohesion of a society, since resentment is not only an individual reaction but also an implicit demand for collective recognition

² I am especially thankful to Anthony Bash for his insights on this point.

³ I only learned after the article was accepted that the anonymous Reviewer 1—whose comments were immensely helpful in improving this article and who devoted considerable effort to it—was in fact Robert Enright to whom I am deeply grateful. Together with Kim, Robert Enright has written a commentary on this article, and I invite the reader to consult it (Kim & Enright, *in press*), which provides a thoughtful and insightful discussion of the topic.

⁴ For a more detailed discussion of this point, see European Forum for Restorative Justice (EU Forum for Restorative Justice, n.d.; <https://www.euforumrj.org/>).

and repair. In some cases, such public acknowledgment becomes inevitable, for example, when legal proceedings are necessary. At the same time, our moral responsiveness is not limited to anger or indignation. We may also experience gratitude when someone exceeds our expectations by acting with particular kindness or altruism. In such cases, our emotional reactions reveal how we experience moral relationships—not as abstract systems of rules, but as networks of mutual expectations, trust, and responsibility. When we suffer a wrong, we can respond in various ways: severing the relationship with the wrongdoer, forgiving without restoring the relationship, or seeking to repair it.

Moral repair is not confined to interpersonal relationships but extends to social and political structures. In many contexts, moral norms reflect power dynamics that advantage some at the expense of others. In such cases, repair not only involves addressing individual injustices but may also require a deeper transformation of the social order itself. When a violation undermines trust in the fairness of the system, resentment can become a tool of protest. In the face of systemic injustices, existing norms may be perceived not as protective mechanisms but as instruments of domination. Moral repair, therefore, cannot be limited to restoring the status quo; it must recognize the dignity of those who have been wronged and promote more just forms of relational engagement (Walker, 2006). Within this framework, forgiveness emerges as a possible virtuous response to moral harm, capable not only of interrupting the cycle of blame and resentment but also of reopening the possibility for ethically regenerated relationships. Understanding why forgiveness can be considered a virtue requires an inquiry into its very nature.

Why Is Forgiveness a Virtue?

Forgiveness has long been a subject of reflection in Western philosophy, particularly within the field of ethics. In ancient Greek thought, it was primarily examined in relation to anger. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle mentions several virtues—such as courage and temperance—but in one instance, he refers to a “nameless virtue” associated with the regulation of anger in response to offenses and insults (Norlock, 2025). Aristotle describes this unnamed virtue by employing a term closely linked to the concept of *praotēs*, which has been translated variously as “calmness” (Irwin,

340BCE/2019), “mildness” (Gottlieb, 1994), “moderation” (Phillips-Garrett, 2022), or “gentleness” (McKeon, 1941; Ross, 340 BCE/2009).⁵ Enright (2014) argued that this nameless virtue may be implicitly encompassed within the virtue of magnanimity, characteristic of the good person.

Virtues are excellent character traits cultivated over time (Annas, 2011) and are not merely emotional states; therefore, feeling calm or mild should not be confused with the virtue itself (Norlock, 2025). The terms “mildness” or “gentleness,” accordingly, do not seem to fully capture the virtue Aristotle intends to describe in this context. According to Gottlieb (1994), the term originates from classical Greek texts written before the Common Era and was used to designate the virtue in question, which may shed light on Aristotle’s innovative attempt to conceptualize it. Furthermore, Gottlieb notes that the virtue related to the moderation of anger in the face of injustice is the only nameless virtue appearing both in the *Eudemean Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a fact that underscores its particular significance.

According to Aristotle, this virtue is manifested in the excellence of the mild person, who responds to injustice with measured anger—only when it is justified and to the right degree. The virtuous person is not overwhelmed by emotion but acts according to reason, and it is precisely here, according to Norlock (2025), that forgiveness comes into play. One who possesses this virtue is characterized by mildness, emotional self-control, and a disposition toward clemency—thus being more inclined to forgive than to punish (Aristotle, 340 BCE/2019, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.5, p. 72; Norlock, 2025).

Song et al. (2025) also argued—as will be examined more closely in Section “Conditional or Unconditional Forgiveness?”—that forgiveness fits within the framework of Aristotelian ethics precisely through the unnamed virtue described above. According to these authors, forgiveness is a response to those who “have acted unjustly” (Song et al., 2025, p. 6), and for this reason, it connects to Aristotle’s conception of justified anger: That is, anger directed toward “offenses against oneself, one’s family, or one’s friends,” and not toward excusable incidents (*Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.5, p. 72). Moreover,

⁵ For a deeper exploration of the theme of forgiveness in Aristotle, see in particular Phillips-Garrett (2022), Phillips-Garrett (2017), Carter (2018), and Curzer (2012).

the authors maintain that adopting “some form of benevolent behavior toward the offender” (Song et al., 2025, p. 6) is consistent with Aristotle’s claim that the virtuous person is inclined to grant *sungnōmē*, a term some philosophers translate as “forgiveness” (Sadler, 2008).

To test the idea that forgiveness is an expression of a virtuous character, Pettigrove (2023, p. 364) referred to the distinctive criteria that, according to Foot (2002), define a character disposition as a virtue: namely, that it is beneficial and corrective and represents an excellence of will. According to Foot, some virtues are notable because they benefit the possessor, others because they advantage others, and still others because they benefit both the individual and those with whom they interact. The dispositions expressed in admirable acts of forgiveness belong to this latter category. The emotions aroused by having been wronged—particularly anger, resentment, and hatred—have both psychological and physiological effects on the individual who suffered the injustice (Pettigrove, 2023; Witvliet et al., 2023, p. 364). Insofar as forgiveness mitigates these emotions, it is beneficial for the forgiver.

According to Pettigrove (2023, p. 365), our interpersonal relationships can be seriously impaired by unresolved resentments and persistent grudges. Given that (a) maintaining harmonious ties with at least some people contributes to our well-being and (b) forgiveness can facilitate conflict resolution and the restoration of harmony, it is clear that forgiveness can be advantageous both for the forgiver and the forgiven. Those who have committed a wrong may also be burdened by guilt, suffering emotionally and living in social isolation. Forgiveness can help such individuals overcome guilt and reestablish a connection with the community. Moreover, unresolved conflicts and prolonged hostilities between victim and offender can have negative effects on those around them, extending the impact of forgiveness beyond the directly involved parties and influencing the well-being of the entire community—as is evident, for example, in the destructive dynamics of blood feuds.

According to Foot (2002, p. 8), beyond its relational benefits, forgiveness—like other virtues—serves a corrective function in response to common but potentially harmful human tendencies. We are often inclined to present ourselves in a favorable light, exaggerating our virtues or minimizing our faults to gain social

approval; the virtue of honesty helps counteract this tendency by promoting authenticity and mutual respect. Similarly, a disposition toward forgiveness can temper our tendency to experience excessive anger or to harbor resentment longer than is beneficial or healthy. When wronged, we tend to remain fixated on the past, repeatedly reliving the harm suffered, even when letting go would be more advantageous. Furthermore, we are often prone to judging others solely based on their moral failings, overlooking their other qualities and positive actions (Pettigrove, 2023). Forgiveness thus helps mitigate this rigidity, offering a more balanced perspective on others and the relationships we maintain with them.

