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In the United States—made front-page news across the country in December 1999, it has become almost de rigueur for	
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“To err is human” is intended as a reminder that	
our medical practice is fallible as long as human beings are involved.	
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When I chose the title of the IOM report, I naively assumed that the report was going to say something about the nature of forgiveness after medical error—forgiveness being a time-honored, if imperfect and often misunderstood, way of dealing with the aftermath of intentional and unintentional harm between persons and between societies. Finding nothing in the report about this dimension of medical error, and finding nothing in the burgeoning theoretical and empirical literature on forgiveness that addressed the aftermath of unintended harm in the context of health care, I started thinking, talking, and writing about what “forgiveness” might mean in this context. The result is this book.

The word “forgiveness” is a word that signifies “religion” to many people, particularly but not exclusively those who are familiar with Jewish and Christian teachings, practices, and expectations with respect to what ought to happen when one person wrongs another person. However, this religious language, practices, and expect-