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## DECONSTRUCTING FORGIVENESS: JANKÉLÉVITCH'S INFLUENCE ON DERRIDA

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The article discusses Jacques Derrida's notion of forgiveness as an essentially aporetic phenomenon and shows that it is entirely dependent on Vladimir Jankélévitch's concept as it was developed by him in the middle of the 20th century. Although Derrida himself never denied the influence Jankélévitch had on his thinking, Derrida's readers are somewhat reluctant to acknowledge this influence and sometimes are completely ignorant of it. The article shows that the aporias of forgiveness that Derrida discusses are entirely dependent on the understanding of forgiveness as a gift and interpersonal event that was proposed by Jankélévitch. Furthermore, Jankélévitch himself was deeply aware of the inner contradictions of forgiveness, which is evidenced by the contradiction between his main two texts on the subject. The article is concluded by a brief discussion of the divergence between the two thinkers.

KEYWORDS: Derrida, Jankélévitch, forgiveness, aporia.

Jacques Derrida's view on the problem of forgiveness attracted much attention from his readers. Most of the commentators insist that Derrida proposes an original concept of forgiveness. Moreover, at least some of them are ready to agree

with Peter Banki's suggestion that the studies of forgiveness that do not draw on Derrida's lose out in their understanding of this particular phenomenon: "It is to the detriment of many of these studies that they have not been informed by a careful reading of the work of the philosopher Jacques Derrida, who, during the last ten years of his life, elaborated a novel concept of forgiveness that took as its departure point a reading of this phenomenon quite different from that of anyone else" (Banki 2018: 49). My contention is that although it is agreeable that Derrida's contribution to the study of forgiveness is valuable, the novelty and originality of this contribution is rather doubtful. In what follows, I will show that Derrida's work draws heavily on Vladimir Jankélévitch's interpretation of forgiveness so much so that the main conceptual instruments, employed by Derrida, are, in fact, coined and extensively used by Jankélévitch. Indeed, the very focus of Derrida's thinking of forgiveness, its aporetic nature, is articulated by Jankélévitch in his main work on forgiveness. It is important to note that Derrida himself acknowledges the scope of debt to Jankélévitch and in no way attempts to minimize the influence Jankélévitch had on him in this regard, which even more pointedly calls into question the supposed novelty of Derrida's thinking.

In what follows, I will discuss Derrida's approach to the problem of forgiveness, which I consider to be aporetic, that is to say, *aporia* for Derrida constitutes the essential feature of forgiveness. I enumerate and discuss at least six *aporias*, associated with forgiveness in Derrida's texts. Then, I turn to a summary of Jankélévitch's understanding of forgiveness, in which I show that this aporetic nature of forgiveness is not merely present in his thought, but is considered to be an essential part of the very nature of forgiveness. So much so that the main two texts of Jankélévitch on forgiveness work in tandem to highlight this particular aspect of this phenomenon. Ultimately, I conclude with some comparative remarks.

## Derrida's Concept of Forgiveness

Jacques Derrida became explicitly interested in the problem of forgiveness in the latter part of his career, when generally his focus shifted towards the relation between a singular individual and law, understood as established rules and norms. He focuses on the question of how singularity (in his opinion, inevitably) is bound to exceed the rules of law. On the one hand, there is a need for moral rules that are then codified in the jurisdiction of the state and society. On the other hand, there is the inability and incapacity of the singularity to submit to those laws without

losing its singularity. This paradox, enforced by the inevitable character of this relation between laws and singularity, is at the core of Derrida's ethical thinking.

Forgiveness is one of the examples of such a paradoxical exceeding. Thus, not surprisingly, he devoted at least two of his annual seminars *Questions de responsabilité* to this topic, which resulted in at least two significant published texts. The two main texts, in which Derrida explicitly deals with the concept of forgiveness, are *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (2001a) and "To Forgive: The Unforgivable and the Imprescriptible" in *Questioning God* (2001b). In what follows I will draw on both of them.

