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The Problem of Forgiveness in Vladimir Jankélévitch's moral philosophy

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Sorbonne, holocaust, russian jewish philosophy, moral philosophy, virtues, justice and equity, forgiveness, unforgetting memory, Derrida, Ricoeur, Jankélévitch,

The introductory part presents the spiritual life journey of the philosopher born to a Russian Jewish family on 31 August 1903 in Bourges, with a richness of biographical reference. His father, a physician, had an interest in philosophy, too: he translated Hegel, Schelling, Freud into French. Vladimir Jankélévitch obtains his degree from the excellent philosopher Émile Bréhier. His doctoral dissertation was on Schelling, not one of the thinkers en vogue at that time, but Jankélévitch was attracted by the deep flow of intuitive total thinking which is always relevant, albeit not fashionable.

His works published clearly show his reflections gravitated around the issue of morality; two major directions of the contemporary spiritual movements–spiritualism open to transcendence and directed to ethics, and the Russian mystical interpretation of being–join each other in the philosophy of *charme*, fecundating it for life. Jankélévitch can be seen, perchance, mostly as an *existential spiritualist*.

World War II caused a huge rupture in his life. He had Jewish ascendants both on his father's and on his mother's side, causing him to lose his job; he spent time in Toulouse, in the free zone, where he taught groups illegally in the town's cafés, and published his writings with help from his former students. He escapes being arrested by the Gestapo, but his entire life was marked by the basic experience of the survivors: the infinite and incomprehensible contingency of his own survival.

In 1951, he was appointed professor of moral philosophy at Sorbonne, where he taught, wrote, and published with undiminished energy for roughly three decades. He enjoyed respect for being an active public personality and one of the most well-known and most authentic French thinkers until the end of his life. He died on 6 June 1985.

RESEARCH HISTORY

In this chapter, we analyze six oeuvres about Jankélévitch and his philosophy, all of them but one authored in the 21st century. The first work of monographic exigency, dedicated to discovering the entire philosophical life-work of Jankélévitch, was written as a doctoral dissertation in 1999: Isabelle de Montmollin-Roulet treated Jankélévitch's metaphysics, ethics, anthropology, the key concepts of these fields, particularities and time concept of this approach, its interpretation of ipseity and mysticism of love, but the uniqueness and strength

of the work are lent by the fact that it listed and systemized Jankélévitch's sources most frequently used.

Joelle Hansel's writing published in 2012 was composed with the exigency of a monograph, too, mapping the particularities of Jankélévitch's philosophy, his metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, and finally, his special relationship with Judaism.

Jean-Jacques Lubrina's tome of 2009 is an homage of the disciple to his master. With loving empathy, the author draws a portrait of the philosopher, sketches the points of gravity of his ethics, and remembers his activity at Sorbonne.

Daniel Moreau's book was published in the same year: the Canadian professor studied the dynamics of the relationship with the other in Jankélévitch's philosophy "in these times of crisis, so deeply marked by narcissism and violence", when, albeit there are obstacles, self-giving love could make a life fulfilled possible.

Besides these French authors, a German one is added to the bouquet too: the key issue in Verena Lemcke's work from 2008 was the tension between the moral imperative of unconditional forgiveness and the unforgivability of Nazi crimes–for obvious reasons, as this is the most sensitive issue for the German researcher and reader.

One of the most significant volumes of studies analyzing Jankélévitch's philosophy was edited by Francoise Schwab, the disciple, publisher and most reputable cognizant of the life-work. The basic material of the book came from the lectures held at the conference of 16-17 December 2005 in the Parisian Ecole Normale Superieur, seeking an answer to the question of timeliness or untimeliness of the legacy twenty years after the philosopher's death. The volume also features studies, documents and recollections about the thinker.

