

Reconciling with Harm: An Alternative to Forgiveness and Revenge¹

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I. Introduction: Harm that Goes Right to the “Bone”—Beyond *Bastard out of Carolina*

With respect to harm or wrongdoing, the traditional reactive attitudes and actions are forgiveness of, revenge against, and reconciliation with a perpetrator. Most accounts of forgiveness focus on benefits of forgiving to the forgiver and others; vengeance against a wrongdoer is often justified for its appeal in satisfying vindictive passions; and arguments for reconciliation tend to center on the social utility of reestablished ability for victim and perpetrator to work together to achieve common goals. However, forgiveness, revenge, and traditional reconciliation may be impossible, inappropriate, or morally undesirable in cases in which a person suffers from wounds and scars not healed by time (or by anything else) and that can and do alter irrevocably one’s ability to make choices, take actions, or enjoy life fully. In such cases, the traditional responses to wrong or harm are insufficient, undesirable, or inapplicable and when and where this is true, a form of “reconciliation” that is morally appropriate and morally preferable to the traditional reactive attitudes and actions is reconciliation with, but not to, harm.

I argue for this alternative conception of reactions to wrongdoing, wrongdoers, and harm as a moral competitor to forgiveness, revenge, and traditional reconciliation centering on the sufferer of harm, making it considerably different from traditional approaches that depend and focus on the offender as much (or more) as they do on the person harmed. In the alternative, we recognize that there are perpetrators who are unforgivable,² harmed people who are unwilling or unable to forgive, wrongdoers who do not seek forgiveness, doers and sufferers of harm who will never be reconciled, harms that cannot be undone, wounds that will not heal, and cases in which neither forgiveness nor revenge solves the problem of harm.

Reconciling with harm, I argue, is not “giving up” nor is it condoning a wrong done; it is not the reaction of a powerless victim who lacks ability or courage to seek vengeance or the magnanimity to forgive. Neither is reconciling with harm identical to reconciling oneself *to* harm. To do the latter *is* to give up and to let harm continue to rule one’s life. To reconcile with harm, on the contrary, is to recognize oneself as harmed, and in the most serious cases, to recognize harm as part of who one is; but it is also to aspire to a vision of oneself as a person who is much more than simply harmed. One who reconciles with harm seeks and develops a conception of and for herself

as a good, complete person, a valuable member of a moral community who accepts that she is harmed and empowers herself to achieve a kind of moral renewal of herself. Reconciling with harm thus affirms individual value and makes possible meaningful social relations by maintaining or creating the dignity and self-respect of the sufferer that may not result from forgiveness, revenge, or the traditional conception of reconciliation. Reconciling with harm is, I argue, morally superior to forgiveness, revenge, and reconciliation with a perpetrator for cases of severe, egregious, and ongoing harm³ to the victim where the traditional reactive attitudes and actions give more power and attention to the perpetrator than he warrants and less to the person harmed than she deserves, thus failing to address appropriately the concerns and needs of the person who has been harmed. Reconciling with harm is therefore a specific and moral affirmation of the value of the harmed person and a virtue to be cultivated.

I refer to the story of Bone in *Bastard out of Carolina*,⁴ a little girl who is very seriously harmed, to make a case for reconciliation with harm as a morally sound and preferable approach because it places the severely and egregiously harmed person at the center of moral concern. Dorothy Allison's moving, disturbing, painfully detailed account of wrongs and harms experienced by Bone, who is repeatedly abused and beaten by her viciously violent step-father, exemplifies such harm. The ordeal through which Bone goes is clear even though one gets the impression at the end of the book that Bone will survive. But it is likely that she suffers from, and will continue indefinitely to suffer from, insufferable harm.⁵ The wounds that are part of her *self*, whether physical or emotional, are likely always to be with her in some way. Obviously, physical aspects of rape caused searing pain, broken bones, and other kinds of intense physical, psychological, and emotional suffering. Even after the passage of time, if Bone suffers as others who have suffered these harms do, there will be times when she cannot help but to remember vividly and thus to suffer again the original harm. She may see herself as worthless; she may conclude as harmed children so often do, that this happened to her because she is bad, worthless, and deserves to be treated this way. To escape this conclusion, she may try to convince herself that it was not really so bad at all, that this is just what happens to "people like her." She may carry these feelings to all of her social and personal relationships and feel uncomfortable, as though she does not belong or does not deserve to belong. As a consequence, she may be unable to trust others in a variety of personal and social circumstances, she may be plagued by doubts about her own worth and value, and it is likely that the effects of harm, which are continuing harms, will last much longer than the time it takes for her to heal physically. It is possible that a person so severely harmed may never recover fully; that a person harmed so deeply will always experience to some degree the harms and continuing harms inflicted upon her because, as Jeffrie Murphy points out, "there is a painfully intrusive light cast into our souls when we are deeply wronged by our fellow human beings – a light that shatters our innocence

by illuminating our fragility, our vulnerability, our openness to suffering and betrayal.”⁶ In the end, there is something in this realization that militates against believing that revenge against her stepfather is all there is to the *moral* of Bone’s story.⁷ What, if anything, will give (or give back) to Bone a sense of herself as a good person, a valuable member of the moral community who can trust and come to live a good life? The traditional answers are that she might forgive, or seek revenge, or reconcile with her stepfather. These answers are, I will show, decidedly wrong for people who have suffered harm of the severity and long-term consequences that Bone has suffered.

II. Reconciling with Harm: Arguing Against Forgiveness and Revenge

Traditional reactions to intentional harm are forgiveness of, revenge against, and reconciliation with a person who has caused it. Arguments for revenge tend toward abstractions concerning scales of justice or moral balance while arguments for forgiveness center on recognizing our shared moral imperfections. Arguments for reconciliation tend to focus primarily on practical matters such as working together to achieve common goals or understanding and welcoming a wrongdoer back into the moral community. In reviewing some of the strongest arguments for the traditional reactive attitudes and actions, however, I find none of them to be always sufficient as appropriate reactions to severe harm and suffering. The simple truth in cases of severe and egregious harm is that what is important is care of the self of the person harmed. It is neither necessary nor likely that exacting revenge against or forgiving a wrongdoer will restore lost self-respect, lost options, or impaired abilities in the harmed person. These, I think, are more pressing moral issues in cases of wrongdoing than the inordinate attention that is often or usually placed on what a perpetrator deserves for having inflicted harm on another. I begin the argument for reconciling with harm by giving an overview of six of the strongest and most recognizable positions on the “virtues” of revenge and forgiveness and providing an analysis of these positions in light of the interests of the victim of harm or wrongdoing.

Revenge and Punishment

Peter French, Jeffrie Murphy, and Jean Hampton argue for the “virtue of vengeance.” All of them argue that revenge or punishment is an appropriate response to wrong or harm, and that they restore balance and moral order.