In general, virtues are excellences of the will (Foot, 2002, p. 4) and concern the desire for and pursuit of what is good and meaningful, rather than what is trivial, irrelevant, or harmful. They lead to the formation of admirable intentions and their wise enactment (Pettigrove, 2023). From this perspective, forgiveness involves what we value, what we consider important, the intentions we form, and the manner in which we carry them out. Forgiveness, therefore, appears to be a matter of the will. Sometimes, letting go of the past is more advantageous than remaining trapped in it. A person who maintains a benevolent attitude even toward those who have wronged them manifests a quality of will that is generally admirable. The disposition to forgive thus seems to embody the distinctive features of virtue identified by Foot.

Another argument advanced by Pettigrove in support of an aretaic analysis of forgiveness is the possibility that it develops over time. Philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics maintained that virtues are not innate but are acquired through practice and experience (Annas, 1995, 2011, 2012; Palazzolo, 2024, 2025; Pettigrove, 2023, p. 365; Russell, 2015). Their acquisition can be complex and require a prolonged process of formation, ideally beginning in early childhood (Kamtekar, 2004; Palazzolo, 2024, 2025; Pettigrove, 2023). In addition to individual commitment, the social and cultural environment also plays a crucial role in fostering or hindering the development of virtue (Herdt, 2015), and even a well-established disposition can weaken in the absence of support and regular practice (Pettigrove, 2015). Just as physical and intellectual skills require consistent—but not

excessive—training to be maintained over time, virtues too require ongoing cultivation (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Although the cultivation of a virtue is a continuous and never fully completed process, the tradition of virtue ethics has consistently maintained that through proper education, practice, and adequate support, it is possible to improve in temperance, courage, justice, benevolence, patience, and other moral qualities. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the same applies to forgiveness, especially in light of research in moral psychology and pedagogy, which confirms what everyday experience seems to suggest: Forgiveness is a capacity that can be nurtured and refined over time (Enright & Song, 2017).

It is important to emphasize that, according to Worthington et al. (2007) and Freedman (2025), forgiveness is best understood as a process rather than a single event. This perspective implies a sequential relationship between intrapersonal forgiveness—understood as letting go of negative emotions regardless of the offender’s actions (Discola, 2021)—and interpersonal forgiveness, which concerns the relationship with the person who caused the harm. In summary, there are compelling reasons to consider forgiveness a virtue.

The question that arises, then, concerns the role this virtue plays in our moral practices and how it can be recognized. In this regard, two methods have been proposed (Pettigrove, 2023). The first involves appealing to exemplary figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, or Malala Yousafzai—the young woman disfigured by the Taliban for defending the right of Afghan girls to education—illustrating how their behavior embodies the ideal of forgiveness.

Linda Zagzebski proposes identifying virtues by examining the traits we admire in moral exemplars: “A virtue is a deep and enduring acquired trait that we admire upon reflection.” Analyzing such traits reveals that they “consist in a disposition to experience a certain emotion that initiates and directs action toward an end, and in the reliable capacity to achieve that end” (Zagzebski, 2017, p. 113). The second method is based on the analysis of fundamental dimensions of human experience, such as conflict and repair, showing how forgiveness enables virtuous engagement within these dynamics (Pettigrove, 2023). In this regard, Nussbaum (1988) suggested identifying areas of human experience that are universal and in which every individual is

inevitably called to make choices, thus orienting their actions in one direction rather than another. From this perspective, a virtue is understood as a disposition that guides appropriate responses in such contexts (Nussbaum, 1988, p. 36; cf. also Roberts, 1995, p. 289). In both approaches, it becomes evident that those who are capable of forgiving with discernment and integrity exhibit traits that fall within the domain of virtue. These interpretations clarify how forgiveness can be understood as a virtue rooted in human experience and ethical discernment. It remains to be clarified what kind of virtue this is.

What Kind of Virtue Is Forgiveness?

Before addressing what kind of virtue forgiveness might be, it is useful to consider how forgiveness occurs psychologically—that is, how individuals experience, process, and enact it. In an article on the effects of forgiveness, Freedman (2025) highlighted how recent psychological research on forgiveness has revealed its numerous benefits, particularly for individuals who suffer from the negative consequences of anger and resentment toward those who have deeply hurt or unjustly wronged them. These benefits extend to physical health—such as reduced blood pressure and a lower risk of heart disease (C. Witvliet & Luna, 2023)—as well as psychological well-being, including decreases in depression, anxiety, and anger, alongside increases in self-esteem and hope (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015). But how is the process of forgiveness structured?

Forgiveness can be described as a sophisticated psychological process involving at least three fundamental components: cognitive control, perspective taking, and social valuation. First, cognitive control is crucial because forgiveness is not an instantaneous decision but a process that unfolds over time (McCullough et al., 2003), involving an internal transformation: It entails relinquishing the impulse for revenge or retaliation and offering an altruistic gift despite having been wronged (Worthington et al., 2000). This involves the voluntary regulation of emotions (Ochsner & Gross, 2005), the suppression of obsessive and aggressive thoughts, and a shift toward more positive and prosocial emotional states (Beyens et al., 2015; McCullough et al., 1997). Research shows that individuals with greater cognitive

control tend to respond less aggressively (Denson et al., 2012), forgive more frequently (Pronk et al., 2010), and reduce rumination related to the offense (Noreen et al., 2014). Second, perspective taking is a fundamental skill for forgiveness: It consists in the ability to consider the situation from the other person's point of view without conflating their emotions with one's own (Ruby & Decety, 2004).

This cognitive component of empathy helps to contextualize the harmful action (North, 1998), to reflect on the intentionality of the act (Cushman, 2008), to recognize the circumstances that may have influenced the other's behavior, and to identify similarities between oneself and the offender. Moreover, recalling one's own transgressions can facilitate a more forgiving attitude toward others (Exline et al., 2008). Finally, social valuation is the process through which motivational value is attributed to the social and relational information that follows the offense. For example, apologies perceived as sincere or difficult tend to increase the propensity to forgive (Ohtsubo & Watanabe, 2009). This phase involves complex considerations related to the severity of the offense, the value of the relationship, the perception of risk, and the presence or absence of remorse. Worthington et al. (2007) distinguished between decisional forgiveness—which involves the cessation of hostile behaviors without a genuine emotional change—and emotional forgiveness, which entails overcoming negative emotions and developing positive feelings toward the offender. While the former primarily depends on social valuation, the latter requires the integration of the three components described. Forgiveness is not a mere rational choice but a complex motivational and relational transformation in which regulating emotions (cognitive control), deeply understanding the other (perspective taking), and evaluating the social and relational context (social valuation) are interdependent elements. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that moral judgment and judgment of forgivability do not coincide: One can forgive what is still considered morally wrong, especially when the emotional bond with the other and the relational context carry significant weight (Fourie et al., 2020). To better understand the tension between the cognitive-decisional and emotional dimensions of forgiveness, it is useful to refer to dual-process theories.