The next chapter is dedicated to the basic elements of Jankélévitch's moral philosophy. "Beyond a doubt, Jankélévitch fought the struggle of his century to obtain recognition for the absolute primacy of morals above any other authority. For this very reason, there are real chances for his philosophical work to endure in the constantly changing milieu of philosophy", Francoise Schwab wrote. For our philosopher, ethical thinking was not one among the various ways of interpreting man and the world, but human approach *par exellence*; acquiring it, thinking and acting according to its rules is not option for any human being, but a prerequisite for experiencing humanity.

Our author unfolds the particularities of this approach by a comparison of aesthetics, religion and psychology. Discussing the relationship of morality and arts, he states that the line of ethics and the line of aesthetics can intersect each other in spite of their differences: in the

works in which the author seeks life itself; this means it is possible for a writing to fail to reach the reader in spite of its bearing excellent aesthetical signs, simply because it lacks sincerity; on the other hand, a work can be enrapturing in spite of some ungracefulness if truth and morality transpire from it.

Reflecting on the relationship of morality and religion, Jankélévitch finds that both fields have total claims on the wholeness of life; therefore, in his opinion, they cause each other to be unnecessary, that is, as if religion were reduced simply to ethics. He agrees that while the religious *must* is an imperative grounded in ontology, the moral obligation is based solely on conscience. While comparing morality and religion, in the focus of his examination stand the concepts of free will, forgiveness, holiness, the constituent historical core, approach to death, impersonality in the case of morality and personality in the case of religion.

Studying the relationship between ethics and psychology highlights the issue of whether the psychical reality of man could be a basis for ethics or in fact, vice versa. Everyone begins the natural physical and psychical life first instead of the moral life, but the core of ethical life is the will which is an dialectic relationship with existence. Existence is and wants, in the same time. Psychology is rather contemplative and descriptive, its verb mode used is the indicative, while the mode used by ethical maxims is the imperative. Thus, the imperative of the moral choice always appears more urgent and more decisive in man's drift towards the future than the indicative of self-analysis. The psychologist is a man of nuances and attenuating circumstances, while the moralist is an adamant guardian of measure.

Our author finds his topic to be contradictory particularly in that morals are constant as opposed to the glimpses of aesthetics, while in comparison with the continuity of the psychological they appear short-lived and fulgurant: it may be, he claims, that "perchance virtue bursts into bloom only once in a lifetime".

Moral action being placed in the future is an organic consequence of Jankélévitch's concept. He refuses the possibility of collecting the moral actions performed in the past and of their essentially transforming power. But protesting against oblivion has a moral value in the case of remorse for the sins, contrition, and repentance.

VIRTUES

One of his most important works, *Traité des vertus,* which is monumental in its size too, is in fact an inventory of virtues with detailed and precise descriptions, but it waives the goal of converting the morals into eternal fixed laws: what prevents us from this is love without which even the moral action would be valueless. For this very reason, Jankélévitch's claims

about the teachability of virtues are contradictory: indeed, these are forms of approach which can be acquired, but intuition is necessary.

Jankélévitch opens the list of virtues with courage which leads to a moral action which is carried out in spite of frightening obstacles: a gesture of freedom. Whatever is commenced by courage, is carried on by loyalty. Loyalty too makes endeavors, but it can be called a positive virtue solely depending on the quality of its object. This is a virtue of continuity which the safety-seeking soul opposes to the caprice of unpredictable time and unsteady human will; at the same time, human dignity is the final stakes of loyalty.

Jankélévitch dedicates a bit more than one hundred pages to sincerity, considering it to be the representative of all virtues, a form of love, which is able to create order in man's relationships with the others and himself. An insincere man must live with a terrific double conscience: such a man carries reality and the quasi-reality created by his hypocrisy at the same time, while the sincere man is free and frees others too. But sincerity has its own limitations too: when it lacks love.

Humility and modesty are closely related to sincerity: a sincere recognition of our own limits advises us to be humble and modest and vice versa: such a man is capable of facing his own limits sincerely. For Jankélévitch, the first one accompanies laudable actions, while the second one rather follows sins.