First, let us suppose that Bone, like Peter French, takes a hard line on the moral value of seeking and getting revenge against offenders. Bone would thus center attention on the notion that it is important to tip the scales of justice back so that the moral order is restored.⁸ Here, it is morally appropriate for Bone to seek revenge against her step-father. To illustrate the appropriateness of

revenge in a case similar to that of Bone in *Bastard out of Carolina*, French uses the popular Western genre film, *Hannie Caulder*, to defend the position that “some people need killing.” Hannie is raped and believes that she must kill the rapists “because they deserve it. Her hatred is far more retributive, indeed moral, than it is malicious,” French contends; and Hannie holds that “they are scum and she knows that she is not. Their violation of her requires a hostile response, in and of itself...”⁹ So revenge establishes “a moral link between the actions of a person and what he or she deserves.”¹⁰ Therefore, Bone (or in this case her surrogate since she is, after all, just a little girl) ought to take revenge. For French, not to take revenge when one is capable of it is to be a “moral failure.”¹¹ It is, apparently, one’s moral duty to seek revenge.

Jeffrie Murphy does not take the hard line on revenge that is clear in Peter French’s account of its moral status since Murphy eschews the vindictive passions that lead to revenge. Murphy argues against acting on retributive hatred because it is literally impossible to get even, it costs too much to try to do so, and “it could, in some cases, become one’s life instead of being a part of one’s life; and the hater would pay a price for being led by this passion.”¹² But his position does not differ from that of French on exacting revenge itself since Murphy still contends that there are benefits in resentment and punishment. For Murphy, it is necessary for the victim to repudiate the offender’s message that the victim does not count and may be used as a thing. This is, like French’s view, formal and focused on an abstract conception of justice such that Bone or her surrogate should seek punishment against her stepfather to make it clear to everyone that Bone has rights and no one has a right to violate them. Murphy says that the values of self-respect, self-defense, and respect for the moral order are “defended by resentment and threatened by hasty and uncritical forgiveness.”¹³ Resentment is a way to “repudiate the message”¹⁴ that the victim does not count as much as the perpetrator and is consistent with some form of punishment. Murphy’s view “takes the past very seriously and makes some of its evil *irrevocable in human terms*.”¹⁵ He adds in *Forgiveness and Mercy* that “a person perceived as given to hatred and revenge is perhaps less likely to become a victim than those who are not given to such passions.”¹⁶ So Bone (or her avenger) is apparently to be feared and reckoned with, not someone against whom it will be easy to perpetrate some harm or wrongdoing again (or at all).

In sum, French and Murphy concentrate their attention with respect to revenge on what the perpetrator deserves and on the moral obligations of the victim in seeing to it that the perpetrator is subject to revenge. Jean Hampton, however, develops a position on revenge turning on the notion that revenge must take into account what the victim of harm deserves. This is evident in her contention that punishment is justified because the intent of a wrongdoer is to attempt to elevate himself in social status or worth over the victim through a wrong or harm done to the victim. In other words, the wrongdoer attempts to make the victim look lower in order to show himself to be

higher in value.¹⁷ Punishment is the appropriate response, Hampton argues, because it denies “a false claim about relative value.”¹⁸ The function of punishment is to reveal that victim and wrongdoer are moral equals, where such revelation as a result of punishment serves to balance the scales of human value. It is worth quoting at length Hampton’s view of punishment for vindicating a victim’s value. She claims that:

[N]o other method purporting to achieve vindication could be preferred to it. Suppose we gave a victim a ticker-tape parade after the crime to express our commitment to [her] value. Still the fact that [s]he had been mastered by the wrongdoer would stand. [S]he would have lost to [him], and no matter how much the community might contend that [s]he was not [his] inferior, the loss counts as evidence that [s]he is. Hence *the victim wants the evidence nullified*. And punishment is the best way to do that. The wrongdoer can’t take [his] crime to have established or to have revealed [his] superiority if the victim is able to do to [him] what [he] did to [her]. The punishment is therefore a second act of mastery that negates the evidence of superiority implicit in the wrongdoer’s original act.¹⁹

On this view, her step-father should be punished so that Bone, and everyone, will know that Bone has a value equal to the person who wronged and harmed her. For Hampton, then, punishment is the best way to nullify the evidence of mastery of the wrongdoer over the victim (where “mastery” occurs as a result of being able to inflict wrong on another).

All three of these arguments for the moral acceptability and applicability of revenge or punishment as a response to harm or wrongdoing are, in my view, morally suspect not because they advocate revenge, but because advocating revenge in cases of severe and irreparable harm such as that suffered by Bone in *Bastard out of Carolina* or Hannie in *Hannie Caulder* does nothing to address the very real and very pressing issue of what the harmed person deserves. Even though I agree in principle that people ought in general to get what they deserve, I remain unconvinced that Peter French’s position is satisfactory for application to the harm suffered by Bone and Hannie. Revenge seems in these cases to fail to address what Bone and Hannie both deserve (a constructive way to restore their senses of self and to rectify the harm they have suffered) and instead center on what the wrongdoer deserves (punishment). To explain, consider what Hannie experiences in seeking and getting revenge in light of Claudia Card’s commentary on the relationship between violence and revenge.

Card argues against revenge largely because it is likely to precipitate violence. The chance for moral harm of the kind that concerns Card is to the victim, going beyond that already suffered and which becomes painfully evident in Peter French’s description of the life of Hannie Caulder,

who turns to violence as a reaction to violence. French contends that Hannie is doing the right thing in taking up with a bounty hunter, learning to shoot, and ultimately seeking out, finding, and killing the men who raped her.²⁰ He defends her actions because she is good and they are not, and she must do something to vindicate herself. French explains that Hannie satisfies her vengeful desires, becomes a bounty hunter, and will, ultimately, come to a violent end. The implication is clear. Even though Hannie may have avenged herself, vengeful feelings and actions render her life at best only slightly better than it was. I therefore remain unconvinced that French's position is satisfactory for application to the harm suffered by Hannie (or Bone). It does nothing to address and correct the harms they have suffered since revenge is only a reaction to harm, not an attempt at a solution in which harm or damage itself is addressed and rectified.

Even though Jeffrie Murphy asserts that there are benefits in resentment and punishment, I fail to see what they are supposed to be. He claims that there are benefits, but there is no argument for that contention except his comments on the results of becoming a revenge-taking and resentful person who reacts to harm by becoming fearsome and perhaps even just a little mean. I doubt, contrary to Murphy's hopeful stance on the possession of such traits of character, that developing a persona and reputation as a revenge-taking, resentful person is a useful strategy in addressing harm or the potential to be harmed. If we do not recognize ourselves as members of communities who deserve lives that are more than defensive existences designed to keep others from violating our rights, we are likely to become less, rather than more, fully social beings – and thereby less likely to live as complete members of moral communities who see others as part of what brings meaning, moral value, and happiness to one's life. Vengeful, defensive people are unlikely to forge social relationships while they are simultaneously scaring or intending to scare others away. Bone would be less likely to recognize and act on options for fuller participation in the human community if she becomes a single-minded vengeance seeker because her vengefulness may continue to lead to lack of trust and, as a result, lack of interaction with others. It is therefore one thing to affirm and assert one's rights by becoming vengeful and one to be reckoned with; it is another thing to live a good, delightful life. Being vengeful and defensive may help to avoid future harm, but it seems terribly ineffective in addressing properly the harm already suffered.

