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Forgiving the Irreparable: Death, Hope, and the Limits of Meaning

Perdoar o irreparável: morte, esperança e os limites do sentido

Perdonar lo irreparable: muerte, esperanza y los límites del sentido

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Abstract: This article examines the paradoxical possibility of "forgiving death" through an interdisciplinary dialogue between philosophy, psychoanalysis, hermeneutics, and Christian theology. It begins from a conceptual limit: death cannot properly be forgiven, since forgiveness ordinarily presupposes agency, imputability, and an interpersonal relation within which responsibility can be addressed. The expression "forgiving death" is therefore proposed not as moral pardon but as an analogical and paradoxical hypothesis concerning the transformation of the subject's relation to the irreparable. Drawing on Jankélévitch, Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida, and Ricoeur, the article distinguishes irreparability from irreversibility, incomprehensibility, mourning, acceptance, and reconciliation. Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva are then mobilized to examine the psychic consequences of loss and the remainder that may resist complete symbolization, without identifying death itself with the Lacanian Real. The argument subsequently turns to Christian eschatology, particularly Moltmann, Balthasar, Marion, and Falque, to develop the notion of hope without representation: hope understood not as an explanatory or compensatory image of what follows death, but as openness to a future received under the category of promise. The interdisciplinary movement is thus articulated through three distinct operations: psychoanalysis confronts the remainder of loss, hermeneutics investigates the reconfiguration of memory and futurity, and theology introduces promise as an eschatological horizon. The article concludes that "forgiving death" does not mean pardoning, overcoming, or justifying death, but transforming one's relation to the irreparable so that fidelity to loss and openness to the future may coexist. Death remains irreversible, but need not become the final determination of possibility.

Keywords: Forgiveness. Death. Irreparability. Mourning. Hope. Psychoanalysis. Hermeneutics. Eschatology.

Resumo: Este artigo examina a possibilidade paradoxal de "perdoar a morte" por meio de um diálogo interdisciplinar entre filosofia, psicanálise, hermenêutica e teologia cristã. Parte-se de um limite conceitual: a morte não pode, propriamente, ser perdoada, uma vez que o perdão pressupõe ordinariamente agência, imputabilidade e uma relação interpessoal no interior da qual a responsabilidade possa ser atribuída. A expressão "perdoar a morte" é, portanto, proposta não como perdão moral, mas como hipótese analógica e paradoxal acerca da transformação da relação do sujeito com o irreparável. A partir de Jankélévitch, Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida e Ricoeur, o artigo distingue a irreparabilidade da irreversibilidade, da incompreensibilidade, do luto, da aceitação e da reconciliação. Freud, Lacan e Kristeva são, então, mobilizados para examinar as consequências psíquicas da perda e o resto que pode resistir à simbolização completa, sem identificar a própria morte com o Real lacaniano. Em seguida, a argumentação volta-se para a escatologia cristã, particularmente para Moltmann, Balthasar, Marion e Falque, a fim de desenvolver a noção de esperança sem representação: uma esperança compreendida não como imagem explicativa ou compensatória daquilo que sucede à morte, mas como abertura a um futuro recebido sob a categoria da promessa. O movimento interdisciplinar articula-se, assim, por meio de três operações distintas: a psicanálise confronta o resto da perda; a hermenêutica

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investiga a reconfiguração da memória e da futuridade; e a teologia introduz a promessa como horizonte escatológico. O artigo conclui que "perdoar a morte" não significa perdoá-la moralmente, superá-la ou justificá-la, mas transformar a relação com o irreparável de modo que a fidelidade à perda e a abertura ao futuro possam coexistir. A morte permanece irreversível, mas não precisa tornar-se a determinação última da possibilidade.

Palavras-chave: Perdão. Morte. Irreparabilidade. Luto. Esperança. Psicanálise. Hermenêutica. Escatologia.

Resumen: Este artículo examina la posibilidad paradójica de "perdonar la muerte" mediante un diálogo interdisciplinario entre filosofía, psicoanálisis, hermenéutica y teología cristiana. Se parte de un límite conceptual: la muerte no puede, propiamente, ser perdonada, puesto que el perdón presupone ordinariamente agencia, imputabilidad y una relación interpersonal en cuyo interior pueda atribuirse la responsabilidad. La expresión "perdonar la muerte" se propone, por tanto, no como perdón moral, sino como una hipótesis analógica y paradójica acerca de la transformación de la relación del sujeto con lo irreparable. A partir de Jankélévitch, Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida y Ricoeur, el artículo distingue la irreparabilidad de la irreversibilidad, la incomprensibilidad, el duelo, la aceptación y la reconciliación. Freud, Lacan y Kristeva son posteriormente movilizados para examinar las consecuencias psíquicas de la pérdida y el resto que puede resistir a una simbolización completa, sin identificar la muerte misma con lo Real lacaniano. A continuación, la argumentación se orienta hacia la escatología cristiana, particularmente hacia Moltmann, Balthasar, Marion y Falque, con el fin de desarrollar la noción de esperanza sin representación: una esperanza entendida no como imagen explicativa o compensatoria de aquello que sigue a la muerte, sino como apertura a un futuro recibido bajo la categoría de la promesa. El movimiento interdisciplinario se articula así mediante tres operaciones distintas: el psicoanálisis confronta el resto de la pérdida; la hermenéutica investiga la reconfiguración de la memoria y de la futurabilidad; y la teología introduce la promesa como horizonte escatológico. El artículo concluye que "perdonar la muerte" no significa perdonarla moralmente, superarla o justificarla, sino transformar la relación con lo irreparable de modo que la fidelidad a la pérdida y la apertura al futuro puedan coexistir. La muerte permanece irreversible, pero no tiene por qué convertirse en la determinación última de la posibilidad.

Palabras clave: Perdón. Muerte. Irreparabilidad. Duelo. Esperanza. Psicoanálisis. Hermenéutica. Escatología.