Justice and equity are virtues which are placed on the last step to the royal throne of love, for Jankélévitch. Jankélévitch's definition of truth surpasses the principle of stricto sensu equal distribution or equal treatment, and its horizon is love: this too is directed to the other, with a difference in that while justice focuses on the other's rights, love focuses on the other's person. *Equity* is justice "contaminated" by love, it does not lack personality. "Equity is art rather than mathematics, it is sensitivity rather than geometry..."

While a bit more than one hundred pages were dedicated to sincerity, to love Jankélévitch dedicates several hundreds of pages. Béla Visky focuses on the space of tension between truth and love. The justice of the logos which claims equality between me and the other is opposed to the "unjust love which claims sacrifice and irrational forgiveness". For Jankélévitch, existence or absence of love is decisive in this matter: "love's most particular work is irrational forgiveness". At the same time, Jankélévitch is seen as one who cannot forgive and has created a theoretical justification for this incapability, in particular, through the concept of *ontological meanness.*

The fundamental tone of Jankélévitch's entire moral philosophy is penetrated by the conviction that ethical action is always open to something more, to an even more complete self-giving for the benefit of our neighbor–or even for the benefit of our enemy in spite of any obstacles.

Jankélévitch summarizes his own philosophy of forgiveness in his highly resonant book published in 1967, *Le Pardon*. As a detailed presentation of this work and of the critical dialogue undertaken with it are essential for the topic, the first chapter of the dissertation is dedicated to it.

Jankélevitch postulates the ontological incapacity of man, stating that nobody ever was capable of perfect forgiveness. This is contrasted by the high ethical expectation of forgiveness, "it is an imperative because it is not an indicative!" He cuts through the Gordian knot of Schopenhauer's doubt–indeed I can do what I want, but can I want to want?–by stating with apparent naiveté: "It is always possible to do what there must be done if we sincerely want to". He interprets the Apostle Paul's thoughts about will as if the power to bear, as a habitual capacity, was the capacity to want to want, making the sinner "always unwarrantable" for the same reason. At the same time, the author rejects the forms of unclean forgiveness, these surrogate mercies which appear as substitutes for pure forgiveness, summarized by the following expressions: "iron teeth of time", explanatory absolution, purging. The first approach leaves the demolition of the all-obstructing block of crime up to the corrosion of time and memory; the second one seeks attenuating and exempting circumstances, while the third approach means the sudden amnesia, the choice of cheap grace which does not face and confront the facts and people, an erasure of sin with a sudden, thoughtless action. In our author's opinion, the three distinguishing marks of true forgiveness are: it is always an *event* occurring at the given point of time; it is a merciful *gift* of the injured party to the injuring party, beyond all the legal considerations; it is confirmed by the *personal relationship* remaining between them.

The next subchapter details the concept of erosion of time. In Jankélévitch's opinion, time changes man as it changes the river in which it cannot step twice. Suffering and experience, a pneumatic intertwining of two transcendent things, which change both the criminal and the

victim; therefore, the crimes can be prescribed because of this futurity. But Jankélévitch states: prescription can by no means replace forgiveness. Forgetting cannot be a moral attitude. Deficient remembering is superficiality; too intensive remembering is rage. But integrating the evil as an experience, using the test of forgiveness as the champion of morality reveals spiritual greed; a truly moral man does not act like his injury hasn't even occurred, but paradoxically for himself, it indeed hasn't occurred. According to Jankélévitch, true forgiveness is the greatest gesture of love besides self-giving, which cannot be left to time or oblivion. If it is left to time, we face the grotesque example of the statute of limitation of war crimes, where something which is an unforgivable sin one day, is no longer one on the next day. This is why forgiveness must be sudden and immediate, its necessity is not dissolved by the time of the perpetrator's penance or by the victim's forgetting which attenuates the rage and the early pain, but the spark of rancor is still preserved deep down in the soul. At the same time, forgiveness does not undo the crime; moreover, according to Jankélévitch, there is a difference between personal injury and crimes committed against the world order. Whoever is angry with the perpetrator of such a crime, is rightful in being so, and forgiveness would mean to betray the rightfulness. This is the "righteous anger" which is an expression of faithfulness to values and martyrs. Leaving a timeless crime up to time is not a walkable path: time can heal, but it cannot redeem. Our author's final word: the heart is not present in this endeavor. "We haven't found the heart of forgiveness in it".