Jean Hampton's view of the nature of punishment requires, in a case in which the victim of harm has been made to be lower or to appear to be lower in some sort of scale of value by a perpetrator's wrongdoing, that the victim or society provide for revenge against the perpetrator to deny the message of lower value and assert and affirm the moral equality of perpetrator and victim. While Hampton's argument concerning punishment does in some sense attempt to do what I think is morally appropriate as a reaction to harm (offer some benefit to the victim), there is something decidedly peculiar about Hampton's argument. Why should the wronged and harmed person care

how the offender feels about himself or want to prove moral *equality* with him? Perhaps it has something to do with the danger of being a resentful hater in that resentful hatred's vengeful results may backfire such that the wronged person fears being brought low or having disrespectful treatment reveal the fact that she is low. If she is brought low by avenging herself, this is certainly no way to prove her high(er) status. If she fears that her low status has already been revealed, the offender gains a victory nonetheless. So on Hampton's view, establishing moral equality with the perpetrator of harm is a way in which to avoid both *admitting* inadvertently that the harmed person does have a lower status or inadvertently *revealing* that "fact."

Hampton's argument for punishment on these grounds is unsatisfying and empty because it fails to address the true problem created by wrong and harm – the moral value of healing the victim. It is possible that Bone will not hear the message that she has a value equal to that of her step-father because Hampton's solution does not address the real, more pressing issues of harm, trust, and the ability to live a good life that a person who suffers egregious and long-lasting harm may experience. Simply to engage in a process of asserting and affirming moral equality is, I think, perhaps only a formality, a kind of hand-waving regarding the fact of harm that does nothing substantive to rectify the damage done to the victim of harm.

In sum, none of these positions (French, Hampton, Murphy) on revenge or punishment centers on harms suffered by victims of wrong nor do they attempt in a constructive fashion to rectify them. French refers only incidentally to harms suffered by Hannie Caulder, and applying this position to Bone does no more. Murphy's view is no more effective at addressing harm since it simply amounts to attempting to negate a claim rather than to attempt to repair harm done to the victim. Hampton's argument centers on the value *of the wrongdoer* in relation to his victim and only incidentally to that of the person harmed, and in the latter case it is a matter of asserting simple moral equality. Revenge in all these cases fails to address what Bone and Hannie both deserve (some way to react to harm and wrongdoing that will improve their lives) -- and instead centers on what the *wrongdoer* deserves or, more oddly, on affirming the *equal value* of wrongdoer and person harmed. This, however, does not exhaust the problems with revenge as a kind of reaction to harm that does not address adequately the rights and needs of victims since it is possible that revenge may have unintended negative consequences making the condition of the harmed person worse. For example, even though Peter French says that Hannie Caulder does the right thing in learning to shoot and in killing the men who raped her²¹ because she is good and they are not, and she must do something to vindicate herself, ultimately she satisfies only her vengeful desires and at the end of the film one gets the distinct impression that she will never live a truly good life; she will "get by," but she will not be happy; she will come to a violent end; she is a harmed person who will not recover even after taking revenge.

If Hannie's life after brutalization ends in the inability to live a good life, in a constant struggle against the harm she suffered, and in silent resignation about her lot in life, then Trudy Govier's contention that the satisfaction expected from revenge is often not felt is right on the mark here.²² Perhaps even any minor sense of simple satisfaction arising from having taken revenge does not overshadow the very pressing needs that transcend basic vindictive reactions to harm centered on what is to be done to the perpetrator. Given that revenge is problematic as a reaction to severe and long-lasting harm, it is at least possible that forgiveness might fill a gap in empowering a victim and addressing her needs that arise as a result of harm.

Forgiveness

Three positions on the moral value of forgiveness to which we now turn are those of Eve Garrard and David McNaughton, Jean Hampton, and Jeffrie Murphy. They all argue for the moral acceptability and efficacy of forgiveness as an appropriate reaction to wrongdoing or harm. They do so on the basis of human solidarity, the concepts of conditional or unconditional forgiveness, and an optimistic hope for human improvement.

Garrard and McNaughton claim that no human being is ever unforgivable for what he does or for his character. Their "solidarity argument" is that "the reasons for forgiveness have their root not in what is noble and admirable about us, but in what is weak, pitiful, and degraded."²³ On their view, we are enjoined to forgive those who have wronged us for the plain and simple reason that we are all frail beings capable of committing moral wrongs and harming others. So on this view, Bone need not excuse her stepfather; she ought, however, to be sympathetic enough to grant forgiveness and realize that she and he are only human. Further, part of the condition in which we find ourselves as human beings subject to contingencies and frailties of existence is the fact of moral luck such that "even if I could not, as I am now, do what the offender did, nonetheless had my early (and ongoing) circumstances been less favorable, I might have become the kind of person who could act [as one who harmed me has acted]."²⁴ For Garrard and McNaughton, shared recognition and acceptance of our fallibility and frailty are enough to recommend offering forgiveness to those who, like all of us, are simply imperfect.

While Garrard and McNaughton argue for forgiveness on the basis of our shared human wickedness, Hampton's position is more optimistic in advocating hope for redemptive human qualities. Hampton's argument has three salient features: she argues for the value of reconciliation, she claims the victims of harm will be freed from the harmful effects of the wrong done, and she contends that forgiveness will allow a wronged person to "reapprove of others through faith in their decency despite a lack of evidence for it."²⁵

Since Hampton notes pragmatically that there are people with whom reconciliation is neither desirable nor safe, it is reasonable to assume that Bone need not tell her stepfather she wishes to forgive and reestablish relations with him. On the other hand, Hampton's position is that forgiving him would ideally allow Bone to create conditions in which she and her stepfather are liberated "from the effects of the immoral action itself. The forgiver is no longer trapped in the position of the victim defending herself, and the wrongdoer is no longer in the position of the sinner, stained by sin and indebted to his victim."²⁶ On this view, Bone should realize that "if she 'lets go' of her sense of herself as the victim of an immoral person, she thereby drops the perspective from which he looks like a morally rotten individual" and in forgiving and having faith in human decency, we "defy to ourselves the appearance of [such] people's rotted souls."²⁷ So Bone ought to forgive him because he is, deep down, not really "rotten."

