

one To Forgive

The Unforgivable and the Imprescriptible

Jacques Derrida

Pardon, yes, pardon.

I have just said “pardon,” in English.

You don’t understand anything by this for the moment, no doubt.

“Pardon.”

It is a word, “pardon”; this word is a *noun*: one says “*un pardon*,” “*le pardon*.” In the French language it is a noun. One finds its homonymic equivalent, more or less in the same state, with more or less the same meaning and with uses that are at least analogous in other languages; in English, for example (“pardon,” in certain contexts that will be become clearer later on), although the word is, if not Latin, at least, in its tortuous filiation, of Latin origin (*perdon* in Spanish, *perdão* in Portuguese, *perdono* in Italian). In the Latin origin of this word, and in too complex a way for us to tackle it head-on today, one finds a reference to the “*don*,” [the “gift”], to “*donation*,” [to “gift-giving”]. And more than once we would have to carry over the problems and aporias of the “gift” (such as I have tried to formalize them, for example, in *Given Time* and in particular in the last chapter of this book, entitled “The Excuse and Pardon”),¹ to transfer them, so to speak, to the problems and non-

problems that are the aporias of forgiveness, aporias that are analogous and, what is more, linked. But one must neither yield to these analogies between the gift and forgiveness nor, of course, neglect their necessity; rather, one must attempt to articulate the two, to follow them to the point where, suddenly, they cease to be pertinent. Between giving and forgiving there is at least this affinity or this alliance that, beside their unconditionality of principle—one and the other, giving and forgiving, giving for giving [*don par don*—have an essential relation to time, to the movement of temporalization; even though what seems to bind forgiveness to a past, which in a certain way does not pass, makes forgiveness an experience irreducible to that of the gift, to a gift one grants more commonly in the present, in the presentation or presence of the present.

I have just said “experience” of forgiveness or the gift, but the word “experience” may already seem abusive or precipitous here, where forgiveness and gift have perhaps this in common, that they never *present themselves as such* to what is commonly called an experience, a presentation to consciousness or to existence, precisely because of the aporias that we must take into account; and for example—to limit myself to this for the time being—the aporia that renders me incapable of giving enough, or of being hospitable enough, of being present enough to the present that I give, and to the welcome that I offer, such that I think, I am even certain of this, I always have to be forgiven, to ask forgiveness for not giving, for never giving enough, for never offering or welcoming enough. One is always guilty, one must always be forgiven the gift. And the aporia becomes more extreme when one becomes conscious of the fact that if one must ask forgiveness for not giving, for never giving enough, one may also feel guilty and thus have to ask forgiveness on the contrary, for giving, forgiveness for what one gives, which can become a poison, a weapon, an affirmation of sovereignty, or even omnipotence or an appeal for recognition. One always takes by giving: I have, in the past, insisted at length on this logic of giving-taking. One must a priori, thus, ask forgiveness for the gift itself, one has to be forgiven the gift, the sovereignty or the desire for sovereignty of the gift. And, pushing it farther, irresistibly, to the second degree, one would even have to be forgiven forgiveness, which may itself also include [*comporter*] the irreducible equivocation of an affirmation of sovereignty, indeed of mastery.

These are the abysses that await us and that will always lie in wait for us—not as accidents to avoid but as the ground [*fond*] itself, the ground without ground or groundless ground [*fond sans fond*] of the thing itself called gift or forgiveness. Thus, no gift without forgiveness and no forgiveness without gift; but the two are, above all, not the same thing. The verbal link of *don* to *pardon*, which is marked in Latin languages but not in Greek, for example, as far as I know (and we will have to ask ourselves about the apparent presence or absence of forgiveness in the strict sense in ancient Greek culture; an enormous and delicate question), this verbal link of *don* and *pardon* is also present in English and German: in English, *to forgive*, *forgiveness*, *asking for forgiveness*, and one will oppose *to give* and *to get* (this extraordinary word in the English

language to which one would have to devote years of seminar) in *to forgive* versus *to forget*, forgiving is not forgetting (another enormous problem); in German, although *Verzeihen* is more common—*Verzeihung*, *jenen um Verzeihung bitten*: to ask someone for forgiveness—and this is the word Hegel uses in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (we should return to this), one often uses *Entschuldigung* (more in the sense of an excuse) and *entschuldigbar* in the equivocal sense of the forgivable-excusable, literally deculpabilizable, relieved of, exonerated from a debt remitted. There is nonetheless a word in German, a lexical family that maintains this link between the gift and forgiveness; *vergeben* means “to forgive,” “*ich bitte um Vergebung*” [I ask for forgiveness], but its usage is usually reserved for solemn occasions, especially spiritual or religious occasions, occasions less common than those that elicit *Verzeihen* or *Entschuldigen*. This link between the uses of the word “pardon,” those uses said to be common and everyday and light (for example when I say “pardon,” “sorry” at the moment I must pass in front of someone as I get out of an elevator) and the serious uses, reflective, intense uses, this link between all types of uses in very different situations, this link should be one of our problems, both a semantic problem of the concept of forgiveness and a pragmatic problem of the acts of language or pre- or ultra-linguistic practice. *Vergabung* is used more frequently—but this frequency and this probability are precisely a question of practice, of context and social gesture—more foreseeably; thus, a religious sense (Biblical-Koranic here) of the remission of sins, although the use of the lexical family (*Vergeben*, *Vergabung*, *Vergabe*) is both flexible and perverse: *Vergeben* can mean the misdeal [*maldonne*], the corruption of the gift, *sich etwas vergeben*: to compromise oneself; and *Vergabe* is an invitation to tender [*marché attribué*], an auctioning . . .)

“Pardon”: “pardon” is a noun. It can sometimes be preceded (in French) by a definite or indefinite article (*le pardon*, *un pardon*) and inscribed, for example as subject, in a constative sentence: forgiveness [*le pardon*] is this or that, forgiveness [*le pardon*] has been asked by someone or by an institution, a pardon [*un pardon*] has been granted or refused, and so forth. . . . Forgiveness asked by the Episcopate, by the police, by doctors, forgiveness that the university or the Vatican has not yet asked for, and so forth. This is the noun as reference of the constative—or theoretical—type. One could devote a lecture to the question, the subject, the theme of forgiveness, and this is basically what we are preparing to do (forgiveness thus becomes, to this extent, the name of a theme or of a theoretical problem, to be treated in a horizon of knowledge), unless the actors of the lecture ask or grant forgiveness in theoretically treating forgiveness. And when I opened this lecture by saying “pardon,” you did not know, you still do not know, what I was doing, if I was begging your pardon or if, instead of using it, I was mentioning the noun “pardon” as the title of the lecture. For in the single word “pardon,” with or without an exclamation point, one can, although nothing forces one to do so if a context does not require it, already hear an entire sentence implicit in it, a performative sentence: Pardon!

I am begging your pardon, I am begging you [*vous*] to pardon me, I am begging you [*te*] to pardon me, pardon me, I beg you [*pardonnez-moi, je vous prie*], pardon me, I am begging you [*pardonne-moi, je t'en prie*].

(I am already marking, I have just marked it as if in passing, beginning with a long digression in parentheses, this distinction between the *tu* and the *vous* in order to situate or announce a question that will long remain suspended but on which no doubt everything will also hang; if the “you” is not a “vous” of respect or distance, as this “Vous” that Lévinas says is preferable to Buber’s “Tu,” which signifies too much proximity or familiarity, or even fusion, and risks canceling out the infinite transcendence of the other; if thus the “you” of “I beg your pardon,” “pardon me” is a collective and plural “you,” the question then becomes one of a collective pardon—collective either because it involves a group of subjects, others, citizens, individuals, and so forth, or because it already involves, and this is even more complicated, but this complication is at the heart of “pardon,” a multiplicity of agencies [*instances*] or moments, instances [*instances*] or instants, of “I”s inside the “I.” Who forgives or who asks whom for forgiveness, at what moment? Who has the right or the power to do this, “who [to] whom?” And what does the “who” signify here? This will always be the almost ultimate form of the question, most often of the question insoluble by definition. However formidable it may be, this question is perhaps not the ultimate question. More than once we will be faced with the effects of a preliminary question, prior to this one, which is the question “who” or “what”? Does one forgive *someone* for a wrong committed, for example a perjury (but, as I would argue, a fault, an offense, a harm, a wrong committed is in a certain sense always a perjury), or does one forgive someone something, someone who, in whatever way, can never totally be confused with the wrongdoing and the moment of the past wrongdoing, nor with the past in general. This question—“who” or “what”—will not cease, in its many forms, to return and to haunt, to obsess the language of forgiveness and this not only by multiplying aporetic difficulties but also by forcing us finally to suspect or suspend the meaning of this opposition between “who” and “what,” a little as if the experience of forgiveness (of a forgiveness asked for, hoped for, whether granted or not), as if, perhaps, the impossibility of a true, appropriate, appropriable experience of “forgiveness” signified the dismissal of this opposition between “who” and “what,” its dismissal and thus its history, its passed historicity.

But between the “pardon” of the “pardon me” [*pardonne-moi*] and the “pardon” of the “pardon me” [*pardonnez-moi*] or the “pardon us” [*pardonnez-nous*] or the “pardon us” [*pardonne-nous*] (four essentially different possibilities, four different hands [*donnes*] of forgiveness between the singular and the plural that must be multiplied by all the alternatives of “who” and “what”—this makes a lot), the form that is the most massive, the most easily identifiable today of this formidable question, and we will begin with it, would be the one of a singular plural: can one, does one, have the right, is it in accordance with the meaning of “forgiveness” to ask more than one, to ask a

group, a collectivity, a community for forgiveness? Is it possible to ask or to grant forgiveness to someone other than the singular other, for a harm or a singular crime? This is one of the first aporias in which we will constantly be entangled.