These theories distinguish between two modes of moral reasoning: an automatic, intuitive mode

guided by emotion and a controlled, reflective mode requiring rational effort. Both processes contribute to moral judgment but can come into conflict—particularly in the context of forgiveness. In many situations, moral evaluations primarily arise from the affective-intuitive process (Haidt, 2001), which explains why motivations such as the desire for inner peace or the wish to maintain a relationship should not be regarded as morally irrelevant. On the contrary, such relational reasons can constitute authentic moral responses, even in the absence of thorough rational deliberation. For example, forgiving to overcome resentment or to preserve family cohesion can be a morally significant response, albeit sometimes perceived as less authentic (Hampton, 1998). Dual-process theories reveal how forgiveness can become problematic: On one hand, the automatic emotional response may generate justified anger toward the offender; on the other hand, moral reasoning may motivate forgiveness (Norlock, 2022). These two forces do not always align, and the conflict between them may persist over time.

According to Tessman (2015), forgiveness often involves an internal fracture between what one feels and what one believes to be the morally right course of action. However, this fracture is not a mistake to be corrected; rather, it reflects two distinct moral systems expressing qualitatively different values and engaging different areas of the brain. For this reason, the tension cannot be resolved simply by privileging one system over the other. To address this complexity, some scholars have proposed structured models of forgiveness. Among these, one of the most influential is the four-stage model put forward by Enright and Kittle (2000): (a) uncovering, in which the victim becomes aware of the offense and its impact; (b) decision, involving the conscious choice to forgive; (c) working through, the phase during which the victim attempts to view the offender in a new light; and (d) outcome, the moment when emotional benefits emerge and the negative burden begins to lessen.

Finally, regarding the very nature of forgiveness, Freedman has noted that there is often an inadequate theoretical understanding that may hinder its practice. The spread of inaccurate or distorted beliefs about forgiveness can indeed generate reluctance, uncertainty, or even outright refusal to consider it. In this regard, it has been noted that the meaning and application of

forgiveness can be distorted in two main ways (Song et al., 2025). The first distortion concerns the confusion of forgiveness with other practices, such as absolution or justification of the offense. If one mistakenly believes that forgiving means excusing or legitimizing an injustice, one may refuse to forgive out of fear that doing so implies acceptance or normalization of the harm suffered. Similarly, if forgiveness is confused with forgetting the offense, victims may consider themselves incapable of forgiving, since the memory of abuse or betrayal might be indelible. However, forgiveness itself does not entail erasing the memory or denying the suffering; on the contrary, it can coexist with the awareness of the injustice endured and the recognition of the pain it caused (Smedes, 1996). The second distortion is reductionism (Song et al., 2025)—the tendency to oversimplify forgiveness by reducing it to only one of its aspects, such as the mere release of negative emotions, thereby neglecting its broader moral and interpersonal complexity. Freedman and Chang (2010, p. 26) have also noted that the most common definitions of forgiveness include “letting go,” “moving on,” and “not holding a grudge.” While all these attitudes may be part of the forgiveness process, they overlook an essential element: its relational dimension. Forgiveness is not merely an internal act but a moral practice that typically involves the acknowledgment of the offender and, at least potentially, openness to a transformation of the relationship. Without this broader perspective, forgiveness risks being reduced to a mere exercise in emotional self-regulation, thereby losing its deeper significance as a moral response to injustice. An adequate understanding of forgiveness must therefore arise from a consideration of its intrinsic nature, rather than from a mere aggregation of its manifestations and effects. In this regard, Song et al. (2025) argued that although empirical data gathered in specific contexts can offer valuable insights into this phenomenon, its nature cannot be fully grasped without a philosophical perspective—particularly the conceptual framework provided by Aristotelian ethics.

According to these scholars, forgiveness constitutes an objective and enduring reality whose concrete expression—what Aristotle terms its “actualization”—may vary depending on cultural contexts, personal situations, and individuals’ interpretive frameworks. From this standpoint, Song et al. (2025) proposed

conceiving forgiveness as an Aristotelian moral virtue; thus, the essence or nature of forgiveness is regarded as universal and accessible through rational and philosophically rigorous analysis. Viewed as a moral virtue, forgiveness is situated within a broader conceptual horizon that includes the cultivation of the human soul and the moral character formation of the practitioner. In the broader Aristotelian tradition, moral virtues are closely connected to personal well-being and moral development and should be primarily understood in light of the transformative process experienced by those who cultivate them (Song et al., 2025). Among the main characteristics of moral virtues, as identified by Enright and Fitzgibbons (2015), Kim and Enright (in press), Simon (1986), and Song et al. (p. 6), are (a) a reference to what is genuinely good—that is, human flourishing; (b) the free choice to act virtuously, motivated by an affective inclination toward the good; (c) the agent’s awareness of performing a morally good action (a cognitive quality); (d) the development of moral maturity through virtuous practice (a behavioral quality); (e) the understanding that virtue is developed over time and does not require immediate perfection; (f) the recognition that virtues may manifest in different forms and degrees depending on individuals and circumstances; (g) the tendency to avoid excesses, in accordance with Aristotle’s notion of the “golden mean”; and (h) the commitment to moral consistency over time and across various life situations. From this perspective, virtue is a stable disposition cultivated through habituation to a steady orientation toward the good, which guides the agent in acting—or preparing to act—in a virtuous manner.

In the Aristotelian tradition, a virtue is specifically considered a “moral virtue,” as opposed to an “intellectual virtue,” if its function is to help us act reasonably despite the presence of emotion (Pakaluk, 2020). For instance, an emergency room doctor may face a critical situation involving a patient in extremely grave condition. If shock or pity interferes with their ability to respond swiftly, they might fail to save the patient’s life. The moral virtue of courage functions to enable the doctor to act with clarity and decisiveness despite intense emotion. Forgiveness shares with other Aristotelian moral virtues the motivation toward the good and is expressed through three fundamental domains: affective, cognitive, and behavioral. It includes forms of respect,