The next chapter examines the issue of absolution. The absolving party's role is to discover deep down under human malice the cause external to man which motivates those actions. With an investigator's zeal, an answer is sought to the question of unde malum. The olden answer comes from dualism: the negative transcendent force, Satan, is the source of all sin. If there is an explanation, sin is mitigated and rage is attenuated, therefore explanations must be found. So one needs to explain–and this absolves one from all obligations of forgiveness. But this method fails the three requirements of true forgiveness, too: it is not an "immediate" "event". It does not involve a personal relationship between the perpetrator and the injured. The offender is not offensive, it is, at the very most, ill or ill-advised; but there are no bridges from here to the other side of the abyss, where there is an obligation of love. Absolution is painless, but forgiveness is a heart-breaking, painful sacrifice. But there is always something behind the intention of absolution which is ultimately similar to forgiveness and love: our

author calls it a surplus of energy. The soul's state is not the same when it seeks exempting or aggravating circumstances.

The third substitute of forgiveness treated by Jankélévitch is the thoughtless purging of the crime committed and of destruction. The author does not use Freud's concept of suppression, but essentially that is what it is about: throwing the case file into the fire and "never speaking about it again". According to Jankélévitch, this misleading, abrupt gesture, which sends the message that nothing happened, lacks mostly the third characteristic of true forgiveness, the personal relationship between the parties; the relationship between the victim and his tormentor remains superficial, mere window-dressing, if they failed to work through the most sensitive questions, if they failed to strive to show mercy, love and forgiveness so that the requirement of truth is left intact.

The next chapter deals with insane and insensate forgiveness, acumen veniae. Obviously, for Jankélévitch forgiveness is a gesture beyond all boundaries. Our author uses Pascal's faith in spite of absurdity, and places faith and forgiveness in the dimension of irrationality entirely, ignoring the rational signs which–without having any mathematical power of proof– still point to the rightfulness of faith (historical, philosophical, psychological, scientific, etc. considerations). He describes three motifs involved in the gesture of forgiveness which question its purity. In the first case, the injured party forgives because it leaves open the possibility that attenuating circumstances could be discovered about the crime which he does not have knowledge of yet. The second non-pure form of forgiveness is the one which is tainted by the speculative hope of the person releasing the debt that the perpetrator would become a different person, specifically as a result of forgiveness. A particularly grotesque type of this is the gesture of reconciliations between the nations, especially between the Germans and the French.

The third form of forgiveness which can be tainted is where a sincere, pure and spontaneous forgiveness, which has already been exercised, seeks justificatory arguments later. And if it seeks, it shall find too, obviously, departing from the pure faith of love and forgiveness without a reason: "indeed, no reasoning being would gladly admit that his actions have no underlying motivation and consideration, and renounce arranging the arguments…" Our author's censorious eyes notice another threat: consciousness barely resists looking back at its own good deed and being filled with a swaggering good feeling. The eye which looks back to

itself with satisfaction is a tireless writer: it writes its own hagiography relentlessly. While the other mixed forgiveness spied the future, searching for the redeeming effects of its own action, this one looks back. Finally, as if being tired of discussing the types of quasi-forgiveness, he gets down to the analysis of actual forgiveness.