In a certain way, it seems to us that forgiveness can only be asked or granted “one to one,” face to face, so to speak, between the one who has committed the irreparable or irreversible wrong and he or she who has suffered it and who is alone in being able to hear the request for forgiveness, to grant or refuse it. This solitude of two, in the scene of forgiveness, would seem to deprive any forgiveness of sense or authenticity that was asked for collectively, in the name of a community, a Church, an institution, a profession, a group of anonymous victims, sometimes dead, or their representatives, descendants, or survivors. In the same way, this singular, even quasi-secret solitude of forgiveness would turn forgiveness into an experience outside or heterogeneous [*étrangère*] to the rule of law, of punishment or penalty, of the public institution, of judiciary calculations, and so forth. As Vladimir Jankélévitch pointedly reminds us in *Le pardon*,² forgiveness of a sin defies penal logic. Where forgiveness exceeds penal logic, it lies outside, it is foreign to [*étranger*] any juridical space, even the juridical space in which the concept of a crime against humanity after the war, and, in 1964, in France, the law of the imprescriptibility of crimes against humanity appeared. The imprescriptible—namely, what is beyond any “statute of limitations”—is not the un-forgivable, and I am indicating here very quickly, too quickly, a critical and problematic space toward which we would have to return again and again. All of the public declarations of repentance that are multiplying in France today (*Eglise de France*, the police and the medical profession—still not the Vatican as such, nor the university in spite of its accomplishments [records] in the area in question), declarations that were preceded, at a certain rate and in various forms in other countries, through similar gestures—the Japanese prime minister or V. Havel presenting excuses to certain victims of the past, the episcopacy in Poland and Germany proceeding to an examination of conscience at the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz; the attempt at reconciliation in South Africa, and so forth. All of these public manifestations of repentance (whether state sponsored or not), and most often of “forgiveness asked,” very new manifestations in the history of politics, are determined by the background of the historical-juridical resources [*s’enlèvent sur ce fonds historico-juridique*] that carried the institution, the invention, the foundation of the juridical concept of Nuremberg in 1945, a concept still unknown then, of “crime against humanity.” Be this as it may, the concept of forgiveness—or the unforgivable—which is often put forward in all of these discourses, and in their commentary, remains heterogeneous to the judiciary or penal dimension that determines both the time of prescription or the imprescriptibility of the crimes. That is, unless the non-juridical dimension of forgiveness, and of the unforgivable—there where it suspends and interrupts the usual order of law—

has not in fact come to inscribe itself, inscribe its interruption in the law itself. This is one of the difficulties that awaits us.

The little book of Jankélévitch that follows *Le pardon* and is entitled *L'imprescriptible* bears in epigraph several lines of Eluard, whose interest is paradoxical, and to my eyes usefully provocative, insofar as the lines oppose salvation, but salvation *on earth*, to forgiveness. Eluard says:

There is no salvation on earth
for as long as executioners can be forgiven.

*Il n'y a pas de salut sur la terre
tant qu'on peut pardonner aux bourreaux.*

Insofar as it almost always happens, and in a non-fortuitous way, that one associates—we will often return to this—expiation, salvation, redemption, and reconciliation with forgiveness, these remarks have at least the merit of breaking with common sense, which is also that of the greatest religious and spiritual traditions of forgiveness—the Judaic or Christian traditions, for example, that never remove forgiveness from a horizon of reconciliation, hope for redemption and salvation, through confession, remorse or regret, sacrifice, and expiation. In *L'imprescriptible*, from the very foreword of the text entitled “Should We Pardon Them?,” a foreword that dates from 1971, Jankélévitch yields, without saying it in these terms, to a kind of repentance, since he admits that this text seems to contradict what he had written four years earlier in the book *Le pardon* of 1967. In addition, the short polemical essay “Should We Pardon Them?” was written in the context of the French debates of 1964 about the imprescriptibility of Hitler’s crimes and the crimes against humanity. As Jankélévitch makes clear: “In *Le pardon*, a purely philosophical work that I have published elsewhere, the answer to the question Must we pardon? seems to contradict the one given here. Between the absolute of the law of love and the absolute of wicked (*méchante*) freedom there is a tear that cannot be entirely unsewn [*décousu*]. I have not attempted to reconcile the irrationality of evil with the omnipotence of love. Forgiveness is as strong as evil, but evil is as strong as forgiveness.”³

Naturally, what we have here are statements and a logic that we have barely begun to debate, with which we are just beginning to struggle. Nonetheless, the texts of *L'imprescriptible*, participating as they do in the debate I have just evoked and to which we will return concerning imprescriptibility, firmly conclude with the impossibility and inopportuneness, indeed with the immorality, of forgiveness. And in order to do this, in this polemical and impassioned debate, they form a continuity of meanings that we must rigorously dissociate, and which, moreover, Jankélévitch himself dissociates in what he calls his “purely philosophical study,” namely, for example, forgiveness, prescription, and forgetting. “Should We Pardon Them?” begins with this question: “Is it time to forgive, or at least to forget?”⁴ Jankélévitch knows perfectly well that forgiveness is not forgetting, but in the spirit of a generous

polemical demonstration, and in horrified fear before the risk of a forgiveness that might end up engendering a forgetting, Jankélévitch says “no” to forgiveness, alleging that one must not forget. He speaks to us, in short, of a duty of non-forgiveness, in the name of the victims. Forgiveness is impossible. Forgiveness should not be. One should not forgive. We will have to ask ourselves, again and again, what this “impossible” might mean, and if the possibility of forgiveness, if there is such a thing, is not to be measured against the ordeal [*épreuve*] of the impossible. Impossible, Jankélévitch tells us: This is what forgiveness is for what happened in the death camps. “Forgiveness,” says Jankélévitch, “died in the death camps.”

Among all of Jankélévitch’s arguments to which we would have to return constantly, there are two I would like to bring to your attention. They are also two axioms that are far from self-evident.

A. *The first* is that forgiveness cannot be granted, or at least one cannot imagine the possibility of granting it, of forgiving thus, unless forgiveness is *asked* for, explicitly or implicitly asked for, and this difference is not nothing. Which would then mean that one will never forgive someone who does not admit his wrong, who does not repent and does not ask, explicitly or not, for forgiveness. This link between forgiveness granted and forgiveness asked for does not seem to me to be a given, even if here again it seems required by an entire religious and spiritual tradition of forgiveness. I wonder if a rupture of this reciprocity or this symmetry, if the very dissociation between forgiveness asked for and forgiveness granted, were not *de rigueur* for all forgiveness worthy of this name.

B. *The second axiom* is that when the crime is too serious, when it crosses the line of radical evil, or of the human, when it becomes monstrous, it can no longer be a question of forgiveness; forgiveness must remain, so to speak, between men, on a human scale—which seems to me as problematic, although very powerful and very classical.

Two quotations in support of these two axioms.

1. *The first* presupposes a *history of forgiveness*; it begins at the end of this history and it dates the end of the history of forgiveness (we might later say, with Hegel, of history as forgiveness) by the project of the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis; Jankélévitch emphasizes what in his eyes is the absolute singularity of this project, a project without precedent or analogy, an absolutely exceptional singularity which would allow one to think, retrospectively, a history of forgiveness. This history would have deployed itself and since exposed itself, precisely, since or starting from its final limit. The “final solution” would be in sum, so to speak, the final solution of a history and of a historical possibility of forgiveness—all the more so, and the two arguments are intertwined in the same reasoning, that the Germans, the German people, if such a thing exists, have never asked for forgiveness: How could we forgive someone who does not ask to be forgiven? Jankélévitch inquires more than once. And here I would repeat my question, a question that should never stop

echoing in our ears: Is forgiveness only possible, with its meaning as forgiveness, on condition that it be asked for?

Here then, before discussing them, are some of the strongest lines in Jankélévitch's argument:

"Forgiveness! But have they ever asked us for forgiveness? [the "they" and the "us" would obviously have to be determined and legitimated]. It is only the distress and the dereliction of the guilty that would give forgiveness a meaning and a reason for being." [Thus, it is clear for Jankélévitch—as it is clear for more than one tradition, those traditions from which an idea of forgiveness comes to us in effect, but an idea of forgiveness the very legacy of which conveys a force of implosion whose deflagrations we will constantly be registering, a legacy that contradicts itself and gets carried away, fired up, I would say more coldly "deconstructs itself"—it is thus clear that for Jankélévitch forgiveness can be granted only if the guilty party mortifies himself, confesses himself, repents, accuses himself by asking for forgiveness, if consequently he expiates and thus identifies, in view of redemption and reconciliation, with the one of whom he asks forgiveness. It is this traditional axiom, which has great force, certainly, and great constancy, which I will be constantly tempted to contest, in the very name of the same legacy, of the semantics of one and the same legacy, namely that there is in forgiveness, in the very meaning of forgiveness a force, a desire, an impetus, a movement, an appeal (call it what you will) that demands that forgiveness be granted, if it can be, even to someone who does not ask for it, who does not repent or confess or improve or redeem himself, beyond, consequently, an entire identificatory, spiritual, whether sublime or not, economy, beyond all expiation even. But I will leave this suggestion in a virtual state, we would have to come back to it incessantly, in a way that is incessant; I return now to my quotation of this very violent text, as if carried away by an anger that is felt to be legitimate, righteous anger.]