generosity, and sometimes moral love (agape), without requiring perfection in its actualization (Holmgren, 1993). However, unlike other moral virtues, forgiveness consists in an act of benevolence specifically directed toward someone who has committed an injustice. Generosity, for example, can be extended to anyone without the necessity of identifying a specific recipient; forgiveness, however, presupposes a direct reference to the offender. Moreover, forgiveness entails a free decision, supported by goodwill and resolve, and is grounded in the recognition of the other's humanity—even when that person has caused harm—through the cultivation of empathy and compassion (North, 1987; Song et al., 2025). The essence of forgiveness lies in the intrinsic value of offering mercy and empathy, even when they are undeserved. The offended party must be willing to actively engage in the process of forgiveness. During this process, the offended individual does not merely rid themselves of resentment but may also develop a broader perspective on the offender. In this regard, Roberts (1995, p. 289) stated that “forgiveness is virtuous because it involves overcoming anger without relinquishing an appropriate judgment concerning the seriousness of the offense and the offender’s responsibility.” Furthermore, forgiveness entails an understanding of the context and motivations that led to the wrongdoing (Freedman, 2000), alongside a willingness to overcome its destructive effects (Enright, 2001). This requires a shift in perspective that cannot occur without an exercise of moral imagination. According to Douglas Stewart (2012), from the offender’s point of view, forgiveness also appears to demand a genuine understanding—or at least an authentic awareness—of what the experience has meant for the victim. This, in turn, presupposes a form of empathy, as well as the willingness to cease viewing victims as “pathetic,” “losers,” or objects to be used and abused and instead to recognize them as human beings equal in dignity and worth. Such a change seems to require a moral transformation on the part of the offender, coupled with a certain degree of humility. Humility is necessary not only for the forgiven but also for the forgiver.

According to Holmgren (2021, pp. 225–226), humility prevents us from adopting a judgmental stance toward the offender, which would entail attributing excessive importance and status to ourselves, thereby neglecting what truly matters

beyond the self—in a way that is ultimately harmful and destructive. The intrinsic value of every person, even the most grievous wrongdoer, prohibits any total moral condemnation of the individual. It is important to avoid what J. G. Murphy (2003) termed “deep retributivism of character”—the tendency to pass judgment not only on the wrongful act but on the offender’s entire moral character. Forgiveness is grounded in an appreciation of human imperfection: It is possible because the imperfection revealed by the offender’s actions is not unique to that individual but reflects a shared human condition.

Forgiveness acknowledges that the forgiver is not without flaws; although innocent of the specific harm suffered, they may be wounded by persistent or excessive anger toward the offender. Recognition of human fallibility should inspire humility in moral judgment. To forgive someone does not imply a definitive evaluation of their character but rather the decision to let go of anger, a choice based—according to J. G. Murphy (2003) and Griswold (2007)—on the offender’s subsequent words and actions. It is the decision not to allow resentment stemming from past wrongs to endure indefinitely—an act that opens the door to the possibility of a renewed relationship. While respecting the importance of making moral judgments about wrongful acts, forgiveness also recognizes the limitations of those called to judge (Pillsbury, 2009). The virtue of forgiveness indeed requires commitment and dedication, but its effectiveness does not depend on the perfection of the act itself. Depending on the context—for example, the severity of the harm or the attitude of the offender—forgiveness may take different forms and manifest with varying intensity. The practice of forgiveness demands patience and perseverance, even when circumstances or the people involved change (Song et al., 2025). According to Song et al. (2025), forgiveness is grounded in the principle of beneficence—that is, the intention to act for the good of the other (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015; North, 1987). In this sense, forgiving requires an inner disposition to do good and the willingness to extend a gesture of openness and care toward the offender, despite the suffering endured.

Forgiveness, as a moral virtue, expresses a moral ideal rather than a set of requirements to be fully satisfied in every circumstance. From this perspective, as already noted, forgiving does not mean justifying the offense, forgetting what

happened, obliging oneself to reconciliation, or renouncing justice; these attitudes represent specific distinctions that do not constitute its essence (Song et al., 2025). Those who recognize forgiveness as a moral virtue are aware that they are performing a good act, aligned with the desire to become a morally better person (Song et al., 2025).

Although it may take different forms, forgiveness retains a stable and recognizable essence. When understood as a moral virtue in accordance with virtue ethics (Pettigrove, 2023; Song et al., 2025; Stewart, 2012), it represents a coherent and principled response capable of transcending personal feelings and subjective interpretations. Acting from such a disposition, the forgiver performs acts of benevolence toward the wrongdoer. If the person is dangerous, such acts may be indirect (e.g., speaking kindly of them in public). As a moral virtue, forgiveness cannot always be exercised flawlessly, but it can be cultivated over time and progressively integrated into an individual's moral development. Through deliberate and consistent practice, forgiveness becomes part of a person's moral character, strengthening their virtuous identity. Over time, forgiving may become more natural, evolving into a moral habit refined through practice and moral maturation. The understanding of the essence of forgiveness, the motivation toward the good, the rational and voluntary choice, the revision of one's judgment about the other, positive affectivity, and concrete action all converge in forgiveness as a moral practice.

Although not all individuals fully achieve this form, partial manifestations do not compromise its essence, which remains the ideal to aspire to (Song et al., 2025). When understood in its broader dimension and properly practiced as a moral virtue, forgiveness can represent an effective path of healing—a means to overcome and free oneself from the harm suffered and the associated pain, without denying or justifying the gravity of the injustice endured. This approach ensures moral consistency regardless of cultural or personal differences, emphasizing that true forgiveness requires a volitional commitment, as defined by Norlock (2023), to overcome the negative impact of the offense. Demonstrating mercy, empathy, and compassion toward the offender makes forgiveness a meaningful moral practice—one that can significantly contribute to the pursuit of the good life. Such an understanding of

forgiveness invites deeper reflection on its relation to other central virtues—most notably, justice.

Is the Virtue of Forgiveness Dependent on the Virtue of Justice?

While in common understanding forgiveness and justice may appear to be in tension, if not outright opposition, their interrelation in philosophical literature constitutes a node that is as intuitive as it is complex. Understanding how one relates to the other is by no means a straightforward matter. We have clarified what forgiveness is. But how should justice be understood? “Moral thought conceives justice primarily as an order implicit in relationships—an order and a balance that injustice disrupts and that must therefore be restored in order to resume a good life” (my translation, from Grandi, 2020, p. 47). In light of this relational definition of justice, one may therefore ask whether forgiveness and justice should be considered as two distinct and autonomous virtues or whether forgiveness should be understood as a particular manifestation of moral justice—an internal corrective to the virtue itself, as Pakaluk (2025) suggested.

From this perspective, forgiveness is deeply connected to the Aristotelian virtue of *epieikeia*, traditionally rendered as “equity” (Pakaluk, 2009). This virtue primarily manifests in two ways, both united by the necessity to act justly in the absence of explicit rules or in cases where a literal application of the law would produce unjust outcomes. In this light, Pakaluk argues that (a) forgiveness constitutes a concrete expression of moral benevolence directed toward enmity and offense and (b) it involves the capacity to rebalance the demands of justice by transforming perceived debts into gratuitous gifts and anger into joy—all inspired by mercy and oriented toward the good of the other and the relationship with them. In this sense, forgiveness can be configured as an act of justice toward a transgressor who has undertaken a process of moral repair toward the offended party. Similarly, Fricker (2019) conceived forgiveness as a form of moral justice exercised by a virtuous agent but conditioned on specific requirements: repentance, inner transformation, and reparation by the offender.