Derrida begins, typically for him, by both situating the origins of the phenomenon and questioning them. According to him, one has to look for the sources of forgiveness in what he calls Abrahamic religions: "As enigmatic as the concept of forgiveness remains, it is the case that the scene, the figure, the language which one tries to adapt to it belong to a religious heritage" (Derrida 2001a: 27–28). For him, this immediately points at a tension, which arises when this religious heritage is exported in its cultural forms to civilizations where Abrahamic tradition is not dominant, if present at all. Derrida speaks of the relations between Japan and Korea that are expected by the onlookers to apply Abrahamic notions of apology and forgiveness, while neither of them are part of Abrahamic tradition in terms of cultural and religious heritage.<sup>1</sup> Derrida, then, is ready to discuss forgiveness as a cultural phenomenon (not a religious one), in which the tension arises when a singular tradition (Abrahamic in this case) has within itself universalizing tendencies that force it to reach outside itself. On the one hand, "this tradition ... is at once singular", on the other, it "has already become the universal idiom of law, of politics, of the economy, or of diplomacy" (Derrida 2001a: 28). This tension between a particular tendency of one cultural tradition and its application as a universal "measuring stick" to other cultural traditions is the first in the series of inherent paradoxes of forgiveness that Derrida intends to uncover in his discussion.

As already stated, Derrida's thinking of forgiveness is aporetic. He meditates on the concept and teases out the inherent paradoxes that are lying dormant within the concept and that make the concept difficult, if not impossible, to act upon. In this sense, his aporias are mirror opposites of Zeno's paradoxes: Zeno constructs his aporias on the conceptual level, yet they disperse when applied to actuality. Derrida constructs the concept and follows it to its logical conclusion in order to

<sup>1</sup> One can easily think of more. "Political Apologies: Chronological List", a project by Graham G. Dodds, from the Political Science Department at the University of Pennsylvania, attempts at enumerating similar attempts of apologies in political history, with Saddam Hussein's apology for invading Kuwait from December 7, 2002, among personal favourites. The list is available at <http://www.upenn.edu/pnc/politicalapologies.html> [accessed 10/12/18].

show that its application in actuality would result in a contradiction or, to be more precise, impossibility. There are at least six aporias which, for Derrida, in various aspects reveal the impossibility of forgiveness.

However, before going deeper into the aporias of forgiveness, Derrida discusses the relation between forgiveness and the gift. In his unique, inimitable style, Derrida proposes this relation should be based on the etymology of the French words *pardon* and *don*. Readers of Derrida will no doubt know that he devoted a lot of attention to the phenomenon of the gift (Derrida 1992). The main idea Derrida proposes in terms of the logic of the gift is that a true gift must stand outside the economy of giving and taking. This suggests a paradoxical and, perhaps, impossible character of the gift. The same applies to forgiveness. Derrida claims that all the aporias or paradoxes of gift have parallels (are analogous, Derrida says) in forgiveness and are linked with the aporias and paradoxes of forgiveness (Derrida 2001b: 22). In a classic Derridean move, Derrida proposes two opposite courses of action only to reject them both for a direction that would render the previous two options useless. He says: "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" (Derrida 2001b: 22). To articulate, then, here means to uncover the structural elements of the concept, however, not in order to show its essence, but, rather, to demonstrate that there is no essence to speak of, that the essence *is* the fluctuation of meanings.

There are two obvious elements, according to Derrida, that are common to the gift and forgiveness. Derrida terms them as the principle of the unconditionality and the essential relation to time. By the first element Derrida means that both the gift and forgiveness have to be given unconditionally, without getting anything back, without being a part of trade, the giving-and-taking economy. That is a required element for both of these transactions. To give with no other goal, for the sake of giving is essential both to the structure of the gift and to the structure of forgiveness. As we will see, this already implies a certain paradoxical, if not impossible, character of both the gift and forgiveness. In regard to the other aspect, although it is clear that the gift and forgiveness both are essentially temporal phenomena, Derrida stresses that for him they also diverge here. Forgiveness for Derrida is inherently related to the past, as it is always connected to something that occurred in the past and refuses to pass. The gift, on the other hand, always takes place in the present, "in the presentation or presence of the present" (Derrida 2001b: 22).

The first aporia of forgiveness consists in the fact that the one who forgives never does enough. It is "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” (Derrida 2001b: 22). If the demand for forgiveness is unconditional, then it is a matter of pure will to be able to execute pure forgiveness. That, of course, is impossible, at least for a human being. There will always be a part that does not forgive, a remnant of refusal to give. Therefore, the roles are reversed – the one who forgives now herself needs to be forgiven, needs forgiveness for not forgiving enough. As Derrida says, “I always have to be forgiven, to ask forgiveness for not giving, for never giving enough, for never offering or welcoming enough” (Derrida 2001b: 22).