1 Introduction

Death constitutes one of the most radical limits of human experience. It interrupts relationships, transforms memory, destabilizes identity, and confronts the subject with an event that cannot be reversed. Philosophy, psychoanalysis, and theology have approached this limit through different conceptual registers: as finitude, alterity, rupture, loss, resistance to symbolization, and, within the Christian tradition, as the horizon against which the promise of resurrection is proclaimed. Yet death also raises a less obvious question: what happens when the language of forgiveness is brought into relation with an event that cannot itself be held responsible?

At first sight, the expression *forgiving death* appears conceptually mistaken. Forgiveness ordinarily belongs to a moral and interpersonal field. It presupposes, in different degrees, an offense, an agent to whom an action may be imputed, someone who has suffered its consequences, and a relation within which pardon, recognition, or release may become meaningful. Death possesses none of these characteristics. It does not act intentionally, cannot assume responsibility, cannot repent, and cannot receive forgiveness. Taken literally, therefore, forgiving death would constitute a category mistake.

This impossibility, however, does not exhaust the philosophical problem. Bereavement confronts the subject not only with the absence of another person but with the rupture of a shared world. Death is irreversible because it cannot be made not to have happened; it is irreparable because the singular relational configuration broken by the event cannot simply be restored. The question of forgiveness can consequently be displaced: not whether death itself may be pardoned, but whether the structure of forgiveness can illuminate a transformation in the subject's relation to what cannot be undone or repaired.

This question occupies an underexplored intersection between several established bodies of literature. Philosophical discussions of forgiveness have concentrated primarily on fault, imputability, resentment, memory, reconciliation, and the limits posed by the unforgivable, as exemplified in different ways by Jankélévitch, Derrida, and Ricoeur. Philosophical and phenomenological approaches to death have investigated mortality, finitude, alterity, and the death of the other, while psychoanalytic accounts have examined mourning, melancholia, identification, and the limits of psychic symbolization. Christian theology, for its part, has developed extensive reflections

on death, Passion, resurrection, and eschatological hope. What remains less developed is the conceptual intersection explored here: whether forgiveness, once rigorously distinguished from pardon addressed to a culpable agent, may be analogically extended to describe a transformation in the relation between irreversibility, memory, and futurity produced by death.

The hypothesis of this article is therefore deliberately paradoxical. *Forgiving death* does not mean pardoning death, declaring mortality acceptable, completing the work of mourning, forgetting the deceased, reconciling oneself with finitude, or constructing a narrative capable of explaining loss. It designates a more restricted hermeneutical-existential transformation: the possibility of inhabiting the irreparable without allowing the rupture produced by death to become the exhaustive determination of the future. The term *forgiveness* is retained because of its constitutive relation to irreversibility. Forgiveness does not make what happened cease to have happened; rather, it concerns the possibility of another relation to a past that cannot be undone (Jankélévitch, 1967; Ricoeur, 2004).

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, it establishes the conceptual limits within which the expression *forgiving death* can legitimately be employed, distinguishing it from mourning, acceptance, reconciliation, forgetting, and narrative reconfiguration. Second, it asks whether Christian eschatological hope introduces a dimension that cannot be derived from philosophical, psychoanalytic, or hermeneutical accounts of loss alone: the future understood not merely as the continuation of possibilities already contained in the present, but under the category of promise.

Methodologically, the study adopts a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach articulated through an interdisciplinary dialogue between philosophy, psychoanalysis, and theology. Such interdisciplinarity does not imply that these fields share identical epistemological assumptions or that their concepts can be transferred without qualification. Heidegger's ontology, Levinas's ethics of alterity, Derrida's deconstruction, Freud's metapsychology, Lacan's account of the Real, Ricoeur's hermeneutics, and Christian eschatology belong to distinct theoretical matrices. They are therefore not assembled into a unified explanatory system but brought into a logic of differentiated mediation.

Within this mediation, phenomenology and philosophy describe death as finitude, interruption, and irreparable rupture. Psychoanalysis investigates how loss affects psychic life and why some dimensions of experience resist complete symbolization. Hermeneutics addresses the reconfiguration of memory, identity, and futurity without supposing that interpretation can annul irreversibility. Theology enters through a different epistemological register: the category of promise, through which the future may be thought beyond the possibilities that the wounded subject can presently represent or generate. The theological claim that death is not ultimate is therefore neither deduced from psychoanalysis nor established by hermeneutical analysis; it belongs to the specific register of Christian eschatological faith.

This methodological distinction also requires differentiating textual interpretation from conceptual appropriation. The article does not claim that Freud, Lacan, Ricoeur, Marion, or the other authors discussed here themselves developed a theory of *forgiving death*. Nor does it identify death directly with concepts such as the Lacanian Real or the Marionian saturated phenomenon. Their categories are considered within the limits of their respective theoretical frameworks and, where explicitly indicated, appropriated as heuristic resources for testing the hypothesis proposed here. Conceptual proximity must not be mistaken for theoretical identity.

The progression of the argument follows these differentiated registers. The first section establishes the paradox and conceptual limits of forgiving death, drawing particularly on Jankélévitch, Derrida, and Ricoeur. The second examines death as irreparable rupture, distinguishing irreparability from incomprehensibility and irreversibility. The third turns to Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva to investigate mourning and the limits

of symbolization without identifying death itself with the Real. The fourth develops the eschatological turn through Moltmann, Balthasar, Marion, and Falque, together with the biblical witness to Passion, resurrection, and hope. The fifth brings these differentiated registers together in order to formulate forgiving death as a reopening of the possible. The conclusion clarifies the relation between mourning, forgiveness, and hope and develops the distinction between the irreparable and the absolute.

The central interdisciplinary movement may thus be summarized through three distinct but related operations: psychoanalysis confronts the remainder that resists complete symbolization; hermeneutics investigates the reconfiguration of memory and futurity in relation to the irreversible; theology introduces promise as the horizon of a future that cannot be reduced to what the present can represent. These operations neither replace nor complete one another. Their distinction is precisely what allows the article to ask how the irreparable may remain irreparable without becoming absolute.