The fact that man has to waive even truth when forgiving is in itself a breach cutting down to the depths of existence. But beyond that, as we have seen, it has to renounce the hope that the pardoned would later become worthy of forgiveness. Forgiveness is a reactive action: it is always a response to a crime. Pure love does not have a special cause or pretext. The great surplus–*perisson* in the Gospel's words, an expression often referenced by Jankélévitch–is in the gesture of forgiveness. Forgiveness, specifically because of its reactive nature, is more difficult and more "worthy" than love. Forgiveness is love obstructed, something that always acts against something: loving the enemy is similar to it. He who forgives overcomes two immeasurable obstacles at the same time. On the one hand, he conquers his own rage and instinct of settlement, as well as the outer world's expectation which claims the restoration of imbalanced justice. In seeking the cause of forgiveness, he finds the lack of logical and moral causes in it, in four steps: The first one is summarized by the conjunction "because": I love him, I don't love him, because… The second one is "albeit, in spite of", the best example of which is loyalty. But there are two threats involved in it: it retains something from the logic of giving and receiving and only uses the obstacles as references. The third one is the cynical "because". I love him because it is intolerable; it is an extravagant perversion, that of the lovers of deviancies. True forgiveness is irrational (fourth step) but not anti-rational, but rather meta-rational, taking one to the world of redemption. The author draws the four-pillared sketch of good and evil as follows: punishment pays evil for evil; gratitude pays good for good; ingratitude, as grace reversed i.e. baseness, pays evil for good; but forgiveness pays good for evil. He who forgives decides to reject and expel the spirit and motivation of crime from his own actions, once and for all. Forgiveness, even if it does not have a cause, it does indeed have a target, a destination, provided that it is perfectly blameless i.e. it does not expect anything in return. This forgiveness is the event which makes the sinner innocent. It is not worthiness of love which causes love, but rather the other way around: love makes its own object worthy of love, this is the transfiguring power of love and forgiveness.

Of the three marks of true forgiveness–event, gift, relationship–definition and description of the first one is most problematic in Jankélévitch's train of thought. For him, the event is

primarily a moment of the injured party's quasi-miraculous partaking of the values of "a completely different order": a totally intuitive happening. Forgiveness is complete and unconditional, but its recipient cannot be an unrepentant offender. If the offender is doing nice all this time, forgiveness is merely a pathetic joke. This also applies to collective reconciliation; it must be performed so that it should not violate the memory of the victims. Jankelevitch involves the concept of the unforgivable at this point. The impenetrable, inconceivable darkness behind the free will which makes the will evil, this impersonal, imperceptible negative mystery is that which is unforgivable. But not the fallible man, who, albeit is the actor of evil, it is still somehow a prey thereof. And this is so because there is an essential identity between the judging one and the sinner: he sinned, but I could sin too: peccavi et peccabo.

On the last page of his book, Jankélévitch flashes a vision of the endless, cyclic battle of the power of love and the love of power, sanity and insanity. Forgiveness breaks through the wall of baseness, but this wall is reconstructed and overgrows forgiveness, then everything starts again and again to infinity. "Reciprocally, to a daze!"

The next chapter is an analysis of the text entitled Pardonner, published in 1971, which is a counterpoint to a certain extent. The two titles illustrate this well: the first one suggests a calm indicative, while the latter one poses a question as early as its title: *Pardonner?*. Of course, it is not a suspension of what was written before; but indeed, it shows that the creative yes of forgiveness could easily be made irrational and thus questionable by the lack of repentance, the tormentor's arrogance which thinks that he is indeed worthy of the immeasurable gift offered to him by the victim. The *Pardonner?* text has its own history. Its fundamental ideas can be traced back to a letter by Jankélévitch published in *Le Monde* on 3 January 1965. *Pardonner?* consists of a short introduction and two parts entitled *L'imprescriptible*, respectively, *Nous a-t-on demandé pardon?*. In the first part, he notes about the statute of limitation: traditional categories of statutes of limitation for war crimes are not applicable in the case of Nazi crimes. He describes the horrors of Auschwitz with the words: clearly acts of horror, ontological baseness, "metaphysical" villainy. Ultimately, in Jankélévitch's opinion, events motivate us to reverse Jesus' words on the cross: God, do not forgive them, for they know what they do. In his opinion, gestures of compensation expressed by Germany in various ways towards Israel and others, are merely results of political constraint. Meanwhile, the conditions of true forgiveness are yet to be met. Surprisingly, Jankélévitch does not