Where Garrard, McNaughton and Hampton concentrate their attention with respect to forgiveness on the state of character of the perpetrator of harm, Trudy Govier's position on forgiveness is an attempt to find and establish benefit for the harmed person in that there is both good that will come to the perpetrator from acknowledging his wrongdoing and good that will accrue to the victim in being able to experience joy and other positive emotions from overcoming a wrong done. On her view, a person is conditionally forgivable because it is possible that the morally rotten person may change to become forgivable;²⁸ yet she also recognizes that there are people who are at some point unforgivable because the "deeds, and by implication, the wrongdoers who have committed them, are absolutely unforgivable insofar as they are enormities, appallingly wrong acts that violate profoundly important moral principles."²⁹ So, at the time at which Bone is brutalized, her attacker is unforgivable simply because he has violated "important moral principles." I assume that Govier is referring to some specific moral principles or concepts, perhaps like the Principle of Utility, or even to Kant's categorical imperative. If so, Bone's stepfather has certainly not behaved as a good utilitarian since he has not created happiness nor has he minimized pain. And he has clearly violated the respect for persons requirement of Kantian ethics by using her as a thing and brutalizing her as he did. Bone, then, is perfectly justified in refusing to forgive her step-father on Govier's account of the matter. If he undergoes moral transformation, however, on Govier's view Bone ought to forgive him, and if she refuses to do so, it is "to make no effort to overcome such feelings" as "anger, resentment, or moral hatred toward him," and this is "to cling to them, perhaps to cultivate them, perhaps to harbor visions of revenge."³⁰ In *Forgiveness and Revenge* Govier expands this notion such that if a wronged person continues to seek or to wish for revenge, it is to do this "instead of rallying to recover a sense of self-esteem or working to reassert moral principles and instead of attempting to gain understanding and a perspective on the broader conflict situation and the motivation and capacities of the wrongdoers."³¹ This is to fail to offer to oneself and the

offender the chance to experience a “fresh start” and re-establish relationships.³² Here, Govier assumes that reconciliation is a good thing, and if so, Bone ought at least to forgive her stepfather to create the chance that some civil relationship might occur between them, and so that she may be open to “positive emotions such as love, joy, excitement, and gratitude, and more readily concentrate on positive pursuits and flourish in life. After reflection the victim *may regain or acquire the conviction that she is a valuable person* and can more readily extend compassion to the wrongdoer, distinguishing between him as a person and his wrongful deed.”³³

It appears that arguments for forgiveness seem on their face to be more efficacious in addressing the interests and needs of a victim than do those for punishment or revenge, but they are on the whole insufficient as means to alleviate or minimize harm to a victim. If this is the case, they fail to address adequately the morally important question of what is ethically significant and practically important in restoring to the victim of harm what has been lost through wrongdoing. Garrard and McNaughton’s “solidarity argument” for forgiveness seems unsatisfactory as a reaction to wrongdoing or harm on particular moral grounds having to do with degrees of culpability (another purely formal notion having very little, if anything, to do with practical concerns of a victim of harm). But further, the solidarity argument is unacceptable in its treatment of individuals and the severity of their actions. As Solomon Schimmel notes, “to advocate forgiving all offenders and all offenses because everyone commits some offenses blurs all distinction between degrees of sin, evil, and crime.”³⁴ In short, Schimmel’s view is that the simple fact that we all at some point commit some offense(s) does not lead to the conclusion that we are all equally culpable and thus equally forgivable since there are offenses that are significantly different in their effects or intentions from others that are minor, short-lived, or generally insignificant (for example, compare the potential effects of systematic torture [major, long-lasting, and significant] to the effects of not keeping one’s promise to attend a child’s birthday party on some particular day [minor, short duration, insignificant in comparison]). Further, even if in general all of us commit some offense(s) at some time, this is largely irrelevant to specific cases in which the harmed person did not commit any offense against the offender, and such specific, individual instances of wrongdoing need to be taken into account in an analysis of reactive actions and attitudes, not simply attempts to justify forgiveness on the basis of abstract notions concerning who may have done what, and what human beings are capable of doing *in general*. Further, Garrard and McNaughton’s view also fails to recognize the wisdom in French’s contention that “there is an unbridgeable moral chasm between people who regularly do wicked deeds and those who typically do good deeds”³⁵—or, I might add, those who in some particular case did nothing wrong at all.

Even if we agree with Garrard and McNaughton that moral luck is a significant and unavoidable element of our lives and that its recognition may help us to feel kinship with an

offender, it is unconvincing as an argument for forgiveness. If we consider claims to moral luck more carefully, it not only makes it possible that we would have committed serious wrongs if we had been in different circumstances (as Garrard and McNaughton argue), but also that our status as victims of harm is understandable in the same way. On this view, if I am the victim of a shooting, I may be able to conceive of the case such that “If I hadn’t been in your way when you pulled the trigger, you wouldn’t have shot me” and “If you hadn’t been the person you have become, you would not have pulled the trigger at all.” This is equally the basis of an argument for *not forgiving* and feeling vengeful if it is, after all, all a matter of moral luck. Instead, then, I may reason such that “The way I was reared leads me to feel vengeful and because of who I am, *you, the offender*, need to accept that *I will not forgive you.*” The argument from moral luck, in short, works both ways.

The argument from moral luck does, however, have appeal as an argument for empathy (assuming that empathy is a good thing and that it is possible for a victim to empathize with someone who has harmed her severely), but in any case, empathy in this case is probably misplaced. For Bone in particular, empathy for her stepfather seems highly unlikely. Empathy is, I think, more or most appropriately directed toward the person who suffers than toward the person who causes it. For solidarity, I have a decided preference for an argument focused on empathy for the victim by noting that any of us could be the victim of harm, so we should perhaps hesitate to forgive those who perpetrate it rather than to forgive them simply since we *could have been* like the perpetrator *if conditions had been different*. Bone is nothing like her step-father, and that she could have been or could become like him is irrelevant to the harm he has caused. So for others to feel empathy for Bone puts emphasis in the moral realm where it belongs – on the person who has been harmed and who needs to regain a sense of solidarity with others that has been shattered by harm.

While Garrard and McNaughton’s position on forgiveness rests on human weakness and frailty, Jean Hampton’s account of the nature, acceptability, and applicability of forgiveness depends on the more optimistic notion that there is no one who is rotten through and through. Given this assumption, her conclusion is that we ought to forgive those who harm us. But even if there is no one rotten through and through, there are people *who do rotten things*, and the state of one’s “soul” is, I think, really quite irrelevant to any harm the offender causes. The state of one’s soul or character is relevant to determining degrees of culpability, perhaps, but that is different from the question whether a person may perform, from a certain state of character, some hideous deed. In fact, it may be the hideous deed itself that is the point. Where Hampton seems insistent that forgiving an offender will free the victim from the harmful effects of the wrong done, I simply cannot see how or why this would happen. Forgiving a person is letting go of resentful or vengeful feelings, and these feelings are themselves one kind of effect of harm. But they are not, in cases of severe harm (and even in many cases of minimal harm) the same as ridding oneself of the effects of harm that go

beyond feelings toward the offender. What, for example, of the feelings one may have toward oneself as a result of being harmed, and what of harms that continue beyond the initial wrong done that may range from physical infirmities to severely hampered ability to deal appropriately with social relationships? It seems that forgiveness can neither heal the lack of trust that Bone may experience nor can it alleviate the continuing challenges of physical and emotional harm that are the result of the initial wrong done.