The second aporia is formulated by Derrida in the form of the question. The question is that of collective responsibility and guilt. Derrida asks: “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?” (Derrida 2001b: 22) Although crimes can be committed collectively, a long Western tradition of ethics and law has always refused to treat guilt as collective. Guilt for the crime is always individualized as only in this way the concept of free will makes sense and can function. However, if guilt is always individual, then what about forgiveness? If there is no collective guilt, maybe there is no collective forgiveness either? If that is the case, this surely makes problematic and at least worthy of reconsideration all the history of political apologies, for if only the individual wronged can take up the responsibility of forgiveness, then the apology on behalf of the collective to another collectivity becomes a void.

The third aporia is concerned with the anti-transactional character of forgiveness. According to Derrida, if true forgiving can have nothing in return, if it is a pure giving, a giving in order to give [*don par don*], as Derrida nicely puts it, then the question has to be asked if true forgiveness comes into play only when forgiveness itself seems and is impossible. “Forgiveness, if there is such a thing, must and can forgive only the un-forgivable, the inexpiable, and thus do the impossible” (Derrida 2001b: 30). For if forgiving is easy, if to forgive means to excuse what is forgivable, then there is, strictly speaking, nothing to forgive – the forgiver herself has no active role in this transaction and the moral value of forgiving what is forgivable is questionable, if existent at all. “To forgive the forgivable (*pardonable*), the venial, the excusable, what one can always forgive, is not to forgive” (Derrida 2001b: 30). It is, therefore, Derrida seems to suggest, not a gift, for nothing is given away.

Even after forgiveness occurs, the transformation is never complete in such a way that it annuls the wrongdoing from the past. In Jankélévitch’s terms, the for-

given wrongdoing does not disappear and it is not cancelled – it remains, however, forgiveness means that one acts *as if* it had not been committed. This, as Derrida rightly notes, creates another aporia: “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 heterogenous to any determination in the order of knowledge, of determinate theoretical judgment, of the self-presentation of an appropriable sense” (Derrida 2001b: 36). On the one hand, the forgiver is transformed by her forgiveness, nevertheless, she remains in relation to the wrongdoing committed in the past. On the other hand, the forgiven is released from the guilt towards the forgiver, yet remains in relation to the wrongdoing committed in the past. Thus, on both sides of the forgiveness, there is a double relation that is contradictory and bound to remain irreconcilable.

This heterogeneity, this contradiction of relations extends into the future in another aporetic aspect of forgiveness. “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” (Derrida 2001b: 41). If the relation to the wrongdoing committed in the past is to remain, then the purity of forgiveness will always be in question. Importantly, the purity is in question not for the lack of trying or intention, but the very relation to the past contaminates it and in this sense the doubts about the authenticity of forgiveness will remain. As Derrida says, this is the case “even when its subjects are and believe themselves to be sincere and generous” (Derrida 2001b: 41). Furthermore, the work of time will call into question the very intensity of forgiveness. Forgetting surely is not forgiveness, but forgetting can dilute it: “History will continue and with it reconciliation, but with the equivocation of a forgiveness mixed up with the work of mourning, with forgetting, ... the work of mourning forgiveness itself, forgiveness mourning forgiveness” (Derrida 2001b: 41–42). To forgive, as Jankélévitch emphasized, does not mean to forget. It means the opposite – to remember. And yet, the passing of time means that forgetting is inevitable, which means that every forgiveness will be compromised by the work of time, decay, in which the gift of forgiveness will inevitably disappear.

Lastly, another aporia emerges in the context of the relation of forgiveness and justice. Derrida’s notion of justice relies on Emmanuel Levinas, who proposes that justice emerges with the notion of collectivity as the ‘Third’, that exceeds and supplements the fundamental relation between the I and the singular Other. The existence of the ‘Third’ is the great balancing factor in the infinite responsibility of the I in front the Other. Thus, justice originates and is checked by the responsibil-

ity for the Other and, at the same time, is itself the balancing of responsibilities.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on this notion of justice, Derrida notices that the seeking of justice in forgiveness will always at the same time produce injustice to others: “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. ... Because it is unjust to be just” (Derrida 2001b: 49). Being just to someone in this sense always means being unjust to someone else. Justice in Levinasian rendering is simply not the supplement of the ethical, but rather an inescapable limitation of it. Ethics simply is not justice and, moreover, is not just. Thus, forgiveness as an act of gift in ethics is necessarily unjust.