Philpott (2013) also offered an interpretation of forgiveness as a form of justice, provided that

justice is understood broadly—beyond the mere protection of violated rights or deserved punishment. In his view, forgiveness embodies justice only if justice is conceived as “justice as right relationship.” This notion carries a dual meaning: On one hand, it designates a state of equitable relationships among persons; on the other, it indicates a process of restoring a bond broken by injustice. Within this framework, forgiveness appears as a reflection of justice understood as the repair of a damaged relationship—a conception deeply rooted in the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

For Pakaluk, Fricker, and Philpott, therefore, the ontological link between forgiveness and justice is so close as to justify categorizing forgiveness as a form, function, or expression of justice itself. From this perspective, forgiveness would not be an autonomous moral virtue, but rather an intrinsic dimension of justice. However, I do not find this thesis convincing. As shown in Sections “Moral Repair,” “Conditional Forgiveness,” and “Conditional or Unconditional Forgiveness?,” forgiveness is best understood as an independent moral virtue, grounded in mercy and endowed with its own ethical identity. While acknowledging that forgiveness can work in cooperation with justice, I consider it essential that forgiveness preserves its autonomy and distinct essence, irreducible and not subordinate to justice.

Precisely based on this ontological distinction between justice and forgiveness, it becomes possible to introduce a well-defined alternative model of justice that places at its core the concept of repair embodied by forgiveness.

Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Restorative Justice

The concept of repair lies at the heart of so-called restorative justice: a set of practices aimed at addressing the harm, offense, and suffering resulting from conflict. The *Oxford Dictionary* describes restorative justice as a subsystem of criminal justice; however, academic literature tends to recognize its full autonomy from other models, both philosophically and legally (Mannozi, 2017, p. 466).

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines this system of justice as follows: “A criminal justice system that focuses on the rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation with victims and the community as

a whole” (Mannozi, 2017, p. 465). But what is meant by reconciliation?

Reconciliation is a form of moral repair that may include forgiveness (Emerick, 2017) or occur independently of it (C. Murphy, 2012; Watkins, 2015). This claim requires further clarification. As has been noted in philosophical reflections on forgiveness, many authors agree in considering it as the process through which a person manages to overcome or set aside feelings of resentment and other negative reactions caused by an offense suffered. At times, this overcoming is accompanied by the return of positive attitudes toward the wrongdoer, such as a disposition toward benevolence (J. G. Murphy, 2003; Pettigrove, 2012). However, it can also happen that, even in the absence of a genuine change in internal attitude, the parties involved succeed in reestablishing some form of cooperation or peaceful coexistence. In such cases, this constitutes reconciliation without forgiveness. Conversely, authentic forgiveness—in the sense of overcoming resentment—may occur without implying a desire to resume a relationship with the offender, for example, due to concerns related to safety or personal well-being (Radzik & Murphy, 2023). These examples clearly indicate that forgiveness and reconciliation, although they may coexist, are not identical phenomena: Rather, they are distinct dynamics that are not necessarily interdependent.

For this reason, Emerick (2017) emphasized that, unlike forgiveness, reconciliation requires a mutual commitment to rebuilding the relationship. Watkins (2015), on the other hand, argued that reconciliation can occur even in the absence of an admission of guilt by the offender (which is typically a condition of forgiveness), especially in historical contexts marked by long-standing injustices. Conversely, C. Murphy (2017) maintained that in situations of systemic oppression, forgiveness cannot be a prerequisite for reconciliation, as imposing it on victims risks perpetuating the injustice. Here, I adopt the definition of reconciliation as the restoration of a connection. Forgiveness, by contrast, can involve precisely the opposite: moving forward with one’s life by distancing oneself from the party who caused the harm.

In any case, both forgiveness and reconciliation are forms of moral repair. However, repair is not always possible and, in cases of severe injustice, entails a cost for all parties involved. For

the victim, the cost consists in accepting the loss suffered and the ensuing pain; for the offender, it involves confronting shame and taking responsibility for one's actions; for the community, it requires acknowledging the harm, assigning responsibility, and reaffirming shared moral norms.

According to the ethics of ubuntu—the principle of shared humanity among human beings (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2011, p. 551)—reconciliation does not necessarily require reciprocal positive feelings, nor is it reducible to mere peaceful coexistence. Rather, it entails that the parties clarify what happened, assume their respective responsibilities, and interact communally, with the possibility that more positive feelings may emerge over time.

Defined in this way, reconciliation differs significantly from forgiveness: It does not imply an emotional transformation on the part of the victim but rather aims to restore balance in relationships disrupted by wrongdoing, both at the interpersonal and intrapersonal levels.

Both the concept of reconciliation and that of forgiveness can be situated within the framework of restorative justice, given its intrinsic moral dimension (Vitale, 2021, p. 4). In particular, victim–offender mediation—the primary tool of restorative justice—promotes the acceptance of responsibility by the offender and a process of acknowledgment and repair of the harm done. If properly guided, this process can create the conditions for openness to forgiveness, understood in its full moral sense (Mannozi & Lodigiani, 2017, p. 338).

Here I take a stronger stance. Forgiveness, understood as a moral virtue as outlined in the preceding sections, represents a distinctive path of ethical commitment and motivation toward relational responsibility. Cultivating the virtue of forgiveness indeed presupposes an openness to the other, which in turn constitutes a necessary condition for the authentic realization of justice. From this perspective, forgiveness is not only compatible with the restorative justice paradigm but is also actively fostered as one of its key components.

The virtue of forgiveness stands in a relationship of alliance and continuity with restorative justice: Both aim to repair, rebuild, and restore just relationships. It is precisely for this reason that a just society requires not only the legal framework provided by restorative justice but also a moral culture of forgiveness conceived as a relational order and openness to the other.

When considered in isolation, restorative justice and forgiveness risk appearing partial and inadequate to fully address the complexity of conflict and its resolution for a comprehensive restoration of relational order. We need both the legal element and the moral one: From a deeply ethical standpoint, neither mere compensation for harm nor the application of punishment suffices to rebuild a broken bond. Morally, it is necessary that the wrongdoer sincerely acknowledge the consequences of their actions and, at least in part, desire the possibility of restoring the relationship, potentially through forgiveness, which serves as a regulative ideal. It matters less how adept the forgiver is at manifesting this virtue than that they engage with it over time. On the other hand, the virtue of forgiveness is complementary to the legal paradigm precisely because we cannot rely solely on the moral dimension: Virtue alone is insufficient to guarantee justice. A legal system is necessary to support, channel, and in some cases enable the restorative process. Morality needs justice just as justice requires a culture of virtue.