separate the concept of forgiveness from reconciliation. Indeed, if we do not make a distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation, the victim remains at the disposal of the tormentor: he continues to be exposed to whether the other one is willing to face himself, repentance, asking for forgiveness, compensation and new life. Therefore it must be emphasized–and this aspect is missing from Jankélévitch's work–that the victim's pure forgiveness, his letting go of the events or leaving them to God are possible even if they continue to be simply unilateral actions. But what the unilateral action–where there is forgiveness but there is no repentance or vice versa–does not make possible is reconciliation. Obviously, the *Pardonner?* text is more polemic, harsh, attempting to call to account, and not least, its entire style is characterized by the signs of journalistic pamphlets. It finds it unacceptable that society urges for forgiveness which the tormentors never asked. Jankélévitch repeatedly emphasizes his theme that everyone is free to forgive injuries he suffered; but he is not entitled to proclaim dispensation for sins which hurt others.

Chapter three is a presentation of the debate published in Times magazine with the headline: "Forty years after the end of the war, has the time come for the Jews to forgive?" The editors' opening question stated: "the true problem of evil is how to forgive and who has the right to forgive". Rabbi Albert A. Friedlander published an article entitled *The Holocaust must not be forgotten*. Dr. Ac. J. Philips, Canon of St. John College of Oxford, replied in a writing entitled *Why the Jews should forgive*. Several writings and comments follow (all of them republished by the spring edition of European Judaism, 1986, 18/2), but the debate seems to have been destined to becoming a communicational dead-end. The analysis attempts to answer the question WHY. The first prelude is Clifford Longley's guide to post-Auschwitz theology. One of its most striking characteristics is that it emphasizes the historical uniqueness and lack of any analogies for the Holocaust. The article cites two German theologians: Johann-Baptist Metz (Catholic) and Jürgen Moltmann (Protestant). A second prelude to the debate is the editors' proposition, remembering the moment of horrible confrontation with the Holocaust forty years back. The article's author concludes that the uniqueness of the Holocaust can be stated solely on theological grounds. Jews are God's chosen people, and their tormentors wanted to destroy God too through their collective personality. The next article was authored by the Jewish Albert Freidlander, protesting against others' giving dispensation to the descendants for the Jews' tragedy. One cannot forgive in the name of the dead, he says. His

writing stirred controversy among the Christians; in the first round, it was Friedlander's very colleague, Anthony Phillips, Oxford priest, to give an answer, considering that "suffering is always evil, cruel and demonic, but it is not necessarily futile; beyond all human imagination, it can be creative and redeeming." He too maintains the need to remember; indeed, man's only chance is for him to remember his own inhumaneness. One must remember the victims, and the tormentors must be forgiven, as Jesus wanted. The Times later published several letters from the readers, and finally, the debate was closed with Friedlander's reaction. One can determine that in spite of the open space of the dialogue and the established tradition of dialogic culture, we see that the communication endeavor described above failed. Cause of this failure was not the limited nature of the media which hosted the debate, but something much deeper: the essential difference between the Christian and the non-Christian world views. Albeit this difference doesn't mean settled and impenetrable boundaries: some representatives of both parties are clearly aware that it is an eternal moral law: after God, the victims have the right to determine the conditions for reconciliation and healing, for what the specific repentance should actually consist of.

The next chapter presents a comparison of Jacques Derrida's text about forgiveness with Jankelevitch. Derrida was not a Holocaust survivor and his family was spared; perhaps that is the reason why he was cooler and more objective on the matter. The comparison shows glimpses of the common ideas of the two authors: we do not forgive something, but someone; it makes sense only in the meeting of two persons, it is beyond the world of law, criminal law, and institutions.