It is within this final displacement that the notion of *hope without representation* becomes decisive. The expression does not imply the absence of eschatological images, symbols, or determinate Christian content. Rather, it designates hope without exhaustive or objectifying representation: a hope grounded in the resurrection of Christ and in the promise that death will not have the final word, while refusing to transform that promise into knowledge or anticipatory possession of its fulfillment. In this sense, Paul's assertion that "hope that is seen is not hope" (Rom 8:24) expresses both the orientation and the epistemological restraint of Christian hope.

The question guiding the study can consequently be stated with precision: if death cannot itself be forgiven, can the subject's relation to the irreparable be transformed in such a way that memory remains faithful to loss while the future remains open? The argument proposed here is that such a transformation can be described, analogically and paradoxically, as forgiveness, provided that its conceptual limits are preserved. Christian hope radicalizes this opening by situating futurity under the sign of promise rather than exhaustive representation. The problem is therefore not how to overcome death, but how to inhabit its irreversibility without conceding to it the final determination of human possibility.

2 The Paradox of Forgiving Death: A Conceptual Delimitation

The expression "forgiving death" contains, from the outset, a paradox that must be preserved rather than resolved through an indiscriminate expansion of the concept of forgiveness. In its moral and interpersonal sense, forgiveness presupposes an offense, an agent capable of being held accountable for it, and a relationship within which guilt, imputability, and responsibility can be called into question. This connection between forgiveness, responsibility, and imputability is central to Ricoeur's reflections on the "capable human being" and difficult forgiveness (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 457–506). Death, however, is not a moral subject. It possesses neither intention nor will nor responsibility; it cannot acknowledge the suffering associated with loss, repent, or answer for the irreparable rupture it introduces. For this reason, to speak of *forgiving death* cannot mean attributing to death the status of an offender in order subsequently to absolve it. Taken literally, the expression would constitute a category mistake. The hypothesis of this article is situated precisely within this impossibility: it asks whether forgiveness, without entirely losing its conceptual specificity, might name a transformation in the subject's relationship to what death renders irreversible.

This delimitation makes it possible to distinguish the hypothesis developed here from several related categories. Forgiving death is not equivalent to accepting it. Acceptance may designate the recognition of a constitutive limit of existence or a lessening of psychic resistance to an inescapable reality. Nor is forgiving death equivalent to the work of mourning, understood, since Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*, as the

complex psychic response to the loss of a loved person or of an abstraction that has taken the place of one (Freud, 1957, p. 243–258). Freud's account should not be reduced to a linear sequence culminating in a simple "resolution" of grief; rather, it describes the difficult reorganization of libidinal attachment in the aftermath of loss. Neither can forgiving death simply be identified with reconciliation with finitude. Finally, it cannot be reduced to the narrative reconfiguration of loss: although narrative may transform one's relationship to what has happened, the event of death retains an excess that resists complete integration into a meaningful totality. If the term "forgiveness" is to be retained, therefore, it must be because it introduces an operation that none of these categories, taken in isolation, fully encompasses.

At this point, Jankélévitch (1967) offers an initial and decisive conceptual delimitation. Forgiveness is neither forgetting nor excusing, nor is it simply an effect of the passage of time. In *Le Pardon*, its radical character derives precisely from the fact that it cannot be reduced to a causal understanding of the offense or to the gradual erosion of resentment. To forgive does not mean concluding that what occurred no longer matters. On the contrary, forgiveness acquires its density only in relation to something that has actually happened and whose occurrence cannot be undone. It therefore bears a constitutive relationship to the irreversible. This relation becomes still more evident when Jankélévitch's reflections on forgiveness are read alongside his philosophy of irreversibility: time does not restore what has been lost, and the fact of "having happened" cannot itself be revoked (Jankélévitch, 1974). The past remains past; what happened is not annulled. Forgiveness does not retrospectively alter the event, but it may transform the way in which its irreversibility continues to operate within the present.

This point also clarifies why forgiveness cannot simply be identified with forgetting. Ricoeur's *Memory, History, Forgetting* places forgiveness within a broader inquiry into memory, forgetting, fault, and imputability. Difficult forgiveness does not erase the event but concerns the relation between the act and the agent, opening the possibility that a person need not remain indefinitely identified with what he or she has done (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 457–506). The act remains, yet the identity of the person who acted need not be definitively reduced to the evil committed. Forgiveness therefore neither destroys memory nor magically rewrites the past; rather, it intervenes in the relationship between past, identity, and possibility. Its force lies in preventing what has happened from absolutely determining what may still come to be.

Derrida's reflections on forgiveness sharpen this conceptual difficulty from another direction. If forgiveness is reduced to reconciliation, normalization, therapeutic recovery, or the restoration of social relations, it risks losing precisely what makes forgiveness distinctive. Derrida (2001a, p. 32–39) therefore insists on the aporetic character of forgiveness, famously associating forgiveness in its unconditional sense with the unforgivable itself. The present argument does not simply adopt Derrida's unconditional conception of forgiveness. His analysis is relevant, however, because it prevents the category from being reduced to a general name for successful adaptation. The paradox of *forgiving death* must likewise retain an irreducible tension: if it merely means "coming to terms with death", the word forgiveness becomes conceptually unnecessary.

Death, however, introduces a difficulty that neither the interpersonal model of forgiveness nor its aporetic radicalization can resolve directly: there is no agent here who can be released from an act. It is precisely at this point that the direct application of Ricoeur's theory of forgiveness reaches its limit and the hermeneutical appropriation proposed in this study begins. The argument does not claim that Ricoeur (1992) conceived death as an object of forgiveness, nor does it transfer an interpersonal category into the domain of finitude without mediation. What is retained from his hermeneutics of forgiveness is a more precise structure: in the face of the irreversible, the past cannot be abolished, but its relationship to possibility can be transformed. This is consistent with Ricoeur's broader understanding of narrative

identity, in which identity is constituted temporally rather than as an immutable sameness (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 113–168). The hypothesis of "forgiving death" thus shifts the object of the operation. It is not death that receives forgiveness; rather, it is the subject's relationship to a world wounded by death that becomes capable of transformation.