Forgiveness! But have they ever asked us for forgiveness? It is only the distress and the dereliction of the guilty that would give forgiveness a meaning and a reason for being. When the guilty are fat, well nourished, prosperous, enriched by the "economic miracle," forgiveness is a sinister joke. No, forgiveness is not for swine and their sows. Forgiveness died in the death camps. Our horror before that which understanding cannot, properly speaking, conceive of would stifle pity at its birth . . . if the accused "could inspire pity in us."⁵

What follow are remarks of such polemical violence and such anger against the Germans that I do not even want to have to read them or cite them. That this violence is unjust and unworthy of what Jankélévitch has elsewhere written on forgiveness it is only just to recognize that Jankélévitch himself knew. He knew he was letting himself get carried away, in a guilty way, by anger and indignation, even if this anger gave itself airs of righteous anger. That he should have been conscious of it comes through for example in an

interview he gave several years later in 1977, in which Jankélévitch writes the following. I quote this *on the one hand* in order to note an expression that might well serve as the title of what I am trying to do here (namely a “hyperbolic ethics,” or an ethics beyond ethics) and *on the other hand* in order to underline the more or less guilty tension that, along with Jankélévitch, we must admit to and try to be forgiven, a tension or a contradiction between the hyperbolic ethics that tends to push the exigency to the limit and beyond the limit of the possible *and* this everyday economy of forgiveness that dominates the religious, juridical, even political and psychological semantics of forgiveness, a forgiveness held within the human or anthropo-theological limits of repentance, confession, expiation, reconciliation, or redemption. Jankélévitch says this; he admits this:

I have written two books on forgiveness: one of them, simple, very aggressive, very polemical [*pamphlétaire*] whose title is: *Pardonner?* [this is the one from which I have just quoted] and the other, *Le pardon*, which is a philosophy book in which I study forgiveness in itself, from the point of view of Christian and Jewish ethics. I draw out an *ethics* that could be qualified as *hyperbolic* [my emphasis], for which forgiveness is the highest commandment; and, on the other hand, evil always appears beyond. Forgiveness is stronger than evil and evil is stronger than forgiveness. I cannot get out of this. It is a species of oscillation that in philosophy one would describe as dialectical and which seems infinite to me. I believe in the immensity of forgiveness, in its supernaturality, I think I have repeated this enough, perhaps dangerously, and on the other hand, I believe in wickedness (*mechanceté*).⁶

It is obvious that the passage I read before on the finite history of forgiveness, on the death of forgiveness in the death camps, on forgiveness not being for animals or for those who do not ask for forgiveness, that this passage obeys the so-called “polemical [*pamphlétaire*]” logic, which the logic of a hyperbolic ethics resists, and resists infinitely, a hyperbolic ethics that would command precisely, on the contrary, that forgiveness be granted where it is neither asked for nor deserved, and even for the worst radical evil, forgiveness only acquiring its meaning and its possibility of forgiveness where it is called on to do the im-possible and to forgive the un-forgivable. But the polemical [*pamphlétaire*] logic is not only a logic of circumstance; we must take it very seriously and pay it careful attention because it picks up on the strongest, the most strongly traditional, logic of the religious and spiritualist semantics of forgiveness, which grants it when there is repentance, confession, a request for forgiveness, a capacity to expiate, to redeem oneself, and so forth. One of the great difficulties that awaits us, in effect, stems from the fact that the hyperbolic ethics, which will also guide me, *both* lies in the wake of this tradition *and* is incompatible with it, as if this tradition itself carried in its heart an inconsistency, a virtual power of implosion or auto-deconstruction, a power of the impossible—that will require of us once again the force to re-think the meaning of the possibility of the im-possible or the im-possibility of the possi-

ble. Where, in effect, we find the un-forgivable as inexpiable, where, as Jankélévitch in effect concludes, forgiveness becomes impossible, and the history of forgiveness comes to an end, we will ask ourselves whether, paradoxically, the possibility of forgiveness as such, if there is such a thing, does not find its origin: We will ask ourselves if forgiveness does not begin in the place where it appears to end, where it appears im-possible, precisely at the end of the history of forgiveness, of history as the history of forgiveness. More than once we would have to put this formally empty and dry but implacably exigent aporia to the test, the aporia according to which forgiveness, if there is such a thing, must and can forgive only the un-forgivable, the inexpiable, and thus do the impossible. To forgive the forgivable (*pardonable*), the venial, the excusable, what one can always forgive, is not to forgive. Yet the nerve of Jankélévitch's argument in *L'imprescriptible*, and in the section of *L'imprescriptible* entitled "Should We Pardon Them?," is that the singularity of the Shoah reaches the dimensions of the *inexpiable*; and that for the inexpiable there is no possible forgiveness, or even a forgiveness that would have a sense, that would make sense (because the common axiom of tradition, finally, and that of Jankélévitch, the axiom we will perhaps have to call into question, is that forgiveness must still have a sense, and this sense must be determined on the basis of [*sur fond de*] salvation, reconciliation, redemption, expiation, I would even say sacrifice).

Jankélévitch had in fact previously declared that in the case of the Shoah:

One cannot punish the criminal with a punishment proportionate to his crime . . . for next to the infinite all finite magnitudes tend to be equal; in such a way that the penalty becomes almost indifferent; what happened is literally *inexpiable*. One no longer even knows whom to put the blame on or whom to accuse."⁷

Jankélévitch seems to assume, like so many others, like Hannah Arendt, for example,⁸ that forgiveness is a human thing. I insist that this anthropological feature that determines everything (for it will always be a matter of knowing whether forgiveness is a human thing or not) is always a correlate of the possibility of punishing—not of taking revenge, of course, which is something else, to which forgiveness is alien, she says, but of punishing and that, I quote:

The alternative to forgiveness, but by no means its opposite, is punishment, and both have in common that they attempt to put an end to something that without interference could go on endlessly. It is therefore quite significant, a structural element in the realm of human affairs [my emphasis] that men are unable to forgive what they cannot punish and that they are unable to punish what has turned out to be unforgivable.

Thus Jankélévitch, in *L'imprescriptible*, and not in *Le pardon*, establishes this correlation, this proportionality, this symmetry, this common measure between the possibilities of punishing and forgiving, when he declares that forgiveness no longer has a sense where the crime has become, as has the

Shoah, “inexpiable,” disproportionate, out of proportion with any human measure. He writes, in effect:⁹

Properly speaking, the grandiose massacre [the Shoah, the “final solution”] is not a crime on a human scale any more than are astronomical magnitudes and light years. Also the reactions that it inspires are above all despair and a feeling of powerlessness before the *irreparable*.

[the irreparable: interrupting the quote, I underline this word for *three reasons*:

1. *First reason*. “Irreparable” will be Chirac’s word to describe, in a text to which we will return, the crime against the Jews under Vichy (“France, that day,” he declared, “accomplished the irreparable”) [*La France, ce jour-là accomplissait l’irréparable*].

2. *Second reason* to underline “irreparable.” We will have to ask ourselves if the irreparable means the unforgivable; I think “No,” no more than the “imprescriptible,” a juridical notion, belongs to the order of forgiveness and means the un-forgivable. Thus everything must be done to discern as subtly and as rigorously as possible between the unforgivable on the one hand and the imprescriptible on the other, but also all the related and different notions which are *the irreparable, the ineffaceable, the irremediable, the irreversible, the unforgettable, the irrevocable, the inexpiable*. All of these notions, in spite of the decisive differences that separate them, have in common a negativity, a “[do] not,” the “[do] not” of an im-possible which sometimes, or at the same time, signifies “im-possible because one cannot,” “impossible because one should not.” But in all cases, one should not and/or cannot go back over a past. The past is past, the event took place, the wrong took place, and this past, the memory of this past, remains irreducible, uncompromising. This is one way in which forgiveness is different from the gift, which in principle does not concern the past. One will never have treated forgiveness if one does not take account of this being-past, a being-past that never lets itself be reduced, modified, modalized in a present past or a presentable or re-presentable past. It is a being past that does not pass, so to speak. It is this im-passableness, this impassivity of the past as well, and of the past event that takes on different forms, which we would have to analyze relentlessly and which are those of the irreversible, the unforgettable, the ineffaceable, the irreparable, the irremediable, the irrevocable, the inexpiable, and so forth. Without this stubborn privileging of the past in the constitution of temporalization, there is no original problematic of forgiveness. Unless the desire and the promise of forgiveness, indeed of reconciliation and redemption, do not secretly signify this revolt or this revolution against a temporalization, or even a historicization that only makes sense if one takes into account this essence of the past, this being of the being-past, this *Gewesenheit*, this essence of the having been as the very essence of being. But also this eventness of being, the “it has been” [*ça a été*], the “it happened” [*c’est arrivé*]. It is in this horizon that we would have to reread all the thinking, which, like that of Hegel or, otherwise, Lévinas (and in Lévinas

differently at different moments in his trajectory), makes the experience of forgiveness, of the being-forgiven, of the forgiving-each-other, of the becoming-reconciled, so to speak, an essential and onto-logical (not only ethical or religious) structure of *temporal* constitution, the very movement of subjective and intersubjective experience, the relation to self as a relation to the other as temporal experience. Forgiveness, forgivenness [*la pardonnéité*], is time, the being of time insofar as it involves [*comporte*] the indisputable and the unmodifiable past. But this pastness of an eventness [*passéité d'une événementialité*], the being past of something that happened is not enough to ground the concept of "forgiveness" (whether asked for or granted). What else is needed? Suppose we were to refer to this being-past of what happened by the seemingly simple term of "fact." Something has happened, a *fact* or a *deed* [*Il y a eu là un fait*] (past participle, which says that something took place, something that remains indisputable; something done, a deed). For there to be a scene of forgiveness, such a fact or deed (*fait*), such an event as done, must be not only an event, something that happens, a neuter/neutral and impersonal fact, this fact will have had to have been a *misdeed* or *wrongdoing* [*méfait*] and a *wrong done* [*méfait fait*] by someone to someone, a harm, a fault, implicating an author who is responsible and a victim. In other words, it is not enough for there to be a past event, a fact or even an irreversible misfortune for one to have to ask for forgiveness or to forgive. If, a century ago, an earthquake devastated a people or engulfed a community, if this past is a past harm, a terribly unfortunate and indisputable fact, no one will think, however, of forgiving or asking for forgiveness for this past event, for this "fact"—unless, that is, one still suspects some malevolent design or some malicious intent.