All of these aporias are meant to illustrate the impossibility or the inner tensions of proper forgiveness. They also can be summed up in one, perhaps, the main aporia, which Derrida formulates in the following way: “There is only forgiveness, if there is such a thing, of the un-forgivable” (Derrida 2001b: 48). If something is forgivable, then this something does not require forgiveness – it will be granted anyway. Forgiveness, then, is required when the wrongdoing exceeds the regular plane of human interaction, when the wrongdoing committed is beyond and below the acceptable misdemeanours and violations of ethics. Only then the pure giving – the forgiving – becomes possible. This, according to Derrida, constitutes the fundamental paradox of forgiveness.

One cannot fail to notice that the provocative value of Derrida’s conclusions is not matched by the conceptual articulation and grounding of those conclusions. In Derrida’s defence, this is justifiable, because Derrida repeatedly draws back to the work of Jankélévitch and, indeed, presupposes that his readers are familiar with the main concepts of his predecessor. Therefore, in order to understand some of the more controversial points of Derrida’s interpretation of forgiveness, we must turn to Jankélévitch’s work for clarification and elaboration.

## Jankélévitch’s Concept of Forgiveness

Jankélévitch introduces his philosophical concept of forgiveness in his book from 1967 *Le Pardon* (2005). This is as much a book about what forgiveness is, as it is about what forgiveness is *not*. Jankélévitch maintains that the concept of forgiveness necessarily implies three characteristics: true forgiveness is an event, true for-

<sup>2</sup> A short and concise introduction of the concept can be found in Emmanuel Levinas *Ethics and Infinity* (Levinas 1985: 89–90).

giveness is a gift, and true forgiveness is interpersonal. And, conversely, he is careful to outline why true forgiveness should not be confused with phenomena that, according to him, are “replacement products [that] offer themselves to us from the start” (Jankélévitch 2005: 5). These are decay through time, intellectual excuse, and liquidation. These six aspects constitute the core of Jankélévitch’s thinking about forgiveness and inform all other deliberations and conclusions. Let us deal with all six aspects in greater detail.

Qualifying forgiveness, Jankélévitch states that “true forgiveness is a significant *event* that happens at such and such an instant of historical becoming” (Jankélévitch 2005: 5). In his attempts to clarify this qualification, he contrasts true forgiveness with clemency. Clemency, he says, “does not imply any determinate event” (Jankélévitch 2005: 6) – it is an *a priori* disposition, which, Jankélévitch argues, makes the very act of offense impossible. “There is no forgiveness because, so to speak, there was no offense and absolutely no offended party, even though there was an offender” (Jankélévitch 2005: 6). Thus, it seems that for Jankélévitch true forgiveness is necessarily a *transformative* activity – it changes or transfixes the one who has been offended and precisely in this sense – in the sense that it happens, that it occurs, that it takes place in the continuity of time – it is an event.

Second, “true forgiveness, which is at the margins of all legality, is a *gracious gift* from the offended to the offender” (Jankélévitch 2005: 5). Jankélévitch here wants to delineate the difference between forgiveness and clemency on the one hand, and forgiveness and exchange on the other. In the first case, if the offended party is forgiving in advance, then, strictly speaking, she is not forgiving at all. Clemency, Jankélévitch argues, does not care for the singularity of the offense – the attitude of clemency is self-focused, it does not take into account neither the offense, nor the offender. Forgiveness, conversely, is always concerned with the particularity of the offence and the offender. For-giving is giving, therefore, it has to have an addressee. Furthermore, the giving cannot be a part of an exchange – it is not a giving, because one gets something in return. Forgiving is giving without getting anything back. In short, it is not a trade. And, thus, forgiveness, strictly speaking, is always undeserved, for there is nothing one can do to deserve it.