This distinction is particularly important in mourning. Loss does not constitute a moral offense that must be excused, but it produces a rupture capable of profoundly reorganizing the survivor's temporality. There are deaths after which the past appears to occupy the entirety of the present and to foreclose the future. The irreparable consists not only in the fact that the deceased will not return, but also in the impossibility of restoring the world exactly as it existed before the loss. In this sense, forgiveness is neither a technique for completing mourning nor a psychological stage subsequent to grief. Its conceptual function is different: it names the possibility that fidelity to what has been lost may cease to require the impossibility of a future.

For this reason, "forgiving death" cannot mean complete reconciliation with death either. Reconciliation suggests, at least in some of its meanings, the restoration of unity or the overcoming of opposition. The forgiveness proposed here preserves a fissure. Something remains unrepaired, without equivalence and without substitution. The person who has been lost is not recovered through narrative, a new affective investment, or a religious explanation. What may be transformed is the manner in which this absence inhabits the present. Forgiveness, in this paradoxical register, does not eliminate the irreparable; rather, it prevents the irreparable from necessarily becoming the impossibility of a future. In this respect, Ricoeur's reflections on memory and forgiveness are particularly important: the question is not how to undo the past, but how a future may remain possible without betraying the memory of what has occurred (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 457–506).

We can thus specify the strict sense in which the expression *forgiving death* will be employed throughout this article. It designates not a moral forgiveness addressed to death, but a hermeneutical-existential transformation of the subject's relationship to the irreversibility disclosed by death, in which memory and future may once again coexist without the latter requiring the erasure of the former. The word "forgiveness" remains deliberately under tension because it points toward something more radical than adaptation or resignation: the possibility that what cannot be undone may nevertheless cease to exercise absolute power over what can still begin. Forgiveness is retained, therefore, not as a synonym for mourning, acceptance, or reconciliation, but as a category concerned with the relation between the irreversible and the reopening of possibility.

This hypothesis also establishes the limits of the present investigation. Psychoanalysis can illuminate why loss is not simply assimilable and why certain remnants resist symbolization; hermeneutics can help us think through the transformation of the relationship between memory, identity, and future. Neither operation, however, permits the conclusion that death has been overcome or that its enigma has been adequately represented. It is precisely at this limit that the theological question of hope emerges. If forgiveness makes it possible to think of an opening toward the future from within the irreversible, Christian hope introduces a further question: whether such an opening can be sustained not by a representation of what comes after death, but by the promise that death does not constitute the final word on existence. It is in this sense that the paradox of "forgiving death" will lead, throughout this study, to the hypothesis of a *hope without representation*.

3 Death, Loss, and the Irreparable

If the paradox of *forgiving death* concerns a transformation in the subject's relationship to the irreversible rather than the forgiveness of death as a moral agent, it becomes necessary to determine more precisely what kind of rupture death introduces. Death is not simply one event among others within the continuity of experience. It confronts existence with a limit that cannot be converted into a reversible loss or compensated

for through substitution. The notion of the *irreparable* will therefore be used here to designate not merely what causes suffering, but what cannot be restored to its previous condition. The irreparable is not synonymous with the incomprehensible: an event may be historically explained, psychologically interpreted, and narratively reconstructed while nevertheless remaining irreparable. Understanding does not undo occurrence.

This distinction is essential because the question raised by death is not exhausted by finitude in the abstract. Heidegger's analysis of *Being-toward-death* provides one of the decisive philosophical accounts of mortality as constitutive of existence. In *Being and Time*, death is not primarily treated as a biological event occurring at the end of life but as the "possibility of the impossibility" of existence, an unsurpassable possibility that individualizes *Dasein* and discloses the finite structure of its possibilities (Heidegger, 2010, p. 228–267). Death thus belongs to the existential structure of being-in-the-world rather than simply appearing as an external event that happens to an otherwise complete subject.

Heidegger's analysis is indispensable for understanding mortality as an existential horizon, yet it does not exhaust the phenomenon that concerns this article. The death that wounds the survivor is not simply one's own anticipated possibility but the disappearance of another person whose presence constituted part of one's world. Here the phenomenology of death encounters a decisive displacement. The question is no longer only how I exist toward my own death, but what occurs when the death of the other transforms the world in which I continue to exist.

Levinas makes this displacement particularly significant. Against any attempt to reduce death to a possibility that the subject can appropriate in advance, he emphasizes its alterity, passivity, and resistance to mastery. Death is not simply something toward which the subject projects itself; it comes as that which cannot be assumed as a project of freedom. In *Time and the Other*, Levinas (1987, p. 69–79) describes death in terms of an event that exceeds the subject's power, exposing existence to a radical passivity. In *God, Death, and Time*, this displacement becomes still more explicit: the death of the other cannot be reduced to information concerning mortality, since it implicates the surviving subject in an ethical relation that exceeds knowledge (Levinas, 2000, p. 8–17).

The death of the other therefore reveals something that an exclusively ontological analysis of finitude risks leaving insufficiently articulated: death transforms not only my relation to my own possibilities but also the relational world through which those possibilities acquired meaning. The deceased is not simply an object removed from an otherwise unchanged field of experience. His or her absence modifies the field itself. Places, gestures, routines, words, objects, and memories may remain, yet they no longer inhabit the same configuration of presence. The world survives, but it is no longer simply the world that existed before the loss.

This is one reason why the category of the irreparable is preferable here to the language of mere absence. Absence may, at least in principle, be temporary. The absent person may return; what is missing may be recovered. Death transforms absence into an absence without empirical return. The irreparable names precisely this impossibility of restitution. It does not mean that life after loss becomes impossible, nor that new relations and meanings cannot emerge. It means that whatever emerges does so without restoring the previous configuration of the world. A future is possible, but it cannot be a simple repetition of the world before the event.

The irreparable must also be distinguished from the irreversible. The two concepts overlap, but they are not identical. Irreversibility concerns the temporal structure of what has happened: the event cannot be made not to have happened. Jankélévitch (1974) emphasizes precisely this dimension of temporality: the *quod* of an event—its having taken place—cannot be revoked by subsequent interpretation or action. Irreparability concerns, more specifically, the impossibility of restoring what the event has broken. Every irre-

parable event is irreversible, but the language of the irreparable draws attention to the wound produced within a world of relations. In death, the two dimensions converge with particular force: the event cannot be undone, and the person who has died cannot be replaced without denying the singularity of the lost other.