Hampton's position, however, goes beyond the notion that we may free ourselves from the wrong done by forgiving and recognizing that no one is completely rotten by contending that forgiveness will allow the harmed person "to reapprove of others through faith in their decency despite a lack of evidence for it." This may be an optimistic view to hold (assuming that optimism is a good thing and that there is in fact decency to be found in everyone) and perhaps one that could lead to benefits for the harmed person, but I find it particularly odd to believe that we will find such "faith in decency" in a person who has intentionally caused harm. It seems much more likely that Bone would gain faith in the decency of others by observing the behaviors of those who have given her reason *to have faith in human decency by not harming others, by being cooperative and participating members of a moral community, and by showing care and concern*, rather than contempt and violence, toward her. The harmed person does not lose the fact of harm and its continuing effects through forgiving the perpetrator even if the harmed person is able, somehow, to find decency in anyone or everyone. For Bone, instead, evidence of human decency may be found in the caring and understanding she receives from her Aunt Raylene, who takes Bone in after her mother abandons her. While being questioned by the sheriff, who says "We're gonna have to know everything that happened," Bone tells the reader: "I couldn't tell this man anything. He didn't care about me. No one cared about me. I didn't even care about myself anymore."³⁶ But Aunt Raylene shows Bone something she needs to see, and even more, something she needs to *feel*.

"Oh, my girl, what'd they do to you?" Raylene leaned over me, and the smell of her wrapped me around. I opened my mouth like a baby bird, cried out, and reached up to her with my good arm. I said her name twice and lay against her breasts. Her arms were so strong, so safe. Don't let me go, I thought. Just please, don't let me go.³⁷

In response to the sheriff, who is bent on a search for "justice," Raylene replies: "She's just twelve years old, you fool. Right now she needs to feel safe and loved, not alone and terrified."³⁸ So when Hampton says that the harmed person, through forgiveness, can drop the "sense of herself" that she is the victim of an immoral person, I think she has expressed an unjustified and unrealistic, even if a hopeful and optimistic, view. The short story is that Bone is the victim of an immoral

person; and there is no realistic or practical sense in which she will cease thinking of herself as harmed if she were to forgive her step-father regardless of whether she is able to find something decent in him. Perhaps, however, she will be able to begin to cease thinking of herself as damaged, as unlovable, as someone that she, herself, cannot care about with the love and care of her Aunt Raylene to begin a transformation of thought and feeling that will give back to her a sense of herself as valuable.

Trudy Govier's account of forgiveness appears ultimately to be no better than that of Hampton in addressing substantially the harm done to a victim. Even though I agree in principle with her positive and optimistic sentiments regarding the value of forgiveness, it is simply not the case that the act of forgiving will always, or even usually, provide a "fresh start" for someone who was wronged or, for that matter, for an offender. There are imaginable cases in which harm inflicted on a person is too serious and long-lasting to think it possible that she will be able to achieve a "fresh start" in her life, and there are imaginable cases in which guilt or remorse felt by an offender because of harm caused will not be alleviated by forgiveness.

Furthermore, and more telling regarding the nature and effects of forgiveness for which Govier attempts to argue, is the contention that forgiveness allows a harmed person to experience joy. There are certainly cases in which the claim that forgiveness creates the ability to experience joy is simply false. Feeling miserable is compatible with forgiving someone while lamenting the fact that harm was done. The act of forgiving may be, at best, only contingently related to the state of mind of the person harmed. Govier believes, however, that forgiveness will benefit the harmed person both "psychologically and ethically."³⁹ Unfortunately, she does not argue for this.

Most odd, I think, is Govier's claim that a wronged person who forgives "*may regain or acquire the conviction that she is a valuable person.*" On this view, Bone should forgive her stepfather in the *hope* that she may, some time *later*, come to see herself as valuable. Contrary to Govier's hope for the victim, the harm she has suffered may simply be too severe for forgiveness to effect this transformation of her sense of self value. Govier's view regarding the condition of the victim in forgiveness is, in short, another instance of the purported benefits of forgiveness that strikes me as so strange that it borders on absurdity. It again focuses on the offender—that he will be the recipient of compassion from the harmed person and the harmed person, if she is lucky, might reap some benefit, too. I simply ask this: What of compassion for the victim and what of doing something having the potential to effect substantially her belief that she *is* a valuable person? It is simply unclear how feeling compassion for an offender will create a sense of value in his victim.

On the whole, I find the arguments in favor of forgiveness and revenge unsatisfying. Nancy Potter's commentary on the issue is particularly damning with respect to the morality of forgiveness on the whole. Potter uses *Bastard out of Carolina* to argue for the moral acceptability and efficacy of

resentment as a form of resistance, stressing that people who “are committed to forgiveness and nonviolence fail to conceptualize forgiveness as a virtue, with a mean, an excess and a deficiency” and that “norms of forgiveness seem unduly to burden the oppressed.”⁴⁰ Potter notes that for Bone, “feelings of vengeance ... function as an important *reminder* that an injustice yet remains to be addressed.”⁴¹ Potter does not argue that Bone ought to seek vengeance and this omission leaves open important possibilities since *something* needs to be done for Bone and those harmed in severe, lasting, and continuing ways. That Potter does not argue for vengeance does not mean, however, that forgiveness is the answer, as though there are two and only two potential reactions to harm. Robin Schott, for example, notes with respect to forgiveness that in the process of recovery, most people do not mention forgiveness as part of their progress⁴² and Claudia Card contends that punishment “need not do anything to alleviate the harm suffered by victims of the offense.”⁴³

So if revenge and forgiveness are insufficient to address the moral concerns of victims of wrong and harm, perhaps reconciliation will be able to effect positive personal, moral, and social change for both the victim and the moral community. My position is that any reaction to harm and wrongdoing should center on addressing, or more specifically including, consideration of a practical means by which to alleviate or minimize the harm done to the victim by including substantive recommendations about what is good for her to do for herself and what is good to do for her. She ought, in short, to be the center of moral concern or at the very least of equal concern in determining morally appropriate and practically efficacious reactions to harm. In this regard, however, I will not argue that she ought to reconcile with the perpetrator of harm as though by rejecting revenge and forgiveness that this is the only available reaction. To believe that revenge, forgiveness and the traditional act of reconciliation are the only possible reactive attitudes or actions available to a harmed person is to neglect a fourth possibility. This fourth potential reaction to harm is to reconcile with harm itself, and it is this for which I will argue in what follows. To show how and why reconciling with harm is an alternative to forgiveness and revenge as well as to the traditional notions of reconciliation with an offender, a brief overview and critical appraisal of the traditional conception of reconciliation will be helpful to illuminate what is unique and important about “reconciling with harm.”