One would also have to discern, for you know, here as elsewhere, one must never give up distinguishing, dissociating as well, I will say relentlessly and without mercy—and the analysis of "forgiveness," of "pardon" is interminable—one must also discern between not only vengeance and punishment, but also between punishing or punishment and the right to punish, then between the right to punish in general and the juridical right to punish, penal legality. H. Arendt could still say that forgiveness is a correlative of *punishment* without concluding thereby that there is, necessarily, a juridical dimension to it; the example par excellence of an incarnation, I am indeed saying an incarnation, of absolute and sovereign forgiveness as the right to forgive, as the right to punish, is the king's right to grant clemency [right of reprieve]. Of course, between forgiveness and clemency (just as between gift and "thank you [*merci*]," "to have at one's mercy [*merci*]"), there is this affinity that comes to us from an abyssal history, a religious, spiritual, political, theological-political history that should be at the center of our reflection. The only inscription of forgiveness in the law, in juridical legislation, is no doubt the right to grant clemency, the kingly right of theological-political origin that survives in modern democracies, in secular republics such as France or in semi-secular

democracies such as the United States, where the governors and the president (who in the United States swears an oath of office on the Bible) have, if I am not mistaken, a sovereign right to “pardon” (moreover, one also says “pardon” in English in this case).

The king’s right to grant clemency, this all-powerful sovereignty (most often of divine right) that places the right to forgive above the law, is no doubt the most political or juridical feature of the right to forgive as the right to punish, but it is also what interrupts, in the juridical-political itself, the order of the juridical-political. It is the exception to the juridical-political *within* the juridical-political, but a sovereign exception and a sovereign interruption that found the very thing from which they exclude or exempt themselves. As often, the foundation is excluded or exempted from the very structure that it founds. It is this logic of the exception, of forgiveness as absolute exception, as the logic of the infinite exception, that we would have to ponder over and over again. One should not be able to say “pardon,” ask for or grant forgiveness, except in an infinitely exceptional way. If, furthermore, we listen to Kant (as we would often have to do, especially on the subject of “radical evil”), if we listen to him on the subject of the right to grant clemency, precisely in his *Doctrine of Right* (the first part of the *Metaphysics of Morals*) when he discusses Public Right, and in this the right to punish and to grant clemency (Introduction to §50 and following), what he tells us still has considerable scope if one transfers it onto forgiveness. The gist of what he says is this: that the right to grant clemency (*ius aggratiandi, Begnadigungsrecht*), the right to lessen or remit the penalty of a criminal, is, of all sovereign rights, the most delicate, the slipperiest, the most equivocal (*das schlüpfrigste*). It gives the most splendor to greatness, to the highness of the sovereign, to sovereignty (and we will have to ask ourselves whether forgiveness should or should not be “sovereign”), but the sovereign thereby runs the risk of being unjust, of acting unjustly (*unrecht zu tun*) in the highest degree. Nothing can be more unjust than clemency. And Kant adds a fundamental caveat here, he marks an inner limit to the sovereign’s right to grant clemency: the latter does not, *should not under any circumstances*, have the right to grant clemency for a crime committed where he is not the one intended; he should not have the right to grant clemency for crimes committed by subjects against subjects—thus for crimes between those who for him are also third parties. Because this impunity (*impunitas criminis*) would be the greatest injustice toward the subjects. The right to grant clemency—and thus to pardon—should only be exercised where the crime is against the sovereign himself, a crime of *lèse majesté* (*crimen laesae maiestatis*). And even in this case, the sovereign should not exercise his right to grant clemency except on condition that this clemency not constitute any danger for his subjects. Thus limited, severely limited, this right is the only one that deserves the name of majesty, the right of majesty (*Majestätsrecht*).

At the very least, what one gathers from this fundamental remark, by

extending it to forgiveness, is that forgiveness in general should only be permitted on the part of the victim. The question of forgiveness as such should only arise in the head-to-head or the face-to-face between the victim and the guilty party, never by a third for a third. Is this possible? Is such a head-to-head, such a face-to-face possible? We would have to return to this more than once. Forgiveness perhaps implies, from the outset, as if by hypothesis, the appearance on the scene of a third party whom it nonetheless must, should, exclude. In any case, according to common sense itself, no one seems to have the right to forgive an offense, a crime, a fault committed against someone else. One should never forgive in the name of a victim, especially if the latter is radically absent from the scene of forgiveness, for example, if this victim is dead. One cannot ask forgiveness of living beings, of survivors for the crimes whose victims are dead. As are sometimes its authors. This would be one of the angles from which to approach all the scenes and all the declarations of repentance and requests for forgiveness that have been multiplying for some time on the public scene (in France, the Catholic Church, the police, doctors, and perhaps one day, who knows, the university or the Vatican) and that we will have to analyze closely.

3. *Third reason* to underline “irreparable”: As I will not cease to repeat, it is only against the unforgivable, and thus on the scale *without scale* of a certain inhumanity of the inexpiable, against the monstrosity of radical evil that forgiveness, if there is such a thing, measures itself.

I return now to my quotation of Jankélévitch:

Also, the reactions it inspires are above all despair and a feeling of powerlessness before the irreparable. One can do nothing [A very strong sentence: everything becomes impossible, including forgiveness]. One cannot give life back to the immense mountain of miserable ashes. One cannot punish the criminal with a punishment proportionate to his crime: for next to the infinite all finite magnitudes tend to be equal [What Jankélévitch seems to exclude, with the full sense and common sense of a tradition, is the infinity of human forgiveness and thus the very hyperbolicity of the ethics by which he seemed to be and said he was inspired in his book on *Le pardon*], for next to the infinite all finite magnitudes tend to be equal, in such a way that the penalty becomes almost indifferent; what happened is literally *inexpiable*. One no longer even knows whom to attack or whom to accuse. (p. 558, modified)

Jankélévitch himself underlines the word “inexpiable”; and what he means to show is that where there is the inexpiable, there is the unforgivable, and where the unforgivable arises, forgiveness becomes impossible. It is the end of forgiveness and of the history of forgiveness: Forgiveness died in the death camps. We would have to ask ourselves, as far as we are concerned, if, on the contrary, forgiveness (both *in* and *against* the concept of forgiveness, in and beyond, or against the idea of forgiveness that we inherit—and whose legacy we must question, perhaps contest the legacy while inheriting from it—

and this is a reflection on inheritance that we are beginning here), if forgiveness must not free itself from its correlate of expiation and if its possibility is not called forth precisely and only where it seems to be impossible before the unforgivable, and possible only when grappling with the im-possible.

Since I have been quoting this page of *L'imprescriptible*: “Pardonner?,” about a forgiveness that *must* be asked for and about a forgiveness that would have died in the death camps, I think we would also be interested in what follows, and that concerns the *waiting* [*attente*] to be asked for forgiveness. Jankélévitch will tell us that he was *waiting* for the word “pardon,” this word with which we began (“Pardon!”) and which can have the value of a performative sentence (Pardon!, I ask your pardon, pardon me [*pardonnez-moi*], pardon me [*pardonne-moi*]), this word that asks for forgiveness. Jankélévitch will tell us that he was waiting, as were others, to be asked for forgiveness, implying thereby that forgiveness must be asked for, that it asks to be asked for. And in a certain way, by saying that he was waiting, as others were, and in vain, for a word of pardon, a request for forgiveness, Jankélévitch admits in short that he was asking for forgiveness to be asked for (this would be a problem for us, of course, but I would like to emphasize here a feature of this scene: It is asked, it is expected that the word pardon be uttered or implied, *signified*, in any case, as pardon beseeched). What is essential is not that the word be said but that it be *signified*, that a pardon-beseeched be signified, such as a plea for mercy [*grâce demandée*], a plea for “thank you” [*merci demandé*], and with this pardon-beseeched, before it, expiation, remorse, regret, confession, a way of accusing oneself, of pointing an accusatory and self-referential, auto-deictic finger at oneself, something that, as one says, rather quickly, the animal would be incapable of, the mea culpa of the one who can beat his breast and, by recognizing his crime, dissociate himself from the guilty subject, from the subject having been guilty. We should return to this structure of temporality and of temporal specularity. For the moment, I will quote this request for a forgiveness requested in order to associate *two references* to it.

Jankélévitch writes thus:¹⁰

To ask for forgiveness! We have long been waiting for a word, a single word, a word of understanding and sympathy . . . we have hoped for it, this *fraternal* word!

I italicize the word “fraternal”; this word “fraternal” to describe a “fraternal word” must be given a very strong and very precise meaning; it does not only mean sympathy or effusion, compassion; it bespeaks the sharing of humanity, the fraternity of men, of sons recognizing their belonging to the human race, as will become clearer still; and it is hard to erase the profoundly Christian tradition of this humanist, familialist, and fraternalist universalism, in keeping with Jesus’s message, among others, for example in Matthew 23: “Yes, you have one rabbi and you are all brothers, *unus est enim magister vester, omnes autem vos fratres estis, pantes de uemais adelphoi este.*”

We have hoped for it, this fraternal word! Certainly, we were not expecting our forgiveness to be implored. . . . But we would have received words of understanding with gratitude, with tears in our eyes. Alas, in the way of repentance, the Austrians have made us a present of the shameful acquittal of the executioners.