This distinction also prevents the argument from turning the reconstruction of meaning into a form of retrospective mastery. Narrative, memory, ritual, psychoanalytic elaboration, and religious interpretation may profoundly transform the experience of loss. None of them, however, makes the death not to have occurred. Ricoeur's hermeneutics is important precisely because narrative configuration does not amount to the abolition of contingency. Narrative makes events intelligible by placing them within temporal configurations, but the work of configuration does not grant the subject sovereign control over what has happened (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 52–87). The capacity to narrate a loss should therefore not be confused with the capacity to repair it.

Derrida's reflections on mourning make this resistance to appropriation still more explicit. Mourning contains an aporia: to preserve the other entirely within oneself risks assimilating the other to the self, whereas simply relinquishing the other risks betraying the singularity of the relationship. In his writings on mourning, Derrida (2001b, 2003) repeatedly returns to this tension between interiorization and the preservation of alterity. The dead other cannot simply be incorporated into a completed narrative without remainder. Memory is necessary, yet a memory that completely absorbed alterity into the identity of the survivor would paradoxically risk effacing what it seeks to preserve.

The irreparable, then, should not be understood as the failure of meaning. Rather, it marks a limit internal to meaning itself. The death of another may acquire multiple meanings; it may be remembered, narrated, ritualized, interpreted, and integrated into the continuing history of a life. Yet none of these operations produces an equivalence for the person who has died. The singularity of the other resists substitution. What is lost cannot simply be exchanged for a meaning about the loss.

This point is decisive for the argument developed here. If the transformation associated with *forgiving death* were understood as the successful incorporation of death into a coherent narrative, the hypothesis would ultimately collapse into a theory of adaptation. The concept of forgiveness would add little. The irreparable establishes a stronger condition: transformation is possible only if it does not require the abolition of the wound. The future that becomes possible after loss is therefore not a future in which the rupture disappears, but one in which the rupture no longer determines the total horizon of possibility.

At this point, however, phenomenological and hermeneutical description encounters another question. Even when the subject recognizes the irreversibility of death and succeeds in narrating aspects of the loss, something may continue to resist integration. The experience of mourning shows that knowledge of the fact of death does not necessarily coincide with its psychic inscription. One may know that the other is dead while continuing, at another level, to encounter the impossibility of fully assimilating that absence. It is here that psychoanalysis becomes necessary for the present argument.

The transition to Freud and Lacan should therefore not be understood as the addition of another disciplinary perspective to an already completed philosophical analysis. Psychoanalysis addresses a problem that phenomenology and hermeneutics alone do not fully resolve: the discrepancy between acknowledging an event and psychically elaborating its consequences. Freud's account of mourning provides the first conceptual framework for examining this work of loss, while Lacan permits a further interrogation of what, within loss, may resist symbolization. The question is no longer simply what death means for finite existence, but what occurs when the irreversible encounters the limits of psychic representation.

4 Mourning and the Limits of Symbolization: Freud, Lacan, and the Real

The phenomenology of the irreparable developed above does not by itself explain how loss is psychically inscribed. The fact that death is irreversible can be acknowledged at the level of knowledge while remaining difficult to integrate at the level of psychic life. One may know that another person has died and nevertheless continue to encounter, in dreams, gestures, expectations, memories, or affects, the persistence of a presence that no longer corresponds to empirical reality. Psychoanalysis becomes relevant at precisely this point: not because it provides a theory capable of explaining death itself, but because it investigates what loss does to desire, attachment, representation, and the subject's relation to absence.

Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* remains a foundational point of departure. Mourning is described there as a reaction to the loss of a loved person or to the loss of an abstraction that has taken the place of one, such as country, freedom, or an ideal (Freud, 1957, p. 243). Freud (1957) famously distinguishes mourning from melancholia while recognizing important similarities between them: painful dejection, loss of interest in the external world, inhibition of activity, and a diminished capacity to invest in new objects. Melancholia adds a distinctive disturbance of self-regard, expressed in self-reproach and self-devaluation (Freud, 1957, p. 244–246).

Freud's account, however, should not be reduced to a linear model according to which mourning consists simply in detaching libido from the lost object and subsequently transferring it to another. Such a reading risks transforming mourning into a predictable sequence leading toward psychic restoration. The demand that libido withdraw from its attachments is met by resistance, and Freud (1957, p. 244–245) explicitly observes that this process is carried out "bit by bit" and at considerable psychic cost. Mourning therefore entails a temporal disjunction between knowing the fact of loss and reorganizing the psychic investments bound to the lost person.

This distinction is particularly relevant to the present argument. The work of mourning does not make the loss reversible, nor does it imply that the deceased becomes interchangeable with another object. Freud's economic vocabulary can sometimes appear to suggest substitution, but the singularity of attachment complicates any straightforward logic of replacement. Later psychoanalytic developments make this difficulty still more evident. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud (1961, p. 28–29) himself complicates the earlier model by recognizing the importance of identification in the formation of the ego: when an object is lost, aspects of the relation to it may be preserved through identification rather than simply abandoned. Loss may therefore transform the subject internally. The dead are not merely left behind; in complex ways, they may become part of the psychic history through which the subject continues to exist.

This allows us to distinguish mourning from the hypothesis of *forgiving death*. Mourning concerns the psychic work demanded by loss; forgiveness, as defined in this article, concerns the possibility that the irreversible cease to determine the entirety of the subject's relation to the future. The two processes may intersect, but they are not identical. Mourning can occur without anything that should properly be called forgiveness, just as the language of forgiveness cannot replace the psychic work of mourning. The distinction is necessary precisely to prevent *forgiving death* from becoming a new name for grief adaptation.

Freud nevertheless leaves open a further question: whether every dimension of loss can be psychically integrated through the work of mourning. It is at this point that Lacan becomes particularly significant. Yet methodological caution is required. This article does not claim that death is identical with the Lacanian Real. Such an identification would collapse distinct conceptual registers and attribute to Lacan a thesis he does not formulate in these terms. Rather, Lacan's concept of the Real will be appropriated here as a means of interrogating a particular dimension

of the experience of loss: that which resists complete symbolization.