Third, Jankélévitch is adamant that forgiveness is possible only in the interpersonal relation. In other words, it is an individual matter both on the offender’s part and on the one’s who is offended part. One can only offend as an individual and can only be forgiven as an individual. And, in parallel, one can only be offended as an individual and can forgive as an individual. Collective forgiveness is not possible precisely because no one has the authority to speak for the collective offense. Offence always touches one’s individual existence, therefore, it can be undone only



on an individual level. It is, perhaps, this impossibility to stand in for someone else is meant by Ruth Klüger, when she says that

When talking about this book *Weiter leben* in German or *Still Alive* in English to German audiences, I was invariably confronted with the anxious question whether I could ‘forgive.’ It was not clear whether I was to forgive the perpetrators or all Germans... How can I ‘forgive’ the murder of my teenage brother when I have had my life, and he didn’t get to have his? And perhaps the adult that I am now cannot forgive even in the name of the child I was then. This was not a free decision, I would explain: it was simply not in my power to grant the kind of absolution that is implied in the plea or demand for forgiveness (Klüger 2002: 311).

As importantly, the impossibility of forgiveness for someone else is taken by some to include the divine providence, too: “The faults of man toward God are forgiven by the Day of Atonement; faults towards one’s fellow man are not forgiven by the Day of Atonement, unless the fellow man has been appeased beforehand” (Levinas 1997: 29). This idea is by no means new and was already expressed by Kant:

Guilt can never be discharged by another person, so far as we can judge according to the justice of our human reason. For this is no transmissible liability which can be made over to another like a financial indebtedness (where it is all one to the creditor whether the debtor himself pays the debt or whether someone else pays it for him); rather it is the most personal of all debts, namely a debt of sins, which only the culprit can bear and which no innocent person can assume even though he be magnanimous enough to wish to take it upon himself for the sake of another (Kant 1960: 67).

And the same idea is even more forcefully illustrated in Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* as a prohibition to forgive on someone else’s behalf: “I don’t want the mother to embrace the oppressor who threw her son to the dogs! She dare not forgive him! Let her forgive him for herself, if she will, let her forgive the torturer for the immeasurable suffering of her mother’s heart. But the sufferings of her tortured child she has no right to forgive” (Dostoyevsky 1969: 269). This means that the individual can forgive for herself and herself only without ever assuming neither the possession of another individual, nor the right of collective or group forgiveness. The risks of sensitivities of such forgiveness are demonstrated by the Holocaust survivor Eva Mozes Kor in a film *Forgiving Doctor Mengele* where she declares: “Fifty years after the liberation, I, Eva Mozes Kor, in my name only hereby give amnesty to all Nazis who participated directly or indirectly in the murder of my family and millions of others, because it is time to forgive, but not to forget. It is time to heal our souls” (quoted in Banki 2018: 9–0). Although she offers an

incredibly generous gesture (a gracious gift), she stresses that she does so in her name only, for to forgive on behalf of someone else, even her closest family, she has no right. Neither the guilt, nor forgiveness is transmitted to the next of kin or anyone else. Therefore, one forgives only in her name.

It is equally important to define what forgiveness is as what forgiveness is not. As mentioned above, Jankélévitch is carefully delimiting forgiveness from the three elements that are often confused with forgiveness: decay through time (forgetting), intellectual excuse (understanding), and liquidation (mad forgiveness).

In order to be able to truly forgive, Jankélévitch claims, we must make sure that we remember the deed. He argues that if it diminishes in the past and is diluted in memory, then there is nothing left that can be forgiven. Therefore, on the contrary, one must remember what one forgives as lucidly as possible. The deed must remain, yet, as we noted above, the relation to it must be transformed. Hegel, when linking forgiveness to forgetting, is pointing at precisely the same aspect: "The deed still subsists, but only as something past, as a fragment, as a corpse. That part of it which was bad conscience has disappeared, and the remembrance of the deed is no longer that conscience's intuition of itself; in love, life has found life once more" (Hegel 1961: 239). Thus, to reiterate, forgiveness should not be confused with our ability to forget the wrong. It is precisely the opposite – in order to be able to forgive, one must remember the wrong.

Similarly, Jankélévitch disassociates understanding from forgiveness. If one can understand the wrong: its reasons, context, motivations, then the wrong loses its malevolence and, in its turn, does not need forgiveness any more. Thus, strictly speaking, forgiveness is possible only when an intellectual excuse has failed, when the wrong is quite literally incomprehensible. Not to understand and still to treat the wrongdoer as if nothing has happened is the true meaning of forgiveness.