Furthermore, conceiving forgiveness as a moral virtue has a decisive impact both on the motivation of the forgiving subject and on their well-being and flourishing. One of the fundamental traits of being virtuous is the disposition to act in a certain way out of motivation. When assessing a person's level of virtue, it is important to determine to what extent they are motivated or committed to acting with the right aim. Here, it is crucial that the forgiver is not perfect—the virtuous person is not required to be flawless—but rather that they actively work on cultivating the virtuous trait. Authentic virtue demands effort (Annas, 2011). The pain caused by the wrongdoing thus becomes an opportunity for growth for the aspiring virtuous agent. This is the benefit of conceiving forgiveness as a virtue.

Forgiveness, in this light, becomes an opportunity for the victim not only to be freed from the burden of the offense but also to experience moral growth. To forgive is part of a larger blueprint for living a meaningful life. It is precisely this dimension of active engagement in the relationship that makes forgiveness, understood as a virtue, a valuable contribution to restorative justice—restorative insofar as it is grounded in practices aimed at healing the wounds caused by wrongdoing and fostering alternatives to punishment. Whereas the retributive system centers on lawbreaking and guilt, the restorative model

focuses on the harm caused and on repairing relationships—that is, on who has been affected by the offense. This model therefore entails the recognition of responsibility by the transgressor, who assumes the obligation to respond, as far as possible, to the victim's needs in order to restore relational balance. This stands in contrast to the retributive system, which seeks to restore civil order.

It is precisely in the recognition of responsibility and the need to overcome conflict that restorative justice and ethics find common ground. Restorative justice places responsibility at its core, understood not in punitive or merely compensatory terms, but as the foundation of the entire restorative process (Mannozi & Lodigiani, 2017, p. 338). In this context, repairing means acknowledging the relational role as a space where recognition of the other and one's responsibility toward them can develop. Only subsequently, from this relational openness, can the possibility of forgiveness emerge.

From this perspective, it is legitimate to speak of an alliance between restorative justice and the practice of forgiveness: Both are grounded in a process of assuming responsibility and a commitment to overcoming the rupture. What confers authenticity on the restorative path is the dimension of reciprocity that arises in the relationship between victim and offender. Within this renewed balance, forgiveness can open a new temporal horizon, making possible transformed bonds and a reconciled coexistence (Vitale, 2021, p. 5; Claessen, 2020). These ideas are deeply rooted in the very origins of restorative justice.

Forgiveness at the Roots of Restorative Justice

Although restorative justice is a secular legal paradigm, it is deeply rooted in religious traditions and Indigenous cultures across the globe, some of which date back centuries (Zehr, 2015). The concept of justice found in Judeo-Christian sacred texts—particularly in the New Testament—offers a particularly meaningful perspective: that of the commandment of charity. In 1 Corinthians 13:1–13, Saint Paul asserts that among the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, the greatest is charity. Forgiveness, though described as “costly” in the language of the Gospels, goes far beyond any logic of proportion or reciprocity.

Jesus calls upon his followers to forgive “seventy times seven” times (Matthew 18:21–35), that is, without limit. This is a gesture that interrupts the logic of calculation and opens the way to radical gratuitousness. Augustine likewise maintains that there is no greater act of charity than sincerely forgiving a wrong that one has suffered. Loving or assisting someone who has done us no harm is relatively easy. By contrast, to love one's enemy—consistently willing their good and offering help whenever the opportunity arises, even if that person hates us and harms us whenever possible—is an act of extraordinary nobility and a manifestation of the highest form of goodness (in Norlock, 2022, p. 931).

In the Christian tradition, forgiveness is a central element of religious practice, and the moral motivation—both divine and human—to forgive has always been a matter of importance for the early thinkers of that tradition. Augustine's well-known recommendation to separate the sin from the sinner reveals a sensitivity to the complexity of identifying a person with their wrongdoings, especially when, as he himself notes, the quality of the individual's will has changed since the morally blameworthy act. However, forgiveness is conditioned by repentance. “In the act of repentance,” he adds, “we should consider not so much the duration as the depth of the [offender's] sorrow”—a clear expression, according to the historian Ramelli, of the dependence of forgiveness on affective repentance (in Ramelli, 2011, p. 43; Norlock, 2022). It is important to note, however, that there may be a significant difference between (a) forgiveness contingent upon repentance and (b) forgiveness seriously considered when the other party repents (while the forgiver may still forgive even in the absence of repentance).

For the purposes of our discussion, it is significant to note that Augustine appears to conceive forgiveness more as an attitude the forgiver ought to adopt toward the wrongdoer than as a specific feeling one must necessarily experience. From this perspective, forgiveness emerges as an act oriented toward the future of the relationship. Such an understanding aligns with the Gospel tradition: Jesus's exhortation, in fact, responds to the question of how many times one must forgive—not how many times one must feel a certain emotion.

Ramelli (2011, pp. 31, 33) highlighted the recurring pattern of the “repentance–forgiveness

sequence” in the Gospels, also noting that forgiveness is sometimes translated as “refraining from imputation.” Within this framework, if there is an emotion that plays a relevant role, it is the wrongdoer’s sorrow for their own transgression.

This attentiveness to the vulnerability of the relationship and to the possibility of interrupting the cycle of guilt and punishment leads naturally to the concept of restorative justice, which is grounded in a vision of justice that is less retributive and more transformative. The retributive conception understands justice as a unilateral assertion directed against the offender. In contrast, a restorative conception views justice as the achievement of a renewed consensus between the parties involved. These two conceptions of justice are conceptually distinct but not necessarily incompatible (Okimoto et al., 2012). The retributive paradigm seeks to restore justice through unilateral action against the offender, thereby addressing concerns related to the victim’s status and power that have been usurped. Conversely, the restorative paradigm aims to restore justice through a renewed understanding between victim and offender, addressing concerns about the violation of shared norms and values that define the victim–offender relationship or a common group identity. These two paradigms respond to different justice-related goals (e.g., Okimoto et al., 2012; Wenzel & Okimoto, 2014; Wenzel et al., 2010). The conception of restorative justice resonates with the Hebrew understanding of justice as grounded in a logic of gratuitousness.

Justice—*edaqah* in Hebrew—goes beyond the Aristotelian framework of “giving each their due,” which is grounded in a criterion of proportionality that also serves as a standard for punishment. Instead, it incorporates both the dimension of gratuitousness—which subverts the rigid logic of reciprocity between wrongdoing and retribution—and that of forgiveness. The duty to “turn the other cheek”—which neither implies minimizing the severity of injustice nor passive submission to it—entails, from a historical-anthropological perspective, a call to interrupt the cycle of violence. (Mannozi, 2017, p. 467, my translation)

Zehr (1990, p. 181), widely recognized as the “father” of restorative justice, moved in this same direction and provided a definition that has gained broad acceptance within the academic community: “Justice involves the victim, the offender, and the community in a search for solutions which promote repair, reconciliation, and reassurance.” More recently, Zehr (2015) has forcefully criticized retributive practices, advocating an

alternative model for addressing wrongdoing. In his view, the foundation of restorative justice lies in the principle of “making things right”: Justice and healing are pursued through solutions coconstructed by the victim, the offender, and the community, thereby fostering reconciliation at both individual and collective levels (Scholl & Townsend, 2024; Zehr, 2015).