The Real is one of Lacan's three registers—the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real—and its meaning undergoes significant transformations throughout his teaching. It cannot be reduced to external reality, biological facticity, or a realm situated behind appearances. Already in the 1950s, Lacan (1998, p. 167; 2007, p. 123–124) distinguishes the Real from the symbolic organization through which human experience acquires structure. Later, the formulation that the Real is "the impossible" emphasizes not a mysterious transcendent reality but a structural limit: something that cannot be fully inscribed within the symbolic order. In Seminar XI, the Real is approached through the notion of *tuché*, the encounter that disrupts the automatism of repetition and confronts the subject with what escapes assimilation into an established network of meaning (Lacan, 1998, p. 53–64).

It is in this restricted sense that Lacan can illuminate the experience of death. The claim is not that biological death "is" the Real, nor that every encounter with death necessarily produces an encounter with the Real. Rather, death may expose a point at which symbolic resources encounter their limit. The survivor can say that the other has died; can recount the circumstances of the death; can participate in rituals; can preserve memories and construct narratives. Yet none of these symbolic operations necessarily exhausts what has occurred. There may remain a discrepancy between the event as narratable and the event as experienced—a remainder that resists being converted into a complete representation.

This resistance should not be romanticized as ineffability. To say that something resists symbolization does not mean that nothing can be said about it. Psychoanalysis itself depends upon speech. The point is more precise: symbolic articulation does not guarantee symbolic totalization. Speech can transform the subject's relationship to loss without eliminating every remainder. The limit of representation is therefore not the failure of language but one of the conditions under which language continues to operate.

Lacan's later teaching further radicalizes this point. The Real increasingly appears not simply as what lies outside symbolization but as what "does not cease not to be written", marking an impossibility internal to the symbolic itself (Lacan, 1998, p. 59; 1999, p. 94). This formulation is particularly useful for the present argument because it prevents the Real from being treated as a positive object hidden beyond representation. The Real names a limit encountered within the work of symbolization. Applied cautiously to mourning, it allows us to think of loss not as an event devoid of meaning, but as an event whose meaning can never become entirely coextensive with what has been lost.

Kristeva's reflections on melancholia provide an important mediation between Freud's theory of loss and this question of representational limits. In *Black Sun*, she examines depression and melancholia in relation to an archaic loss that may not be fully available to representation, describing the difficulty of translating affective suffering into signs and meanings (Kristeva, 1989, p. 3–30). Her analysis is particularly relevant because it shows that the problem of loss cannot be reduced either to conscious remembrance or to the simple absence of an object. The loss may affect the very capacity through which the subject gives form and meaning to experience.

Kristeva (1989) also helps prevent an overly abstract use of the Lacanian Real. What resists symbolization is experienced affectively and bodily: as inhibition, silence, fragmentation of discourse, repetition, or the impoverishment of the world's capacity to signify. The question of the irreparable therefore concerns not only an epistemological limit—what cannot be known or represented—but a transformation in the subject's capacity to inhabit a meaningful world. Loss may wound the very processes through which meaning becomes possible.

This is where the psychoanalytic contribution becomes indispensable to the interdisciplinary argument. Phenomenology describes the rupture introduced by the death of the other; psychoa-

nalysis demonstrates that such a rupture cannot simply be overcome by an intellectual recognition of finitude. The subject is not transparent to itself, and knowing that death is irreversible does not determine how the loss will be psychically inscribed. Mourning involves repetition, ambivalence, identification, resistance, and transformations of desire that exceed conscious decision.

At the same time, psychoanalysis establishes an important limit for the concept of forgiveness proposed here. If *forgiving death* were understood as the complete integration of loss into meaning, it would contradict precisely what the psychoanalytic analysis has revealed. The transformation sought cannot consist in making death fully intelligible, symbolically complete, or psychically harmless. Something of the loss may remain. The dead other cannot be replaced by an explanation, and the wound cannot simply be eliminated through interpretation.

The hypothesis of *forgiving death* must therefore be reformulated in light of psychoanalysis: forgiveness does not remove the remainder; it transforms the subject's relationship to it. This distinction is decisive. What resists symbolization need not disappear in order for the future to become possible. The persistence of a remainder and the reopening of possibility are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, the capacity to live with what cannot be completely repaired or represented may constitute one of the conditions for a future that does not depend upon forgetting.

Here psychoanalysis reaches both its contribution and its limit within the argument of this article. It can describe the psychic consequences of loss, the ambivalence of mourning, the persistence of identification, and the limits of symbolization. It cannot, on its own terms, transform the persistence of the irreparable into a promise. Nor should it be asked to do so. The question that now emerges is therefore hermeneutical: how can memory remain faithful to the lost other without allowing the past to close the horizon of the possible? This question returns us to forgiveness, now no longer as a metaphor for mourning but as a transformation in the relationship between memory, irreversibility, and the capacity for a future.

5 The Eschatological Turn: Hope without Representation

The preceding argument has reached a limit. Psychoanalysis can describe the persistence of what resists complete symbolization, while hermeneutics can account for transformations in the relation between memory, identity, and futurity. Neither perspective, however, can establish, from within its own conceptual resources, that death does not constitute the ultimate horizon of existence. It is at this threshold that the theological question emerges—not as an external supplement to the argument, but as a response to a problem generated by its internal limits.

The specifically theological contribution consists in introducing the category of promise. Christian hope does not explain why death occurs, restore the world that has been lost, or eliminate the irreparable. It changes the status of the future. The future is no longer understood exclusively as the continuation of possibilities already contained in the present, but as that which may be opened by a promise that the subject cannot produce or guarantee by itself.

This distinction is central to what will here be called *hope without representation*. Hope must first be distinguished from expectation. Expectation anticipates a future that can, at least in principle, be represented according to existing possibilities. Christian hope, by contrast, is directed toward a future whose fulfillment cannot be derived from the present or mastered imaginatively in advance. It is therefore neither prediction nor compensatory fantasy. Its content is not the representation of another world capable of neutralizing the pain of this one, but trust in a promise whose fulfillment exceeds the subject's capacity to determine its form.

Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* provides an important framework for this claim. Christian hope is grounded not in the uninterrupted development of history but in the promise disclosed in the resurrection of Christ. Resurrection introduces a fu-

ture that cannot be deduced from the conditions of the present and thereby contests the apparent finality of death (Moltmann, 1993). Eschatology, in this sense, is not simply a doctrine concerning the last things. It constitutes a transformation of the present through a future that remains promised rather than possessed.

The biblical structure of hope reinforces this distinction. Paul associates hope precisely with what is not yet seen: "hope that is seen is not hope" (Rom 8:24). Hope is therefore oriented toward what exceeds present visibility while remaining grounded in promise. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 15 does not portray resurrection as the restoration of biological existence to its former condition, but through the language of transformation: what is sown perishable is raised imperishable (1 Cor 15:42–44). The eschatological horizon does not simply return the lost world unchanged. It introduces the possibility of transformation beyond restitution.

The resurrection narratives themselves preserve this tension between continuity and discontinuity. In Luke 24, recognition of the risen Christ does not occur through immediate conceptual identification. The disciples on the road to Emmaus initially fail to recognize him; recognition emerges through interpretation, memory, the breaking of bread, and a retrospective rereading of the event. Resurrection is announced and testified to, but it resists reduction to an object that could be fully represented or conceptually mastered. Christian hope therefore concerns an event whose meaning can be received without becoming exhaustively available to representation.

Balthasar (1990) deepens this eschatological claim through a Christological account of abandonment and descent. The Paschal event does not circumvent death. In the Passion and the *descensus ad inferos*, the incarnate Son enters into the extremity of human mortality and abandonment (Balthasar, 1990). Theologically, this should not be formulated as though the divine nature simply became mortal or ceased to be divine. Rather, Christian confession concerns the death of the incarnate Son and the Paschal relation between abandonment, death, and resurrection within the economy of salvation. The radicality of hope therefore derives precisely from the fact that resurrection follows neither the denial nor the avoidance of death, but the passage through it.

This Christological qualification is essential. Christian hope does not claim that suffering is illusory or that finitude can be spiritually bypassed. The cry of abandonment—"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34; Matt 27:46)—preserves within Christian discourse the experience of rupture itself. The Paschal movement does not retrospectively transform agony into something that was never truly tragic. Rather, it prevents tragedy from being identified with the total meaning of the event.

Falque's phenomenological theology is particularly relevant here. In *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*, resurrection is approached not as an escape from finitude but as its transformation through the Paschal passage (Falque, 2012). What is at stake is not the suppression of human corporeality or mortality, but a metamorphosis that occurs through, rather than around, finite existence. This perspective makes it possible to maintain the full weight of death while refusing to make death the ultimate definition of the human.

Marion's phenomenology of givenness helps clarify another dimension of this problem, provided that its categories are used with methodological caution. It would be too strong simply to identify death with the saturated phenomenon. What Marion's account makes available is rather a critique of the assumption that every meaningful event must be proportionate to the subject's conceptual and representational capacities (Marion, 2002). Certain experiences exceed the subject's capacity to constitute them as objects. Applied heuristically to the present argument, this excess helps us understand why eschatological hope cannot be reduced to an image constructed by consciousness.

The movement from psychoanalysis and hermeneutics to theology can therefore be expressed in three different but related operations. Psychoanalysis identifies the remainder that

resists complete symbolization. Hermeneutics investigates the reconfiguration of memory, identity, and future in relation to the irreversible. Theology introduces the category of promise, according to which the future is not exhausted by what the wounded subject can presently represent or generate.

These operations should not be collapsed into one another. Theology does not complete psychoanalysis by supplying a religious meaning for what psychoanalysis cannot explain, nor does it transform hermeneutical reconfiguration into proof of resurrection. The distinction between the disciplines must remain. The theological claim begins precisely where philosophical or psychological description reaches its own epistemological boundary: the assertion that death is not ultimate belongs to faith in a promise and cannot be deduced from an analysis of mourning, consciousness, or narrative identity.

Hope without representation thus names neither ignorance nor the abandonment of theological content. It names a specific relation between promise and futurity. Christian hope possesses a determinate orientation—the resurrection of Christ and the promise that death will not have the final word—without claiming to possess an exhaustive representation of the form that fulfillment will take.

Such hope does not repair the irreparable. It does something different: it prevents the irreparable from becoming synonymous with the impossible. What has been lost cannot simply be restored, and death cannot be made not to have occurred. Yet the future need not therefore be reduced to the indefinite continuation of loss. Eschatological hope maintains that a possibility may emerge which is neither repetition of the past nor projection of the wounded present.

This is the theological displacement required by the argument. Death remains irreversible; mourning remains marked by absence; and the subject remains incapable of producing a definitive reconciliation through its own symbolic resources. Nevertheless, the horizon of existence is no longer determined exclusively by death. Hope does not abolish the rupture. It contests its claim to ultimacy.

6 Forgiving Death: The Reopening of the Possible

The paradoxical expression *forgiving death* can now be formulated more precisely. It does not mean forgiving death as though death were an agent, nor does it designate the acceptance, justification, or comprehension of mortality. These possibilities have already been excluded. The expression names instead a transformation in the subject's relation to the irreparable through which loss remains real without becoming the exhaustive determination of the future.

This is why forgiveness cannot be reduced either to mourning or to narrative reconfiguration. Mourning concerns the psychic and affective work through which the subject lives with absence; hermeneutical reconfiguration concerns the transformation of the relation between memory, identity, and temporality. Forgiveness, as appropriated in the hypothesis developed here, designates the possibility that the irreversible past may remain present without possessing absolute sovereignty over what the subject may still become.