And a little further on, as often elsewhere, Jankélévitch violently attacks Heidegger.¹¹ I would be tempted—this is the first of the two references that I mentioned—to relate this remark to what many interpreters of Celan’s poem (*Todtnauberg*)—that he wrote in memory and in testimony to his visit to Heidegger—have read as the trace of a disappointed expectation [*attente*], of Celan’s anticipation [*attente*] of a *word* from Heidegger that would have signified a *pardon* beseeched. I myself will not venture to confirm or invalidate, I will not, out of respect for the letter and the ellipsis of Celan’s poem, rush into an interpretation so transparent and univocal; I abstain from this not only out of hermeneutic prudence or out of respect for the letter of the poem, but also because I would like to suggest that forgiveness (granted or asked for), the address of forgiveness, must forever remain, if there is such a thing, undecidably equivocal, by which I do not mean ambiguous, shady, twilit, but heterogeneous to any determination in the order of knowledge, of determinate theoretical judgment, of the self-presentation of an appropriable sense [*de la présentation de soi d’un sens appropriable?*] (it is an aporetic logic that, at least from this point of view, forgiveness would have [in common] with the gift, but I will leave this analogy in progress or undeveloped here). What *Todtnauberg* says, Celan’s poem that bears this title, what it says and on the basis of which the interpreters who rush to transform it into a clear narration find their authority (a narration of the type: “Celan-came,-H.-did-not-ask-the-Jews-for-forgiveness-in-the-name-of-the-Germans,-Celan-who-was-waiting-for-a-word-of-forgiveness,-a-“pardon!,”-a-request-for-forgiveness-left-disappointed-and-he-made-a-poem-of-it-he-recorded-it-in-one-of-his-poems), no, what the poem says, is at least this:¹²

*Arnika, Augentrost, der
Trunk aus dem Brunnen mit dem
Sternwürfel drauf
in der
Hütte
die in das Buch
—wessen Namen nahms auf
vor dem meinen?—,
die in dies Buch
geschriebene Zeile von
einer Hoffnung, heute,
auf eines Denkenden
kommendes
Wort
im Herzen, [. . .]*

Arnica, eyebright, the / draft from the well with the starred die above it, / in
the / hut, / the line / —whose name did the book / register before mine?—, /
the line inscribed / in that book about / a hope, today, / of a thinking man's /
coming / word / in the heart, [. . .]

Arnica, Casse-Lunettes (euphrasia, euphrase), la / gorgée à la fontaine
surmontée du / dé étoilé, / dans la / hutte / la ligne dans le livre / le nom de
qui a-t-il / accueilli avant le mien?— / la ligne écrite dans ce / livre d'un /
espoir, aujourd'hui, en la / parole / à venir / au cur / d'un penseur; [. . .]

However one interprets the meaning and testimonial reference of such a poem, it links its signature as poem (and of a poem that signs itself by naming a signature in a book, a name left in a book [. . .] to, I quote, one must quote, the hope for words [*parole*], for a word (*Wort*) that comes in the heart, that comes from the heart, of a thinking being; and because it is a question of a past, of the signature and the trace of names left in the book of another, as that which is named, it is the hope for a word to come—or not—thus of a gift and a gift of thought, of a gift to come or not from a place or from a thinking being (*kommendes, eines Denkenden*—and you know how Heidegger is known for having often associated *Denken* and *Danken*: to thank, to acknowledge, to express one's gratitude, the thank you of acknowledgment, and think further of the relation between thanks and mercy [*grâce*], “to grace [*faire grâce*]” or “to beg for mercy, an act of grace [*demander grâce*]”), for all of these reasons, the motifs of the gift and acknowledgment belong as much to its thematics as they do to the act or essence of the poem, to the gift of the poem; and this poem says all of these things, the gift, and the gift of the poem and the gift of the poem which it itself is. As much because it gives as because it receives, from the past that it recalls and from the hope it calls forth [*appelle*], through its recall [*rappel*] and its calling forth [*appel*], it belongs to the element of the gift—and thus to the element of forgiveness, of a forgiveness asked for or a forgiveness granted, both at the same time no doubt, the moment it says the poetic experience both as appeal for acknowledgment (in the sense of consciousness, of the acknowledgment that recognizes and admits or the acknowledgment that gives thanks, acknowledgment as gratitude), the poetic experience as gift and forgiveness hoped for, asked for, granted, for the other, in the name of the other; as if there were no poetic experience, no experience of language as such without the experience of the gift and forgiveness—whether or not they are asked for, granted, given—the question mark around the name that comes before my own in the book (*wessen Namen nahms auf vor dem meinen?*—whose name was received before mine, with this untranslatable alliteration, *Namen nahms auf*, that evokes hospitality [*aufnehmen*]), the reception offered to the other, this question mark around the identity of the other, around the name of the other who will have preceded me and with whom I am, whether I want it or know it, bound, bound up in the strange community, the strange genealogy of this book: This question mark indeed marks this anguish or this

anxiety as to the name of the other, as to this other to whom I am given over with my eyes blindfolded, passively, although I sign, the other having signed before me and marking, sur-marking in advance, my signature, appropriating my signature in advance, as if I always signed in the name of the other who also signs thus, in my place, the other whom I countersign or who countersigns me, who countersigns my own signature, the gift and forgiveness having taken place, or not, having taken place and having been nullified, carried away, without my ever even having to make a decision. This abyssal countersignature forms one body with the poem, with the experience of language itself, always as the language of the other, something that Celan knew and acknowledged so singularly, but which is also a universal experience of language (I must say that I myself signed this book in the hut, at the request of Heidegger's son, with as much anxiety, an anxiety that extended as much to all those in whose following, without knowing it, I signed, as to what I myself scribbled in haste, both things likely to be equally at fault, perhaps even judged unforgivable). Naturally, in order to begin doing justice to *Todtnauberg*, one would have to read as attentively what precedes and what follows each of the words, and the break after each word, for example "*Der Mensch*," the man, to designate the driver, *deutlich* to designate, so close to *deutsch* (a classical and quasi-proverbial association), to designate, thus, the univocal distinction between the words that were then uttered, once the words *Namen* and *Wort*, proper noun and words, had already found their echo in the poem, and especially the word "*viel*," many, innumerable, infinitely numerous, which is the last word of the poem and apparently, or figuratively, describes that which, like tracks or the humid thing (*Feuchtes*), is buried in the bog. . . . *Todtnauberg* remains thus to be read, to be received—as gift or forgiveness themselves, a gift and a forgiveness which are the poem before being, possibly, its themes or the theme of the poet's disappointed expectation.

2. The other, *the second* reference that I mentioned, involves an exchange of letters that took place in 1980 and 1981 between a young German and Jankélévitch following the publication of *L'imprescriptible*.¹³ The young German who writes to Jankélévitch places in epigraph to his moving and troubling letter the words of Jankélévitch ("They killed six million Jews. But they sleep well. They eat well and the Mark is doing well."), and the long letter begins painfully as follows:

I myself have not killed any Jews. Having been born German is not my fault, or my doing. No one asked my permission [thus is posed from the outset the immense question, which will remain with us, the question of guilt or forgiveness according to the legacy, the genealogy, the collectivity of a *we* and of which *we*]. I am completely innocent of Nazi crimes; but this does not console me at all. My conscience is not clear, and I feel a mixture of shame, pity, resignation, sadness, incredulity, revolt. I do not always sleep well. I often remain awake at night, and I think, and I imagine. I have nightmares that I cannot get rid of. I think of Anne Frank, and of

Auschwitz and of *Todesfuge* and of *Nuit et Brouillard*: “*Der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland.*”

Todesfuge is the title, as you know, of another of Celan’s poems clearly referring to the death camps and in which the line “*Der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland*” comes back four or five times; guilt without fault and repentance or forgiveness asked for a priori, infinitely, in the name of the other. Mixture of a “pardon beseeched,” without the word “pardon” but this amounts to the same, of a pardon beseeched and a protest against what condemns one to admit and to ask forgiveness in the name of the other, for a fault that one has not oneself committed; as for the nightmare, it alerts us to the guilt, and the scene of forgiveness, and the mourning that is inseparable from it; when he says that he does not have a “clear conscience,” Wiard Raveling no doubt knows that he is addressing the author of a book called *La mauvaise conscience*, which includes an entire chapter on “The Irreversible” and some very fine sub-sections on regret, the irremediable, remorse, and repentance. *La mauvaise conscience* is a book whose first edition dates from 1933 and of which the book *Le pardon*, in 1967, given all that you know, is a kind of sequel.

This young German also invited Vladimir Jankélévitch to visit him, thus offering him hospitality (hospitality, gift and pardon, tears: the gift is always insufficient, thus pardon, or else ghost [*revenant*] and mourning): “If ever, dear M. Jankélévitch, you pass through here, knock on our door and come in. You will be welcome. And be assured [this is the painful irony of the entire letter]. My parents will not be there. No one will speak to you of Hegel, or of Nietzsche, or of Jaspers, or of Heidegger or of any other of the great Teutonic thinkers. I will ask you about Descartes and Sartre. I like the music of Schubert and Schumann. But I will play a record of Chopin, or if you prefer Fauré and Debussy. [. . .] Let it be said in passing: I admire and respect Rubinstein; I like Menuhin.”

Following this long letter, which, once again, I cannot read to you here, and which is both a pathos-filled complaint, a protest, a confession, a plea, and a summation, Wiard Raveling received two responses, both of which are also published in the *Magazine littéraire*. The first from Fr. Régis Bastide, on July 1st, 1980, from which I will cite several lines:

Dear Sir, I cannot tell you for lack of time, the degree to which I was moved by your letter to Vladimir Jankélévitch. [. . .] I am an old friend of Vladimir Jankélévitch. But his attitude shocks me profoundly. This non-forgiveness is dreadful. It is up to us, to us Christians (even non-believers!) to be different. The fanatical Jew is just as bad as the Nazi. But I cannot say this to Vladimir Jankélévitch. [. . .] You are no doubt a French teacher to write so well and so powerfully. I agree absolutely with all the words of your letter that my friend will surely judge too sentimental, tinged as it is with the awful *Gemütlichkeit* that must seem to him the greatest of vices. But you are right. Do not judge all French Jews by the terrible words of my friend. [. . .] What is the origin of your last name, and your first name? Hungarian? Viking?