In Western culture, the typical response to lawbreaking is punitive in nature, with penalties imposed according to legal codes (in civil law systems) or judicial precedent (in common law systems). Moreover, individuals found guilty are frequently stigmatized and socially reduced to their offense—a form of extrajudicial punishment by which the offender, stripped of their humanity, is denied any possibility of healing or reintegration (Scholl & Townsend, 2024). As a result, many former inmates face significant obstacles in fully reentering society as free and reintegrated individuals.

By contrast, Zehr (2015, p. 134) emphasized that the restorative philosophy is grounded in the virtue of *shalom*, understood as the creation of a space characterized by a condition of “wholeness and rightness.” This concept unfolds along three dimensions:

1. Physical well-being: the fulfillment of basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter.
2. Social or interpersonal well-being: relationships marked by peace and harmony, free from oppression or injustice.
3. Moral and ethical well-being: acting with honesty and transparency, without feelings of guilt or moral responsibility for wrongdoing (Scholl & Townsend, 2024, p. 187).

Restorative justice thus places the humanity of those who have broken relational bonds at its core, while also fostering the healing of those who have been harmed. From this perspective, restorative practices are situated along a continuum that ranges from highly informal approaches to more structured interventions. Not all restorative practices are formal, such as victim–offender conferences, which involve rigorous procedures and direct, face-to-face meetings between victims and offenders (Zehr, 2015).

In particular, restorative practice often takes an informal form, relying on the use of open-ended questions that foster mutual understanding, empathy, and a shift in perspective

among participants. This approach plays a crucial role in encouraging the offender to engage in deep reflection on their actions while also providing a space in which they can express their perspective without being judged. Zehr (2015) conceived restorative justice as a relational way of life and as a response to those who have violated rules. Similar to the restorative practices of Indigenous communities (Umbreit, 2003), storytelling plays a central role in the restorative process. The offender is asked to provide an introspective narrative of the event, explaining the motivations behind their actions and the needs they were attempting to meet, regardless of whether those actions were legally permissible.

The level of offender engagement in the restorative process is crucial to its success (Bouffard et al., 2017). The interaction between the offender and the facilitator marks the beginning of a path toward healing and restoration (Clark, 2014). At the heart of this process lies the offender's acceptance of responsibility. Through open-ended and nonjudgmental questions, the facilitator helps the offender explore the impact of their actions on both themselves and others, fostering greater self-awareness and assisting them in identifying concrete ways to make amends (Zehr, 2015, p. 282). However, within this framework, forgiveness can occur even in the absence of the offender's willingness to make amends or restore the relationship.

Unlike the retributive process, which focuses solely on the offender's guilt, restorative justice creates spaces for reflection, problem solving, and accountability, thereby promoting a transformative path that goes beyond mere punishment. From this perspective, Zehr articulates three foundational pillars of restorative justice:

1. Attention to the harm done and the needs of the victim.
2. The obligation to repair, grounded in offender accountability.
3. The active involvement of all parties in resolving the conflict (Mannozi, 2017, p. 469).

As Mannozi (2017, p. 466) noted, among the various formulations of restorative justice, the one proposed by Van Ness and Strong (2015) stands out for its strong victim-centered orientation and for its conception of restorative justice

as a genuine "philosophy of justice," aimed at healing the harm suffered by victims and/or the community. This approach represents a radical departure from the traditional penal paradigm: Wrongdoing is no longer understood solely as a violation of legal norms but as an infringement of individual rights and a rupture of social relationships. Restorative justice thus marks a shift from justice as punishment to justice as healing (Pranis, 2007), fostering the reduction of negative emotions and the cultivation of positive sentiments such as empathy (Strang & Sherman, 2003). It is important to distinguish between *forgiveness* (with a lowercase "f"), which refers to everyday transgressions among acquaintances, and *Forgiveness* (with a capital "F"; Suzuki & Jenkins, 2024, p. 280), which concerns grave violations and deep injustices and therefore requires a radical transformation in the victim's way of living (Suzuki & Jenkins, 2024).

Equally essential within the restorative justice process is the role of intrapersonal forgiveness. Within psychology, intrapersonal forgiveness is self-forgiveness, which often (not always) constitutes a necessary step toward interpersonal forgiveness. The experience of victimization generates intense emotions such as anger, fear, and anxiety that must first be acknowledged and processed (Suzuki & Jenkins, 2024), especially since these emotions can undermine the victim's autonomy and sense of safety (Pemberton, 2019; Suzuki & Jenkins, 2024). If these emotions remain unaddressed, there is a risk that the forgiveness granted to the offender becomes *hollow forgiveness* (Suzuki & Jenkins, 2024, p. 280; Yu et al., 2021)—that is, forgiveness given as a rational decision but not genuinely felt emotionally, allowing resentment to persist. While in cases of minor harm it may be possible to bypass the emotional processing of the victim's pain, this does not apply in the context of restorative justice (Zehr, 2002). It is crucial that victims first release negative emotions through intrapersonal forgiveness and only afterward, if they wish, proceed to interpersonal forgiveness (Suzuki & Jenkins, 2024).

Restorative justice—by drawing upon the inner strength of victims—highlights shared values and engages participants on both emotional and spiritual levels. More specifically, by creating a context in which victims can process the harm they have suffered, restorative justice helps them to rediscover dignity and strength, essential elements

for overcoming the emotional burden of the offense (Pranis, 2007; Suzuki & Jenkins, 2024). By fostering reflection on shared values, restorative justice reduces the distance between victim and offender, enabling the former to recognize the humanity of the latter—not by imposing forgiveness, but by offering it as a potential tool for personal growth (Pranis, 2007). Finally, by deeply involving emotional and spiritual dimensions, restorative justice supports a transformative process that allows victims to free themselves from anger and resentment, thereby promoting a sense of inner peace (Pranis, 2007).

Thus, although restorative justice does not necessarily include forgiveness, remorse, or reconciliation among its institutional objectives, it is possible to recognize that the conditions it creates may render these outcomes morally and relationally plausible (Blad, 2013; Zehr, 2015). Thus, by maintaining the conception of forgiveness as a moral virtue not prescribed by restorative justice, it can emerge spontaneously as a relational outcome of the reparative process. Encounters between victims and offenders, as well as collective dialogue practices, tend to generate relational contexts within which profound ethical responses may arise, even if they are not formally prescribed. Some scholars express caution regarding the incorporation of morally charged concepts, such as forgiveness, into the normative framework of restorative justice. From this perspective, such concepts risk becoming morally demanding or even inappropriate if imposed as expectations (Van Stokkom, 2008, p. 405; 2018, p. 35). For this reason, forgiveness is often considered a supererogatory act, comparable to heroic deeds or extraordinary sacrifices—morally good actions that, however, are not obligatory. This point raises an important philosophical question: Can the concept of the supererogatory be meaningfully accommodated within the framework of virtue ethics? This question invites a closer examination of the relationship between supererogation and virtue—a topic that has generated considerable debate among contemporary scholars.