Reconciliation

Traditional reconciliation may be an acceptable mid-ground between forgiveness and revenge in some instances. Adam Morton indicates that this may be true because reconciliation with a wrongdoer is “both more and less than forgiveness. More in that it requires a change of attitude on both sides ... and less in that it does not require that either person cease to condemn the actions of others. Both sides now have enough understanding of the other that they can cooperate in a

shared project of ‘undoing the continuing effects of the past’⁴⁴ and both can “accept the other’s way of thinking as points on the spectrum of human possibilities, which can fit together in constructive social life.”⁴⁵

On this account of the nature of reconciliation, the condition that the victim must understand the offender’s thinking, however, complicates the question whether reconciliation is possible even if it is desirable. In cases of extreme and continuing harm caused maliciously and without concern for the well-being of another, it is not very likely that the harmed person will be *able* to understand; and even if she could understand, it does not make any recommendation for either forgiveness or reconciliation. I think this is the case, contrary to the solidarity argument for forgiveness discussed by Garrard and McNaughton and which is very similar to Morton’s position on reconciliation, because the harmed person cannot always or often reasonably be expected to imagine herself performing the same action that was perpetrated against her. Even if I can imagine myself performing some particularly hideous action, it is irrelevant to whether someone has perpetrated some harm on me. There is a decidedly distinct difference between imagining oneself performing an action and performing the action in fact; there is an equally distinct difference between imagining oneself capable of performing an action against someone else and being the subject/victim of an action of someone else. So if understanding or solidarity is required for reconciliation, there will be some cases in which there will be none because it may be impossible for the harmed person to be able to understand, to sympathize, or to empathize with the perpetrator of harm against her.

Even if this conception of reconciliation is unsatisfactory in some ways, however, it is not the essence of reconciliation by any means and another way of understanding it may be more acceptable such that it is possible to imagine reconciliation in which offender and victim may ignore past and continuing harm as far as possible so that a common goal may be reached. This, however, seems at best to be toleration, not reconciliation; and most likely it is simple expediency to achieve the goal. At the very least, it does not appear to be reconciliation as a form of working or existing together without hostility threatening in at least some cases to bubble to the surface. Even if this is the case, however, it seems difficult to argue against some form of reconciliation since it has significant utilitarian appeal. If there are conditions in which we live or work in which it is impossible for a victim to avoid an offender for whom she cannot conjure up warm or friendly feelings, some amicable or non-combative relationship is at least beneficial in getting on with their lives. In its better or best incarnations, however, reconciliation allows people to establish loving, amicable, or at least reliably functional relationships with each other. Jean Hampton, for example, claims that “if we come to know and understand the wrongdoer as an individual, we may retain our hatred of her deeds and of her character traits that led her to hurt another, but still come to feel

compassion, and even come to like, the individual herself. And these warmer feelings are what open up the way to forgiveness and reconciliation.”⁴⁶ Hampton, however, does not explain why reconciliation is desirable. Neither do Garrard and McNaughton. They assert that it is good while referring again to the solidarity argument, but they leave it to the imagination of readers to determine why reestablishing relations with offenders is a good thing.

Govier comes closer to providing an argument for reconciliation when she refers to loving partners who suffer a breach of trust through betrayal and in which “the injured person needs to overcome her resentment and fear. She needs acknowledgement and reassurances as a basis to forgive and come to trust again, seeing the other as one who will not hurt again.... So in this kind of case, reconciliation and forgiveness go together.”⁴⁷ Govier and Hampton here hold similar positions in which there are cases in which a wronged person “will not let the wrongdoing continue to intrude into ... dealings with the wrongdoer in order that they can reestablish ... at ... least, the ‘civil’ relationship that prevails between strangers in a human community.”⁴⁸

Being able to continue relationships between strangers is, I think, quite to the point. It may be the case in a condition in which the victim is severely and irreparably harmed that she becomes a stranger to the moral community such that reconciliation with the perpetrator is not an option. Reconciliation between offender and victim is sometimes not possible in any case (an offender may have died, moved away, or been incarcerated, for example); it may not be desirable even if it is possible (an offender may still be violent or likely to cause harm again or the victim, for any number of reasons, simply cannot and will not associate with the offender); and, it may simply be irrelevant and morally deficient from the point of view of the person harmed (the person harmed cannot conceive of benefit to herself in addressing the challenges of harm by reconciling with, forgiving, or getting revenge against a perpetrator). So if forgiveness and revenge are undesirable, if reconciliation is unlikely, and if combined failures of trust and challenges to self-respect make the harmed person a stranger to the moral community, there must be an alternative course of action to be taken in reacting to harm to heal the wounds suffered by a victim of harm. If anything has the capacity to help to heal the moral and psychic wounds of victims of harm, it is a form of reconciliation that does not depend in any way on offenders. It is “reconciling with harm.”

III. Conclusion: Reconciling with Harm

In cases in which offender and victim reconcile with each other, it involves trusting the offender while at the same time remembering that he caused harm—and in very serious cases, there is *continuing harm* of which he is a more remote cause. Victim and offender may work or associate with each other, and the harmed person accepts the offender for who he is, willing to see or hope

for what is good in him by assuming that he will not violate her trust again. I do not argue against this very productive manner of reconciling since it has obvious benefits in establishing or re-establishing civil, non-combative relationships. This, however, may not always or reliably occur since there are cases in which the harmed person does not wish for any number of reasons to reconcile with an offender even when the offender still lives or works in the community or has some continuing contact with the victim. Further, although it may be true that there are cases in which forgiveness, revenge, and reconciliation may be justified, there are instances in which they are unjustified, insufficiently justified, undesired, inappropriate, or (and most importantly) simply *irrelevant* from the point of view of one who suffers from past and continuing harms.

A severely harmed person may have no interest in forgiving, getting revenge, punishing, or reconciling. The harmed person may have concluded that forgiveness and revenge fail adequately to address harm done to a victim, and what she wants is to alleviate her pain and to rectify the wrong. She recognizes that, for example, her lost physical capacity is not regained by impairing through punishment the same or another capacity in another person and that capacity will not be restored by forgiving the person who perpetrated some harm on her. She recognizes that even though reconciliation with an offender may allow her to achieve common goals or engage in common projects, as a harmed person she may still lack trust, feel violated, and suffer continuing harms as a result of the initial harm done to her. In such cases, there may come a time at which the *perpetrator becomes irrelevant* in her personal odyssey in experiencing harm, reacting to it, and finding a way to rebuild a life shattered or imperiled by harm. The harm she suffered may manifest itself in the her precarious hold on self-respect, self-regard, confidence, trust in herself and others, and limitations on options, choices, and ways in which she goes about living her life that she would not otherwise experience. The harmed person's desire, if it ever was for forgiveness or revenge, may move instead toward ridding herself of limitations as much as she is able to be rid of them – with or without involving the perpetrator of harm in her quest.