The other response came from Vladimir Jankélévitch himself. The word “forgiveness” is not uttered. But it clearly says that what was awaited (You remember these words: “. . . to ask for forgiveness! We have long been waiting for a word, a single word, a word of understanding and sympathy . . . We have hoped for it, this fraternal word!”) has finally arrived:

Dear Sir, I am moved by your letter. I have waited for this letter for thirty-five years. I mean a letter in which the abomination is fully assumed and by someone who has had no part in it [*n'y est pour rien*]. This is the first time I have received a letter from a German, a letter that was not a letter of a more or less disguised self-justification. Apparently, German philosophers, “my colleagues” (if I dare to use this term) have nothing to say to me, nothing to explain. Their good conscience is unperturbable. [Injustice or ignorance of Vladimir Jankélévitch: as if a letter addressed to him personally were the only reparation possible.] You alone, you the first and no doubt the last, have found the necessary words outside the political commonplaces and the pious clichés. It is rare for generosity, spontaneity, and a keen sensitivity to find their language in the words we use. And such is your case. There is no mistaking it. Thank you [pardon beseeched: a gift that calls for thanks]. No, I will not come see you in Germany. I will not go that far. I am too old to inaugurate this new era. Because for me it is a new era all the same. For which I have waited too long. But you are young, you do not have the same reasons as I. You do not have this uncrossable barrier to cross. It is my turn to say to you: When you come to Paris, do as everyone does, knock on my door. . . . We will sit down at the piano.

I underline this allusion, on both sides, on the part of both correspondents, to music, to a musical correspondence, to music played or listened to together, a sharing of music. I underline it not only because Vladimir Jankélévitch was, as you know, a musician, an interpreter of music and a music lover, but also because between a certain beyond the *word* required, perhaps by forgiveness (a theme to which I should return later—the theme of verbal language, of discourse as the disastrous condition of forgiveness, which makes possible forgiveness but which also destroys it), between a certain beyond the word required, perhaps by forgiveness, and music, and even wordless song, there is perhaps an essential affinity, a correspondence which is not only that of reconciliation.

And in fact, Wiard Raveling recounts that he visited Vladimir Jankélévitch only once, that everything took place very cordially but that Jankélévitch always “systematically avoided” returning to these questions. Even in the correspondence that followed. But you will have remarked in Vladimir Jankélévitch’s letter that I have just quoted and which speaks of a “new era” for which “I am too old” (“You do not have this uncrossable barrier to cross”: “the uncrossable to cross”), Jankélévitch, in a way which is exemplary for us, causes two discourses to cross each other [*croise entre eux deux discours*], two logics, two axiomatics, which are contradictory, incompatible, irreconcilable, one of

which is, precisely, that of conciliation or reconciliation, the other that of the irreconcilable. On one side, he welcomes the idea of a process, of a history that continues, of the passage from one generation to the other, and thus of the work of memory, as the work of mourning that makes what was not possible for him, forgiveness, possible in the future. Forgiveness will be good for you, for the next generation, the work will have been done, the work of mourning and memory, history, the work of the negative that will make reconciliation possible, and expiation, and healing, and so forth. But at the same time, he makes it known, more than he says it, that if this barrier—which will perhaps be crossed by new generations—remains uncrossable for him, this is because it must and can only remain uncrossable.

In other words, history, as the history of forgiveness, has stopped and it has stopped forever, it will have to have remained stopped by radical evil. It has stopped forever. And one feels this double conviction, both sincere and contradictory, self-contradictory. He does not doubt, he even hopes, and sincerely, that history will continue, that forgiveness and reconciliation will be possible for the new generation. But at the same time, he does not want this, he does not want this for himself, thus he does not want what he wants and what he accepts wanting, what he wants to want, what he would like to want, he believes in it but he does not believe in it, he believes that this reconciliation, this forgiveness will be illusory and false; they will not be authentic forgivenesses, but symptoms, the symptoms of a work of mourning, of a therapy of forgetting, of healing away, of the passage of time; in short, a sort of narcissism, reparation and self-reparation, a healing that re-narcissizes (and we would have to study in the Hegelian problematic of forgiveness this logic of the identification with the other that is assumed by the scene of forgiveness, on both sides, of the forgiver or the forgiven, an identification that forgiveness assumes but which also compromises and neutralizes, cancels out in advance, the truth of forgiveness as forgiveness from the other to the other as such). The uncrossable will remain uncrossable at the very same moment it will have been crossed over. Forgiveness will remain im-possible and with it history, the continuation of history, even if it becomes possible one day. What is it one senses at the heart of Jankélévitch's letter—and that I call to your attention because it should remain a great paradigmatic lesson for us? One senses the unaltered conviction, unalterable, that even when forgiveness of the inexpiable will have taken place, in the future, in the generations to come, it will not have taken place, it will have remained illusory, inauthentic, illegitimate, scandalous, equivocal, mixed with forgetting (even when its subjects are and believe themselves to be sincere and generous). History will continue and with it reconciliation, but with the equivocation of a forgiveness mixed up with the work of mourning, with forgetting, an assimilation of the wrong, as if, in short, if I can summarize here this unfinished development in a formula, tomorrow's forgiveness, the promised forgiveness will have had not only to become the work of mourning (a therapy, a healing away, even an ecology of memory, a

manner of better-being with the other and with oneself in order to continue to work and to live and to enjoy) but, more seriously, the work of mourning forgiveness itself, forgiveness mourning forgiveness. History continues on the background of [*sur fond de*] an interruption of history, in the abyss, rather, of an infinite wound, which, in its very scarring, will have to remain an open and unsuturable wound. In any case it is in the zone of hyperbole, of aporia and paradox that we should often have to stand or move in this reflection on forgiveness.

Before leaving, at least provisionally, these texts of Jankélévitch, I would like to return to another of the paradoxes of the “inexpiable,” of the logic of the “inexpiable” that he puts to work under this word in *L’imprescriptible*. The word “inexpiable” is used at least twice in a disturbing face-to-face (p. 24, p. 29, and again, p. 62; Eng. tr. p. 554, p. 558). You will remember that Jankélévitch said, I quoted it earlier, that “what happened [namely the Shoah, which defies all judgment, all logic, all logic of punishment, and so forth] is literally inexpiable.” Before this, he has already described the will to exterminate the Jews as a singular, exceptional, incomparable movement of hatred against an existence, the existence of the Jew insofar as this existence is felt to be an “inexpiable” sin of existence. In this context, it is more particularly a matter of the human, anthropocentric dimension that structures the problem—and which will interest us precisely when it becomes a problem, a problematic, contestable and contested by the very idea of forgiveness.

A little earlier in his text (p. 22 ff.; Eng. tr. p. 554 ff.), in fact, precisely at the beginning of the chapter that bears the title “The Imprescriptible,” (at the very moment of the vote in France on the imprescriptibility of crimes against humanity) Jankélévitch reminds us that these crimes are aimed at the essence of the human, “or, if one prefers, the ‘humanness’ [*l’humanité*] of man in general.”

The German [he says, hypostasizing in turn, in a way that is problematic, something like the essence of Germanity], the German did not want, strictly speaking, to destroy beliefs judged to be erroneous or doctrines considered to be pernicious: it was the very being of man, *Esse*, that the racist genocide attempted to annihilate in the suffering flesh of these millions of martyrs. Racist crimes are an assault against man as man: not against this or that man (*quatenus . . .*), not against man insofar as he is this or that, for example, communist, Freemason, or ideological adversary. No! the racist was truly aiming at the ipseity of being, that is, the human in all men. Anti-Semitism is a grave offense against man in general. The Jews were persecuted because it was they, and not at all because of their opinions or their faith: it is existence itself that was refused them; one was not reproaching them for professing this or that, one was reproaching them for being. (p. 555, modified)

Here, through some gap in the argument that does not explain why an aggression against the humanity of man is aimed at the Jew alone (and even

Israel, for he extends the same reasoning to the existence of the State of Israel, in a way that is even less convincing), Jankélévitch goes so far as to reverse, in some sense, the logic of the inexpiable. What becomes inexpiable, and this is Jankélévitch's word for the Nazis, is the very existence of the Jew. For the German, the Germans, the Nazis (and Jankélévitch passes easily from one to the other or others),

it is not obvious that a Jew must exist: a Jew must always justify himself, excuse himself for living and breathing; his arrogance in fighting for subsistence and survival is in itself an incomprehensible scandal and there is something outrageous about it; the idea that "*sub-humans*" [my emphasis] may defend themselves fills the *superhumans* [my emphasis] with indignant stupefaction. A Jew does not have the right to be, existing is his sin. (p. 23; p. 555, modified)

I take up and underline the expression, polemical here, "sin of existing," removing it a little from its context: "A Jew does not have the right to be, existing is his sin." Implicit is: for the German. I am taking up the expression, I am exporting it out of its context and I am indicating in it a horizon of possible generality in order to point out one of the paths of the problematic of forgiveness—which will, furthermore, be illustrated quite strongly and classically by thinkers as powerful and as diverse as Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Lévinas, and others, no doubt: It is a matter of forgiveness—asked for, granted or not—a priori, and always asked for, whose request is originary and without end, because of a guilt or a debt, an original liability or imputability, infinite and indeterminate, in some sense, such that existence, or consciousness, or the "I," before any determined fault is at fault and in the process, consequently, of asking at least implicitly for forgiveness for the simple fact, finally, of being-there. This being-there, this existence, would be both responsible and guilty in a way that is constitutive ("sin of existing") and could only constitute itself, persevere in its being, sur-vive by asking for forgiveness (knowing or without knowing of whom or why) and by assuming forgiveness to be, if not granted, at least promised, hoped for, enough to be able to continue to persevere in one's being. And along with forgiveness, reconciliation and redemption, atonement for this "sin of existing"—which would not be reserved for the Jew here, unless the Jew, what one understands by this word, is once again interpreted as exemplary of the humanity of man, with all the problems that this claim to exemplarity would engender and on the subject of which I have often questioned myself. In all of these cases, forgiveness can be just as constantly hoped for, assumed to come, as desperately deferred, for if the sin is the sin of existing, if guilt is originary and attached from birth, stained by birth, so to speak, forgiveness, redemption, expiation will remain forever impossible. We would all be in that inexpiable state of which Jankélévitch speaks regarding the Jew for the German: if the fault consists in being-there, only death, only annihila-

tion can put an end to it and feign salvation, mimic atonement or redemption, silence the plaint or the accusation. Naturally, the problem is enormous and we should return to it more than once, for we would have to ask ourselves what relation there may be among all these determinations of the “sin of existing,” of an originary scene of “forgiving,” first among them, between, let’s say, a Hegelian type, a Heideggerian type or a Lévinassian type in the description and interpretation of this structure, and what relation there might be between this general structure, universal and supposedly originary, aeventful, preventful, and on the other hand determined faults, crimes, events of malice or viciousness, effective perjury for which I must accuse myself and for which I could ask for forgiveness.]