The term *forgiveness* is retained because it names a peculiar relation to irreversibility. As Jankélévitch (1967) and Ricoeur (2004) each show in different ways, forgiveness does not change the fact that something has happened. It does not make the irreversible reversible. Rather, its force lies in transforming the relation between the past event and the possibilities that remain open after it (Jankélévitch, 1967; Ricoeur, 2004). In the case of death, this structure must be displaced beyond its ordinary interpersonal framework. There is no guilty agent to be released from fault; what may instead be released is the future from total determination by the wound.

Such a use of forgiveness remains analogical and deliberately paradoxical. It is justified only if its limits are maintained. *Forgiving death* does not mean ceasing to grieve, relinquishing attachment to the deceased, declaring mortality meaningful,

or restoring a lost equilibrium. It means inhabiting a world that cannot return to what it was while nevertheless refusing to identify the destruction of one configuration of existence with the destruction of every possible future.

At this point forgiveness and hope become closely related without becoming identical. Forgiveness concerns the transformed relation to what has irreversibly occurred; hope concerns the future that cannot yet be represented. Forgiveness loosens the sovereignty of the past, while hope prevents the future from being determined exclusively by that past. Their intersection makes possible what may be called a reopening of the possible.

The formula is intentionally modest. The possible that is reopened is not a compensation for the dead, nor does it cancel absence. The wound remains a wound. But it ceases to function as the total horizon within which every subsequent experience must receive its meaning. The subject may continue to remember, mourn, and remain attached to the lost other without being confined entirely to the world destroyed by the loss.

The hypothesis of forgiving death can therefore be stated in its strictest form: to forgive death is not to pardon death, but to undergo a transformation in one's relation to the irreparable such that memory and futurity can coexist without either erasing the loss or allowing loss to become the final determination of existence.

Theological hope radicalizes this possibility. It does not guarantee psychological recovery, nor does it transform faith into knowledge about what follows death. Rather, it situates the reopening of the future within the horizon of a promise: that the final meaning of existence is not identical with the interruption produced by death. In this sense, forgiveness reaches an eschatological dimension without ceasing to remain a fragile human gesture.

The original question can therefore receive a paradoxical answer. Death cannot be forgiven in the proper moral sense of forgiveness. Yet the relation to the world wounded by death can be transformed. The irreparable remains irreparable, but it need not become absolute. Forgiveness names this transformation toward the past; hope names the promise through which the future remains open.

7 Conclusion

This study began from a conceptual impossibility: death cannot properly be forgiven. Forgiveness, in its moral and interpersonal sense, presupposes agency, imputability, and a relation within which responsibility can be addressed. Death fulfills none of these conditions. To speak literally of forgiving death would therefore constitute a category mistake. Yet the impossibility of forgiving death as an agent does not exhaust the philosophical significance of the expression. It is precisely at this limit that the paradox developed throughout this article becomes intelligible.

The argument has proposed that "forgiving death" be understood as an analogical and hermeneutical-existential transformation of the subject's relation to the irreparable. Such a transformation neither reverses the event nor repairs the world fractured by loss. The deceased remains absent; the past cannot be undone; and no narrative, interpretation, or psychic elaboration can restore the singular relational configuration that death has interrupted. What may be transformed is the way in which this irreversible past inhabits the present and conditions the future. Forgiveness, in this restricted sense, names the possibility that fidelity to what has been lost need not require the foreclosure of what may still become possible.

This formulation also preserves the distinction between mourning, forgiveness, and hope. Mourning transforms the subject's relation to absence; forgiveness transforms the relation to irreversibility; hope transforms the horizon of the possible. These movements may intersect, but none can be reduced to another. Mourning does not naturally culminate in forgiveness; forgiveness is not a technique for resolving grief; and Christian hope cannot function as a theological compensation for psychic suffering. What they share is a form of transformation without restitution: the possibility of living otherwise in relation to what

cannot be restored.

The interdisciplinary character of the argument consequently depends upon preserving, rather than dissolving, the differences between its theoretical registers. Psychoanalysis shows why loss cannot be reduced to conscious recognition or complete symbolic integration: a remainder may persist beyond what can be narrated or represented. Hermeneutics examines how memory and identity may nevertheless be reconfigured in relation to an irreversible past. Theology introduces a distinct category—promise—through which the future is no longer limited to possibilities that the wounded subject can presently generate or anticipate. Theology neither completes psychoanalysis nor converts hermeneutical transformation into evidence for resurrection. Its claim belongs to another epistemological register: the confession that death, while real and irreversible, is not ultimate.

It is within this theological register that the notion of hope without representation acquires its precise meaning. The expression does not imply an absence of eschatological symbols, images, or determinate Christian content. It designates, rather, a hope without exhaustive or objectifying representation. Christian hope is oriented by the resurrection of Christ and by the promise that death will not have the final word, while refusing to transform this promise into anticipatory possession of its fulfillment. In this sense, Paul's assertion that "hope that is seen is not hope" (Rom 8:24) marks both the strength and the epistemological humility of eschatological hope: the future is promised without becoming an object available to mastery in advance.

The principal contribution of this study can therefore be formulated as a distinction between the irreparable and the absolute. Death is irreparable because neither interpretation, mourning, forgiveness, nor faith can make the loss not to have occurred or restore the world exactly as it was. But the irreparable need not thereby become absolute. To absolutize death would be to grant the rupture it produces sovereignty not only over what has been lost but also over every possibility still to come. The paradox of forgiving death names the loosening of this sovereignty: not the overcoming of death, but the transformation of the relation between an irreversible past and a future that remains open.

Christian hope radicalizes this opening without abolishing its fragility. It does not explain death, justify suffering, or promise the restoration of the past in an imaginable form. Rather, it situates existence under the horizon of a promise whose fulfillment exceeds representation. The wound may remain a wound; memory may remain faithful to absence; mourning may remain unfinished in important respects. Yet none of these requires that death become the final measure of meaning.

"Forgiving death", then, does not mean pardoning death. It means inhabiting the irreparable without granting it the power to exhaust the possible. Forgiveness loosens the sovereignty of the irreversible; hope opens the future beyond what loss allows the subject to foresee. The irreparable remains irreparable, but it need not become absolute. Death retains its gravity, its rupture, and its resistance to conceptual mastery. What it loses is only its claim to determine, by itself, the final horizon of human possibility.

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