I take this to be the case with Bone. I imagine that she struggled so long, and is harmed so severely, that her concern is simply to address harm itself, to regain trust, to build a secure sense of her own worth, and to forge relationships she wishes to have to live a good life. She realizes that she will not necessarily conquer harm and may not simply “move on” as though no harm was ever caused. But she wishes to move on in some way so that she can live the best life of which she is capable. She realizes this in the same way that one can realize that a person who suffers a severe physical disability such as the loss of a leg, for example, cannot just re-grow the leg and resolve to behave and think as though she really has two and try, based on this resolve, to walk in exactly the same way she did before harm occurred. She instead faces the limitation, works around it, and tries to find another way to go where she wishes to go. If she wants to move forward, she needs a railing

or another device to aid in doing so. She may find places and spaces having no railings or devices, and she must then take the hand of another person who is willing to try to bear some of her weight and help her to go where she wishes to go. Even when accepting the hand of another person for support, it is likely that the harmed person will fall flat on her face at some point, and perhaps many times, throughout her journey. This, however, is not due to the hand outstretched and offered to her for assistance; in fact, when she falls she may gladly accept that hand again. If she tries and succeeds in reconciling with harm, she will come to see that there are times when pain is severe, and when another person is unable to hold her steadily all the time; but she can learn to trust again through association with those who are kind and understanding rather than with he who has harmed her. She can learn to see herself as a person of value through the struggle to reconcile with harm and in the process come to recognize goodness in human beings who care—rather than to hope that she will begin to feel better about herself as a result of forgiving an offender or showing through punishment that she and the offender are moral equals. She can begin to live a better life as a result of actions and associations with good people in the human community and come to see herself as they see her, and coming to see herself as like them, a person who can care about others who are harmed, including herself. In spite of harm, she aspires to be the best person she can be.

In reconciling with harm, she reconciles with harm within herself; and in doing so, she reconciles with humanity that she came not to trust as a result of harm. By receiving the support of the community of those who did not wrong or harm her, she learns that there is trust – and she is therefore no longer a stranger to the moral community. In a case like Bone's where erosion of trust is severe, it is often difficult to seek or to accept the support of others. But learning to do this is part of what it is to reconcile with harm, and to reconcile with herself as a harmed person who is a valuable member of the moral community. For Bone, it is Aunt Raylene who takes Bone in and comforts her after her ordeal with her step-father and abandonment by her mother, and who is the beginning of Bone's ability to reconnect with others and learn to trust again. Bone describes her feelings and connection with Raylene:

I would be thirteen in a few weeks. I was already who I was going to be.... When Raylene came to me, I let her touch my shoulder, let my head tilt to lean against her, trusting her arm and her love. I was who I was going to be, someone like her, like Mama, a Boatwright woman. I wrapped my fingers in Raylene's and watched the night close in around us.⁴⁹

Here, Bone *begins* to experience what it is to reconcile with harm, but there is much more to be done. The person who caused harm is (or at least was, at the time of inflicting harm) acting as a *dysfunctional* member of the moral community and, in inflicting harm on another, made her

dysfunctional as well, indeed, one who thought herself as not being worthy of inclusion in it, or not being able to trust others sufficiently to function as a member of it. But the harmed person who seeks reconciliation with harm that is part of herself, and who forges relationships with others as part of the process, recognizes that trust shattered by harm can be recovered by care and she can transcend limitations even when harm, too, is with her all the time. Reconciling with harm is therefore not the fourth best alternative after the harmed person realizes that forgiveness, revenge, and reconciliation with an offender are not possible, out of her reach, unlikely, or irrelevant. It is, instead, the best alternative to all of them. Reconciling with harm has all or most of the benefits that apologists for reconciliation between victim and offender put forth, but it is more fully centered on what should be our overriding concerns in the moral realm: the ability of the harmed person to live a good life, and strengthening moral communities through the fullest participation of people in the life of the community. It also promises to deliver on the purported benefits of forgiveness in aiding moral repair⁵⁰ that defenders of forgiveness often assert or imply but for which they fail to argue adequately.

Forgiveness fails as a reaction to severe, egregious and long-lasting harm because it does not reliably or necessarily help a harmed person regain trust simply by letting go of hostile feelings toward an offender. What the harmed person consistently experiences and that with which she must deal is harm itself and its attendant effects. So it is not necessary or relevant for her to forgive, or to wish for revenge; nor is it necessary to reconcile with an offender to create possibilities to build or sustain communities of moral agents. Instead, community is built through restoration of trust in both herself and others. Even though we may be moved by the strength of character of the forgiving or the vengeful, or the motives of the reconciler, I doubt that forgiveness, revenge, and traditional conceptions of reconciliation are preferable to reconciling with harm in cases such as those of Bone in which a human being has suffered devastating harm. For someone like Bone (and there are innumerable people who are much like her) reconciling with harm is allowing oneself and harm to work together to create something better, something of value, that transcends the dominance of harm. It is a necessary step if one is ever to achieve any measure of peace; it is a necessary step in one's aim for a good life.

Reconciling with harm does not remove harm nor does it guarantee that it will have no further effects; but it can offer benefits that are only purportedly offered through traditional reactive attitudes and actions. In this, I share Murphy's "tragic view of life" to some extent, where his comments regarding self-forgiveness apply to the notion that there may be no means to remove one's burdens. Murphy contends that "it is, after all, possible to have a somewhat tragic view of human life, including one's own, without being destroyed or defeated by that view—an insight often missed in popular writings on self-forgiveness where terminally upbeat cheerfulness is the

insufferable order of the day.”⁵¹ Reconciling with harm is not necessarily cheerful, but I think it offers hope in the moral realm. To reconcile with harm is to reconcile with oneself as harmed, and as valuable,⁵² and to do this is to reconcile with the harm that was, the harm that is, and the harm that remains.

Notes

¹ Many thanks to Joan Callahan, Martha Marinara, Suzanne Jaeger, Shelley Park, Michael Strawser, Bruce Silver, Joanne Waugh, Stephen Turner, Nancy Potter, anonymous reviewers, and those present at the 2009 Feminist Ethics and Social Theory Conference for reading and/or commenting on earlier drafts of this paper. In addition, thanks to all those who create communities of care to help harmed people to engage in the process of reconciling with harm. You know who you are; you make it possible.

² There is a distinction between a person who is unforgivable simpliciter, and one who is unforgivable because of some aspect or condition of the victim. Claudia Card discusses this distinction and other aspects of the “difficult and interesting question whether some deeds truly are unforgivably heinous, however deeply repented” (by an offender) briefly in *The Atrocity Paradigm* (New York: Oxford UP, 2002) 180. She expands on this such that “This question seems multiply ambiguous. First, does ‘unforgivable’ mean ‘incapable of being forgiven’? Or ‘unworthy of being forgiven’? If it means ‘incapable,’ the question of whether some deeds are unforgivably heinous is either the logical question of whether forgiveness is incoherent as a response to some offenses or else an empirical, psychological question about whether survivors of some evils are simply not able to renounce hostility or offer others release. Of course, some victims die and others are so badly injured that they are physically unable to communicate. The empirical question of interest is about an otherwise competent survivor’s ability or inability to undergo the requisite change of heart” (180). In this paper, I make no definitive claim regarding the nature of the unforgivable. I assume for the sake of argument that it may be the case that there is no one who is in principle unforgivable. I thank Joan Callahan for suggesting this clarification.