I am closing my digression here on the expression “inexpiable” I noted earlier. On the next page, in the spirit of the same logic, one thus finds this word “inexpiable” again, this time not to describe the crime of Hitler’s Germany but the being-Jew as being-human for the Nazis. For the latter, Jankélévitch says, and I quote (p. 24; p. 556), “the crime of being a Jew is inexpiable. Nothing can erase that curse: neither political affiliation, nor wealth, nor conversion.”

Conveyed by the same word, “inexpiable,” (and it is to an entire history of this word and to the expiatory that we are summoned here: what does “to expiate” mean?), we have two antagonistic and complementary movements: as if it were because the Nazis treated the being of their victim, the Jew, as an *inexpiable* crime (it is not *forgivable* to be Jewish), that they behaved in a way that was itself *inexpiable*, beyond all possible forgiveness. If one takes account of these two occurrences of the word “inexpiable” in Jankélévitch’s text, and of their logic, one will say that the crime of the Nazis seems inexpiable because they themselves considered their victims to be guilty of the (inexpiable) sin of existing or of claiming to exist as men. And this always takes place around the limit of man, of the human figure. This is why I emphasized the words *sub-human* and *superhuman* a moment ago. It is because they have taken themselves to be superhuman and have treated the Jews as sub-human, it is because from both sides the Nazis believed they could pass over the limit of man that they committed these *inexpiable* crimes against humanity, that is, imprescriptible crimes—according to the juridical translation and the human right, according to the right of man which is here at the horizon of our problem.

I insist on this point for two reasons, two programmatic or problematic reasons, two ways of announcing today what should subsequently give us steady pause. Thus two questions.

1. *First question.* Is forgiveness a thing of man, something that belongs to man, a power of man—or else is it reserved for God, and thus already the opening of experience or existence onto a supernaturality just as to a superhumanity: divine, transcendent, or immanent, sacred, whether saintly or not? All the debates around forgiveness are also regularly debates around this

“limit” and the passage of this limit. Such a limit passes between what one calls the human and the divine and also between what one calls the animal, the human, and the divine. In a moment, we will perhaps say a word about “animal” forgiveness.

2. *Second question.* Because this limit is not just a limit among others, everything that depends on it will also affect it, as it will affect this difference—or distinction—that we have already recalled more than once today, between pure or unconditional forgiveness and these related and heterogeneous forms of remission, heterogeneous among themselves and heterogeneous to forgiveness and that are called excuse, regret, prescription, amnesty, and so forth, so many forms of conditional forgiveness (hence impure), and sometimes juridical-political forms. We thus dissociated *on the one hand* unconditional forgiveness, absolute forgiveness—I am not saying absolution in the Christian sense—absolutely unconditional forgiveness that allows us to think [*donne à penser*] the essence of forgiveness, if there is such a thing—and which ultimately should even be able to do without repentance and the request for forgiveness, *and on the other hand* conditional forgiveness, for example, that forgiveness which is inscribed within a set of conditions of all kinds, psychological, political, juridical above all (since forgiveness is bound up with the judiciary as penal order). Yet the distinction between unconditionality and conditionality is shifty [*retorse*] enough not to let itself be determined as a simple opposition. The unconditional and the conditional are, certainly, absolutely heterogeneous, and this forever, on either side of a limit, but they are also indissociable. There is in the movement, in the motion of unconditional forgiveness, an inner exigency of becoming-effective, manifest, determined, and, in determining itself, bending to conditionality. In such a way that, for example, and I am saying it too quickly for the moment, phenomenality or juridical or political conditionality is both outside and inside the motion of forgiveness—which will not make things easy. Even if the “imprescriptible” does not mean the “unforgivable,” the contamination of the two orders will not be an accident that is itself reducible; and this will be valid of all the distinctions we will have to make.

We started by considering cases in which the noun “pardon” belonged to a performative utterance (Pardon!, I ask your pardon [*je te demande pardon/je vous demande pardon*], We ask your pardon [*nous te demandons, nous vous demandons pardon*]). You will note that in French it can only be used alone (Pardon!) in an act of performative language in the sense of “pardon beseeched,” never in the case of forgiveness granted or refused. Is it true that for forgiveness to be granted or even only envisaged, it must be asked for and asked for on the basis of [*sur fond*] confession and regret? In my eyes, this is not a given and might even have to be excluded as the first fault of anyone who grants forgiveness; if I grant forgiveness on condition that the other confess,

that the other begin to redeem himself, to transfigure his fault, to dissociate himself from it in order to ask me for forgiveness, then my forgiveness begins to let itself be contaminated by an economy, a calculation that corrupts it.

As soon as the word “pardon!”—the performative of forgiveness as speech act—is uttered, is there not the beginning of a reappropriation, a mourning process, a process of redemption, of a transfiguring calculation which, through language, the sharing of language (see Hegel on the subject) rushes toward the economy of a reconciliation that causes the wrong itself to be simply forgotten or annihilated, and thus this unforgivable as well, this unforgivable that is the only possible correlate of a forgiveness worthy of the name, of an absolutely singular forgiveness as unique event, unique but necessarily iterable, as always? The result of this law of iterable unicity, promised to repetition, divided by the promise that haunts all forgiveness, the result of this law of iterable unicity is that at the same time there is no sense in asking for forgiveness collectively of a community, a family, an ethnic or religious group—and at the same time multiplicity and the third and the witness are involved from the outset [*d’entrée de jeu de la partie*]. This may be one of the reasons, certainly not the only one, why forgiveness is often asked of God. Of God not because he alone would be capable of forgiveness, of a power-to-forgive otherwise inaccessible to man, but because, in the absence of the singularity of a victim who is sometimes no longer there to receive the request or to grant forgiveness, or in the absence of the criminal or the sinner, God is the only name, the name of the name of an absolute and namable singularity as such. Of the absolute substitute. Of the absolute witness, the absolute *superstes*, the absolute surviving witness. But inversely, if the address of forgiveness (I say the *address of forgiveness* to designate both the act of asking for forgiveness, of addressing a request for forgiveness, and the place from which forgiveness, once the request is received by the addressee of the request, is either granted or not granted), if the address of forgiveness is always singular, singular as to the fault, the sin, the crime, the harm, and singular as to the perpetrator or his victim, nonetheless it calls forth not only repetition but through or as this repetition, a disidentification, a disseminating multiplication, all of whose modes we would have to analyze.

Three suspension points before concluding.

1. Why did I begin with the single word “pardon,” with the noun “pardon” about which it was impossible to know, to decide at the beginning, out of context, whether I was quoting, whether I was mentioning a noun, a theme, a problem or whether I was asking your pardon, performatively, not by mentioning but by using the noun (mention/use distinction in speech act theory)? I began in this way not only because I have an infinite number of reasons for asking your forgiveness (and in particular for keeping you too long: this is always the first fault of anyone who asks forgiveness: to think he has the right to interest the other and to keep his attention—“Listen to me, I am begging your pardon; wait, don’t leave, I am begging your pardon; pay attention, pay atten-

tion to me, I am begging your pardon”—this can become an odious strategy or an odious and ridiculous calculation of false mortification that can go as far as tears; and we are very familiar with situations in which the person who does this is a pain in the neck and you pretend to forgive him or her in order to change the subject and to interrupt the conversation: “OK, give me a break, I am not even accusing you, enough already; OK, I forgive you but I don’t want to see you again . . . , my mind is elsewhere, let’s talk about something else, I don’t even take you seriously enough to be accusing you”).

No, I began in this way to quote a performative (neither to *mention*, nor to *use*, but to mention a use) in order to draw your attention to the question of the word, the performative word as speech, as verb (pardon, I ask your [*te-vous*] pardon). Like everyone, like all those who wait and think, they must wait for forgiveness to be asked for; it is a *word* of forgiveness, a verb, a verbal-noun that Jankélévitch was waiting for (“I have been waiting for this letter for thirty-five years . . . , Have we ever been asked for forgiveness?”) and even, according to his interpreters, it was a *word* that Celan was waiting for, (*von/ einer Hoffnung, heute, / auf eines Denkenden / kommenden / Wort / im Herzen*). Must forgiveness pass through words or must it pass [beyond] words? Must it pass through word-verbs or must it pass [beyond] them, these word-verbs? Can one only forgive or ask forgiveness when speaking or sharing the language of the other, that is to say, by already identifying sufficiently with the other for this, and, by identifying with the other, making forgiveness both possible and impossible? Must one refuse the experience of forgiveness to whoever does not speak? Or, on the contrary, must one make silence the very element of forgiveness, if there is such a thing? This question is not only that of music, which I alluded to earlier; it is also, even if it is not only this, the question of the animal and of that which is said to “belong to man.” Does forgiveness belong to man or does it belong to God? This question seems to exclude the animal, that which one calls by this confused general term “animal” or the animality of the beast or of man. Yet we know that it would be very imprudent to deny all animality access to forms of sociality in which guilt, and therefore procedures of reparation, even of mercy—begged or granted—are implicated in a very differentiated way. There is no doubt an animal thank you or mercy. You know that certain animals are just as capable of manifesting what can be interpreted as an act of war, an aggressive accusation, as they are capable of manifesting guilt, shame, discomfort, regret, anxiety in the face of punishment, and so forth. I am sure you have seen shameful animals, animals giving all the signs of “feeling guilty,” thus of remorse and regret, and animals fearing judgment or punishment, animals hiding or exposing themselves to reproach or chastisement. One also knows that in the often-overloaded symbolism of combat or war, of fights between animals, well, that movements and even rites of reconciliation, of the interruption of hostility, of peace, even of mercy, of mercy begged and granted, are possible. The moment an animal is, I would say, at the mercy of another, it can admit to being defeated and make signs that put it at the mercy

of the other who then sovereignly grants it its life unharmed as a sign of peace. Certain animals make war and peace. Not all, not always, but neither do men. So, without confusing everything and without erasing all sorts of ruptures that arise with the articulation of a verbal language, one cannot deny this possibility, even this necessity of extra-verbal forgiveness, even un-human [*an-humain*] forgiveness.