Forgiveness as a Supererogatory Act?

The morally excellent actions—those that, because of the gravity of the circumstances and the high level of sacrifice required, cannot be imposed as duties—are often described as *supererogatory*.

Nevertheless, supererogation is not limited to exceptional deeds; it also includes everyday gestures of generosity that go beyond mere moral obligation, such as giving a book to a friend or offering a meal to a neighbor.

According to Heyd (1982), forgiveness represents a paradigmatic case of supererogatory abstention: an act that, while morally commendable, cannot be demanded as a moral obligation. To forgive entails relinquishing the moral right to resentment, thus constituting a voluntary ethical choice rather than a duty.

Gamlund (2010, p. 543) suggested that an act of forgiveness can be classified as supererogatory if it meets three fundamental criteria:

1. It is not forbidden, that is, it is permissible.
2. It is not obligatory.
3. It is morally good or praiseworthy.

Based on this definition, forgiveness fully qualifies as a supererogatory act.

Other authors adopt a less categorical stance. Stewart (2012), for example, distinguished between cases in which forgiveness is morally obligatory and those in which it is not, differentiating between unconditional and conditional forgiveness. As noted earlier, the presence or absence of repentance on the part of the wrongdoer carries moral significance: The lack of an apology may present an obstacle to forgiveness, whereas taking responsibility provides a reason to grant it. Furthermore, the absence of remorse and apology tends to outweigh any favorable motivations for forgiveness, making unconditional forgiveness often a supererogatory act, that is, not morally required. Conversely, when the wrongdoer demonstrates sincere remorse and apologizes for the harm caused, forgiveness may in some cases become a moral duty for the victim. However, in situations where the gravity of the offense or the degree of culpability of the wrongdoer is significant, the value of an apology may be insufficient to render forgiveness morally obligatory.

In such cases, even conditional forgiveness can be considered supererogatory, insofar as it represents an act that goes beyond what is morally required. However, the definition of forgiveness as a moral virtue appears to be in tension with the conception of forgiveness as a supererogatory act. The concepts of supererogation and virtue seem to be in evident conflict. As Heyd (2015) argued,

within virtue ethics there is no distinction between a morally good act and an exceptional act; rather, the exceptional act coincides with the good act—the only right thing to do. “If the virtuous person has only one moral option in a given situation, then the question of whether this choice is obligatory or supererogatory makes no sense. It is simply the only right choice” (Heyd, 2015, p. 32).⁶

To address the apparent tension between virtue ethics and the concept of supererogation, some scholars have proposed distinguishing between degrees of virtue, such as “ordinary” versus “saintly” or heroic. However, such distinctions prove problematic. Even a less virtuous person models themselves on the ideal of the virtuous agent, which remains the exemplary standard for all. The question is whether figures like Saint Francis or Mother Teresa belong to this ideal or transcend it. Once accepted as virtuous, they cannot be excluded from the ideal accessible to other moral agents. The hypothesis of two levels of virtue is difficult to sustain unless deontological criteria are adopted. What seems to distinguish heroic virtue are the actions themselves, not the dispositions. But if this is the case, why should the “ordinarily” virtuous person not aspire to the highest form of virtue? Aristotle, with his doctrine of the mean, suggests that there are no categorical degrees of virtue: A single virtue of forgiveness can account for both the mercy shown by those who have forgiven serious offenses and the everyday gestures of forgiveness.

On this point, Annas argues that the traditional concept of supererogation fails to adequately account for moral heroism, yet outright denying it risks rendering moral heroism unintelligible. She contends that moral heroes should not be seen as exceptional individuals or as those who perform the “ethically best” action compared to others. Rather, moral heroes are ordinary people who, in extraordinarily difficult and unforeseen circumstances, nevertheless manage to do what ordinary virtue requires. They act rightly and respond appropriately in extreme situations, where most people would fail even to exercise ordinary virtue. Their example challenges us not to become extraordinary, but to uphold the level of virtue we already possess when circumstances become demanding (Annas, 2015). Thus, although forgiveness may appear to take on the characteristics of a supererogatory act, a review of contemporary literature on the relationship between virtue and

supererogation reveals that the connection is far more complex than it initially seems.

I believe that, in order to frame forgiveness within the context of restorative justice, focusing on virtue makes forgiveness a more attainable goal, without diminishing its moral grandeur.

Final Remarks

The analysis of forgiveness as a response to harm has shown that it constitutes a complex dynamic involving moral, psychological, and legal dimensions, thereby requiring a multidisciplinary approach. When conceived as a moral virtue, forgiveness emerges as a practice capable of fostering character development and repairing damaged relationships through the renewal of trust.

The virtue ethics perspective highlights how forgiveness can correct morally negative human tendencies—such as resentment or withdrawal from others—thus contributing to the restoration of relational balance. This underscores the invaluable significance of forgiveness not only as a moral act but also as a dispositional trait that can be cultivated over time. In particular, the virtue ethics approach conceives forgiveness as a response carefully calibrated to the individuals and circumstances involved—a conception that also possesses practical plausibility. Furthermore, the emphasis on the gradual cultivation of forgiveness indicates that it is not an instantaneous decision but a process unfolding over time, involving moral maturation, ongoing reflection, and, in certain cases, a transformation of the relationship between victim and wrongdoer. This approach avoids treating forgiveness as an unconditional attitude while simultaneously rejecting its exclusion *a priori* from the set of morally legitimate options.

On the other hand, moral psychology—as represented in the works of Freedman and Song et al.—illuminates the psychological and physical benefits of forgiveness, as well as its role in fostering empathy and recognizing the dignity and humanity of others. This approach closely aligns with the conception of forgiveness as a moral virtue proposed by virtue ethics.

Moreover, the analysis has revealed the close connection between forgiveness and justice,

⁶ To further explore the relationship between virtue and supererogation, see in particular Heyd (2015) and Crisp (2013).

showing that they are two distinct but potentially complementary virtues. Forgiveness possesses its own essence and autonomy as a moral virtue and is neither identical to nor exhausted by justice. Similarly, it must be distinguished from reconciliation, which may represent a possible outcome but does not constitute a necessary condition for forgiveness. When the well-being of victims and the quality of their relationship with the wrongdoer are genuinely prioritized, forgiveness becomes a vital element in the process of repair and transformation for both parties involved. Accordingly, the virtue of forgiveness stands as a foundational element of restorative justice; rather than being merely ancillary or exceptional, it can flourish within this framework, provided it is not imposed but freely exercised as a virtuous choice.⁷

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