³ I do not argue that forgiveness of, taking revenge against, or reconciling with an offender are *always* morally deficient as reactions to wrong or harm. But there are some cases in which setting a wrong aside and dropping feelings of resentment toward a wrongdoer are morally justified—such as cases in which harm is minimal, not long-lasting, or when there is some pressing reason that the victim takes into account (sympathy toward a wrongdoer, for example) that leads to forgiveness. For revenge/punishment, there may be conditions that lead the harmed person to be satisfied with some form of punishment against an offender. And reconciliation may be deemed appropriate by a

harmed person when harm is not severe and she wishes to reestablish amicable or loving relations with an offender. I wish in this paper *only* to consider harms that are serious, long-lasting, continuing, and perhaps even devastating for the person harmed.

⁴ Dorothy Allison, *Bastard out of Carolina* (New York: Plume, 1992).

⁵ By *insufferable harm*, I intend harm that is serious, painful, potentially or actually debilitating in some way, ongoing, and continuing. It is wounds and harms that may or will not ever heal and will continue to affect adversely the ability of a harmed person to live a good life.

⁶ Jeffrie G. Murphy, *Getting Even: Forgiveness and its Limits* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003) 117.

⁷ Interestingly, Allison describes Bone as trying to figure out how she will ever be able to forgive her mother, whose name she finds it impossible to say, who has returned to her step-father and abandoned Bone, effectively having failed both to protect her daughter from harm and to acknowledge properly the harm that Bone experienced. It is not difficult to understand why Bone is confused regarding forgiveness of her mother. But it is not her mother and her culpability for harm on which I wish to focus attention. Even though her mother was complicit in the harm Bone experienced, her mother did not directly inflict physical harm on her. Her step-father did. I will center attention on the harm inflicted on Bone as a result of the abuse she suffered, and how various philosophers who have written on the moral value and appropriateness of forgiveness, revenge, and reconciliation would presumably argue for forgiveness of, revenge against, or reconciliation with her step-father as reactions to harm. Although my focus of attention with respect to reactive attitudes and actions is on the step-father, there is an important sense in which Bone's mother has inflicted harm on her. She has failed to protect her daughter; she has failed to react appropriately to the harm Bone suffers; and because of this, Bone's mother *is* responsible for harm inflicted that goes beyond harm inflicted on her by her step-father.

⁸ Peter French, *The Virtues of Vengeance* (UP of Kansas, 2001) 3.

⁹ French 59.

¹⁰ French 70.

¹¹ French 95.

¹² Jeffrie G. Murphy and Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1988) 105.

¹³ Murphy 19.

¹⁴ Murphy 77.

¹⁵ Murphy 19; emphasis added.

¹⁶ Murphy and Hampton 94.

¹⁷ Murphy and Hampton 49-51.

¹⁸ Murphy and Hampton 128.

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- ¹⁹ Murphy and Hampton 128-29 (emphasis in original).
- ²⁰ French 59.
- ²¹ French 59.
- ²² Trudy Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge* (London: Routledge, 2002) 13.
- ²³ Eve Garrard and David McNaughton, "In Defense of Unconditional Forgiveness," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 103 (2003): 59.
- ²⁴ Garrard and McNaughton 54.
- ²⁵ Murphy and Hampton 155.
- ²⁶ Murphy and Hampton 86.
- ²⁷ Murphy and Hampton 85, 155.
- ²⁸ Trudy Govier, "Forgiveness and the Unforgivable," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 36.1 (January 1999): 69.
- ²⁹ Govier, "Forgiveness and the Unforgivable," 68.
- ³⁰ Govier, "Forgiveness and the Unforgivable," 66.
- ³¹ Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge*, 11.
- ³² Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge*, 44.
- ³³ Govier, "Forgiveness and the Unforgivable," 62; emphasis added.
- ³⁴ Solomon Schimmel, *Wounds Not Healed by Time* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 56.
- ³⁵ French 89.
- ³⁶ Allison 297.
- ³⁷ Allison 297-98.
- ³⁸ Allison 298.
- ³⁹ Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge*, 64.
- ⁴⁰ Nancy Potter, "Is Refusing to Forgive a Vice?" in *Feminists Doing Ethics*, eds. Peggy DeSautels and Joanne Waugh (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001) 139.
- ⁴¹ Potter, "Refusing to Forgive," 145.
- ⁴² Robin Schott, "The Atrocity Paradigm and the Concept of Forgiveness," *Hypatia* 19.4 (Fall 2004): 205.
- ⁴³ Card 171.
- ⁴⁴ Adam Morton, *On Evil* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 127.
- ⁴⁵ Morton 128.
- ⁴⁶ Murphy and Hampton 151.
- ⁴⁷ Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge*, 141.
- ⁴⁸ Murphy and Hampton 37.

⁴⁹ Allison 309.

⁵⁰ Here, it is important to make two points. First, there is some affinity between the argument here for “reconciling with harm” and the work of Margaret Urban Walker in *Moral Repair* (Cambridge UP, 2006) in that the central concern in both works is the person who has been wronged or harmed. The primary focus in *Reconciling with Harm*, however, is not with the specific *conditions* (see Walker 42) to achieve moral repair, but instead it is a critical evaluation of traditional reactive attitudes and actions combined with a description and account of the concept of reconciling with harm for specific individuals who have experienced serious, egregious, long-lasting harm and the particular human relationships with other individuals that are essential to the process of “moral repair” for specific *persons*. In this, I argue that there are cases of harm in which the perpetrator is irrelevant in the process of reconciling with harm and that community building as part of moral repair needs not include reference to or actions by wrongdoers after harm has been done. Second, the first versions of this paper were written prior to the publication of Walker’s *Moral Repair*. Subsequent versions have taken into consideration Walker’s work where appropriate.

⁵¹ Murphy 70.

⁵² Trudy Govier is averse to the common tendency of people who are victims of tragedy (and harm) to make the “story of victimhood the story of *who we are*” (*Forgiveness and Revenge*, 152). Reconciling with harm is certainly more than recognition that one is harmed; yet it is, I think, true that the harm a person suffers is part of who the person is. Why is this a bad thing? If we see our successes as part of who we are, then why not see ourselves and the processes in which we engage ourselves in healing and moral growth a part of who we are? It is, I think, much like the *vindictive* life that Govier admires in which a person who is wronged or harmed goes about trying to make herself the best person she can be by being victorious over the past (see *Forgiveness and Revenge*, 21). Jeffrie Murphy refers to this as “one’s attempt to mold the object that is *oneself* into the best and most admirable instance of humanity of which one is capable” (Murphy 106, n. 21).

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