2. We constantly struggle in the snares of an aporia whose abstract and dry form, whose logical formality is as implacable as it is indisputable: There is only forgiveness, if there is such a thing, of the un-forgivable. Thus forgiveness, if it is possible, if there is such a thing, is not possible, it does not exist as possible, it only exists by exempting itself from the law of the possible, by impossibilizing itself, so to speak, and in the infinite endurance of the im-possible as impossible; and this is what it would have in common with the gift; but besides the fact that this enjoins us to try to think the possible and the impossible otherwise, the very history of what one calls the possible and “power” in our culture and in culture as philosophy or as knowledge, we must ask ourselves, breaking the symmetry or the analogy between gift and forgiveness, if the urgency of an im-possible forgiveness is not first what the enduring and non-conscious experience of the im-possible gives to be forgiven, as if forgiveness, far from being a modification or a secondary complication or a complication that arises out of the gift, were in truth its first and final truth. Forgiveness as the impossible truth of the impossible gift. Before the gift, forgiveness. Before this im-possible, and as the impossible of this latter im-possible, the other. The other im-possible. You understand that this lecture could also have been a lecture on the possible and on the “im-” that comes in front of it, of an im-possible which is neither negative, nor non-negative, nor dialectical.

3. Finally, perjury. Today I must justify the articulation (proposed as the title of this seminar) of pardon and perjury. Pardon/Perjury: As you can imagine, if I associate these two nouns, it is not because “[parleying] with the syllable *par* thus begin these words [*par la syllabe par commencent donc ces mots*],” as a certain Ponge would have said, Ponge’s *Fable* which I am parodying here (*Par le mot par commence donc ce texte / Dont la première ligne dit la vérité* [With the word *with* thus begins this text / Whose first line tells the truth]), *Fable* which would not be without relation, nonetheless, to the scene of forgiveness, since it revolves around a judgment, on the one hand, and on the other, of the breaking of a mirror, of the interruption of a specular identification: “(*Par le mot par commence donc ce texte / Dont la première ligne dit la vérité / Mais ce tain sous l’une et l’autre / peut-il être toléré? / Cher lecteur déjà tu juges. Là de nos difficultés . . . /APRES sept ans de malheurs / Elle brisa son miroir* [With the word *with* thus begins this text / Whose first line tells the truth / But this tain under one and the other / can it be tolerated? / Dear reader, already you judge. There as to our difficulties . . . /AFTER seven years of bad luck / She broke her mirror.])”¹⁴

The reader, apostrophized as judge (“you judge”: performative and con-

stative), is being asked to forgive—and this is perhaps the truth of which the text speaks as the truth of any scene of writing and reading: to ask the reader's pardon by confessing. One always writes in order to confess, one always writes in order to ask forgiveness; I wrote something like this somewhere, forgive me for quoting myself. No doubt one always teaches, also, in order to ask forgiveness; this is perhaps why I think I will no longer change, henceforth, the title of this seminar, for as long as it may be destined to last. If I have associated pardon and perjury, it is thus not to begin with words that begin with *par*. . . . But for a reason that here again I will state dryly, I will lay out abstractly, before returning to it later. I will draw a broad outline of it in two strokes.

1. Any fault, any crime, anything there might be to forgive or for which one might have to ask forgiveness is or assumes some perjury; any fault, any wrong, is first a perjury, namely the breach of some promise (implicit or explicit), the breach of some engagement, of some responsibility before a law one has sworn to respect, that one is supposed to have sworn to respect. Forgiveness always concerns a perjury—and we will (would) then have to ask ourselves what in fact perjury is, what an abjuration is, what it is to break a vow, an oath, a conjuration, and so forth. And thus first what it means to swear, to take an oath, to give one's word, and so forth.

2. The second feature, even more aporetic, more impossible, if this is possible. Perjury is not an accident; it is not an event that happens or does not happen to a promise or to a prior oath. Perjury is inscribed in advance, as its destiny, its fatality, its inexpiable destination, in the structure of the promise and the oath, in the word of honor, in justice, in the desire for justice. As if the oath were already a perjury (something of which the Greeks, as we will see, had more than a premonition). And this, I have already spoken of this in the wake [*sillage*] of Lévinas but by dangerously complicating the trajectory of this Lévinassian path [*sillage*], from the moment that in the face-to-face there are more than two, from the moment that the question of justice and law arises. From the moment there is *law* and *three*. And there are at least three from the first dawn of the face-to-face, from the first look [*regard*], from the crossing of the first look that sees itself looking. Then it is justice itself that makes me perjure myself and throws me into a scene of forgiveness.

I must ask forgiveness—*pour être juste* [*for being just/to be just*]. Listen carefully to the equivocation of this "*pour*." I must ask forgiveness in order to be just, *to be* just, with a view to being just; but I must also ask forgiveness for being just, for the fact of being just, because I am just, because in order to be just, I am unjust and I betray. I must ask forgiveness for (the fact of) being just. Because it is unjust to be just. I always betray someone to be just; I always betray one for the other, I perjure myself like I breathe. And this is endless, for not only am I always asking forgiveness for a perjury but I always risk perjuring myself by forgiving, of betraying someone else by forgiving, for one is always doomed to forgive (thus abusively) in the name of another.

Forgive me for having taken so long, and without mercy [*merci*], so much

of your time, thank you [*merci*]. When one says “thank you,” does one say “thank you,” I am thanking you for what you give me and what I acknowledge with gratitude? Or else “mercy,” I ask for your mercy, I ask you not to be “merciless,” I ask your forgiveness for what you give me, I give you thanks [*grâce*] for mercy [*grâce*], for the forgiveness that I am still asking you to give me, and so forth. In short, you will never know what it is I am saying to you when I say to you, to conclude, as in the beginning, pardon, thank you/mercy [*merci*]. In the beginning, there will have been the word “pardon,” “thank you/mercy [*merci*].”

TRANSLATED BY ELIZABETH ROTTENBERG

NOTES

1. *Given Time, I: Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

2. Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Le Pardon* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1967), p. 165. See also the little book that was published shortly after Jankélévitch's death under the title *L'imprescriptible: Pardonner? Dans l'honneur et la dignité* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), which brings together essays and talks from 1948, 1956, and 1971. [*Le Pardon* is also available in Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Philosophie Morale*, ed. Françoise Schwab (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), pp. 991–1149. The articles “Should We Pardon Them?” and “Do Not Listen to What They Say, Look At What They Do” are translated by Ann Hobart in the journal *Critical Inquiry* 22 (Spring 1996): 549–572, which also contains brief “Introductory Remarks” by Arnold Davidson (545–548). There is also a translation of “Irony: A French Approach” in *The Sewanee Review Quarterly* 47 (1939). See also Emmanuel Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), especially “Vladimir Jankélévitch,” pp. 84–89. All of these articles use the spelling of his name with a “J” rather than a “Y”.—Eds.]

3. “Should We Pardon Them?,” p. 553 (translation modified).

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, p. 567 (translation modified). (This is on pp. 50–51 of the original edition of *Le Pardon*, same pagination in the *Points* edition.)

6. This is cited by Alain Gouhier in an article entitled “*Le temps de l'impardonnable et le temps du pardon selon Jankélévitch* [The Time of the Unforgivable and the Time of Forgiveness According to Jankélévitch],” published in the proceedings of a remarkable colloquium devoted to forgiveness in *Le Point Théologique, Forgiveness*, Proceedings of the Colloquium organized by the Centre Histoire des Idées, Université de Picardie, ed. Michel Perrin (Paris: Beauchesnes, 1987).

7. “Should We Pardon Them?,” p. 558 (translation modified).

8. In a passage in *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 241.

9. “Should We Pardon Them?,” p. 558.

10. “Should We Pardon Them?,” p. 567 (translation modified); *Le pardon*, p. 51.

11. For example: “Robert Minder forcefully asserts that Heidegger is responsible not only for everything he said under Nazism but also for everything he abstained from saying in 1945.” “Should We Pardon Them?,” p. 568 (translation modified); *Le Pardon*,

p. 53. See Robert Minder, "Hebel et Heidegger: Lumière et obscurantisme," in *Utopies et institutions au dix-huitième siècle*, ed. P. Francastel (Paris: 1963).

12. "Todtnauberg," in *Poems of Paul Celan*, trans. Michael Hamburger (New York: Persea Books, 1989), pp. 292–293.

13. This exchange is too long for me to cite here, but it was published in an issue of the *Magazine Littéraire* devoted to Vladimir Jankélévitch in June 1995 (no. 333), and it can be consulted there.

14. See Jacques Derrida, "Psyche: Inventions of the Other," trans. Catherine Porter, in *Reading De Man Reading*, ed. Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 30–42. [—Eds.]