He thinks that according to Jankélévitch, there are two circumstances which make forgiveness questionable or even impossible: if the repenting perpetrator does not ask for it, or if the sin committed is extremely big. In Derrida's interpretation, for Jankélévitch the "final solution" meant also the end of the history of forgiveness and of its historic possibility. About the expression of rage against the Germans where Jankélévitch declared: forgiveness was not for those who were prospering because of the 'economic miracle', not for the swine and brutes, because forgiveness died in the camps, Derrida writes: it would have been better not to read these lines at all, and "this rage is untrue and unworthy of what Jankélévitch wrote somewhere else about forgiveness". We accept and consider Derrida's criticism about the tension between Jankélévitch's 'hyperbolic' and 'everyday' ethics (which otherwise he himself admits to) and the fact that it is a downright "sinful" tension which "needs

forgiveness" to be legitimate. But we do have the feeling that the remarkable critic does not read Jankélévitch from "inside" but only from outside. Our author reflects on two "case studies" while reacting to Jankélévitch's statement expressing his hope that those responsible and involved would utter the words of understanding and sympathy to the victims. The first one evokes Paul Celan's visit to Heidegger, where he found disappointment as the great thinker seemed to omit to say the oracle-like word which he wanted to hear. In the second reference, Derrida quotes and comments on a resounding exchange of letters. In 1980, a German young man, Wiard Raveling, who followed Jankélévitch's activity and who was particularly disturbed by the relentlessness expressed in *Pardonner?*, wrote to the French philosopher. In this letter, he fully admitted to the horrors of the Holocaust, albeit he was not involved directly. His letter touched Jankelevitch who answered that he had been awaiting such a statement for thirty-five years. Derrida correctly saw the signs of sincerity, but also of contradiction and self-contradiction in that letter. According to this interpretation, Jankélévitch considered that the wheel of history was turning, there was the new generation which overcame the obstacles that seemed impossible to overcome at that time. At the same time, he himself was not capable to travelling that far.

Ricœur's work cannot be ignored in an analysis of Jankélévitch particularly because it tackles the problem of forgiveness thoroughly through several hundreds of pages, almost as a response to his fellow philosopher: in his opinion, forgiveness is not easy, it is not impossible, but difficult. According to Ricoeur, love is able to forgive everything, even the unforgivable, "forgiveness is directed to the unforgivable or it does not exist". He classifies iniquities into four categories: criminal, political, moral, metaphysical sins. He admits that sinfulness means liability, but he rejects contempt for the perpetrator–inability to turn to the criminal with respect is a sign of imperfect love. Even if forgiveness cannot be institutionalized, this culture of respect could penetrate politics and the relationships of various nations, Ricoeur thinks.

Jankélévitch's passionate question of "has anyone asked for our forgiveness?" shows that forgiveness is easier where the perpetrators admit to their crimes. Ricœur is interested particularly in this dynamics of reciprocity.

Ricoeur sees a connection between giving and forgiving. Both show an asymmetrical relationship. He agrees with Jankélévitch in that the utmost of ethics is to love the enemy without expecting reciprocity. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus eliminates the norm of reciprocity. "This dissymmetry is the constituent of the formula of forgiveness. It follows us

as an enigma (*énigme*) whose depth the inquisitive soul can never deplete", Ricoeur says.
He asks: What power makes one capable of asking for, giving and accepting forgiveness? He cannot accept that forgiveness is a human capacity, as "men are incapable of forgiving what they cannot punish, and they cannot publish what proves to be unforgivable"; he insists that forgiveness "comes from above". In his opinion, the connection between crime and criminal must be untied. Ricoeur examines this aspect also in the case of repentance.
What would remembrance, history and forgetting be like when touched by forgiveness? This is another question to which the philosopher answers: "The spiritual stake of each liberating release is this: to quiet down the memory's unforgetting." At the same time, it is a moral obligation to oppose unforgetting memory to cheap amnesty and amnesia.