Finally, Jankélévitch speaks of what he calls mad forgiveness – an act on the part of the offended to completely block out the wrong without any reaction or sentiment. It is mad as it requires a submission and abandonment of one's subjective autonomy. Forgiveness can only occur when there is an injury, and the latter is only possible when at least two autonomous individuals are interacting. A complete refusal to acknowledge the injury, liquidating it as it occurs, is a sign of one's autonomy being broken – indeed, a sign of madness.

In addition to the book of 1967 Jankélévitch wrote a short polemical article "Should We Pardon Them?" (*Pardonner?*) (Jankélévitch 1997), which seems to be at odds with a lot of what is implied or even explicitly said in *Le pardon*. The main point of diversion is the question from the title of the article: should we (the Jews, the French, the civilization) forgive them (the Nazis, the Germans, the Barbarians)?

Derrida notes the obvious problem in the very division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ – it is not as obvious as it might seem immediately to define who precisely are these ‘us’ and ‘them’, especially in the light of Jankélévitch’s himself insistence that forgiveness is possible only on the interpersonal plane .

Be it as it may, the answer to this question which Jankélévitch articulates in this text is an emphatic ‘No!’. This is clear from the very first remarks where Jankélévitch employs sarcastic tone to emphasize his point: “Is it time to pardon, or at least to forget? Twenty years are enough, it would seem, for the unpardonable to become miraculously pardonable: by right and from one day to the next the unforgettable is forgotten. A crime that had been unpardonable until May 1965 thus suddenly ceases to be so in June – as if by magic” (Jankélévitch 1997: 553). This point has an additional controversy, as in *Le pardon* Jankélévitch seems to suggest without reservations that forgiveness is a moral imperative, thus, there has to be a particular procedure towards forgiveness. This, in its turn, means that whichever way formulated, it will be situated in time – albeit it might not have a precise time frame, it will, nevertheless, occur in time and therefore will *at some point* happen.

To be sure, a bigger problem formulated by Jankélévitch in *Pardonner?* is not a particular time frame, but the very demand for or necessity of forgiveness which he advocated in the book. While *Le pardon* seems to suggest that forgiveness is morally imperative, *Pardonner?* quite unequivocally refuses to do so. This is a point picked up and commented upon by Derrida.

Yet, this contradiction between the two texts is acknowledged by Jankélévitch himself in an interview from 1977:

I have written two books on forgiveness: one of them, simple, very aggressive, very polemical whose title is: *Pardonner?* 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, for which forgiveness is the highest commandment; and, on the other hand, evil always appears beyond. Forgiveness is always stronger than evil and evil is stronger than forgiveness (quoted in Derrida 2001b: 29).

It seems that Jankélévitch is very much aware of the aporias which Derrida is so fond of. At least one is already present in *Le pardon*: forgiveness can and attempts to exceed evil, and evil can and will exceed forgiveness. This is inherent in the Christian and Jewish concept of forgiveness. This aporia is unsolvable, yet not unfamiliar: “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 danger-

ously, and on the other hand, I believe in wickedness” (quoted in Derrida 2001b: 29). And yet, there is another aporia present in Jankélévitch’s work – it is the clash between philosophical deliberation and the existential demand. These two opposite poles are expressed in two books Jankélévitch wrote on this topic. There is a philosophical – ideal – concept that describes a correct and just course of action, and there is an actual situation of an individual in concrete circumstances that might show that actuality exceeds philosophy. As with Derrida’s aporias, Jankélévitch’s bind is not debilitating. Rather the opposite: forgiveness is a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy, a performative act that is impossible until it happens. Only the execution of it makes it possible, while without it forgiveness always will remain unattainable and, possibly, repulsive. Jankélévitch’s polemical text demonstrates precisely that.

## Disagreements

As we have seen, Derrida makes use of the main conceptual suggestions that Jankélévitch provides: forgiveness as a gift and forgiveness as an interpersonal event are necessary structural elements in Derrida’s attempt to expose forgiveness as aporetic. Also, he makes an extensive use of Jankélévitch’s separation of forgiveness from forgetting and, to a lesser extent, understanding. It is worthwhile to repeat that Derrida never denies the influence and openly acknowledges his debt to Jankélévitch.

Having said that, Derrida also explicitly comments on his disagreement with Jankélévitch. He formulates what he terms ‘the axioms for Jankélévitch’, the presuppositions that are unquestionable and on which all other deliberations can be based. The first axiom is formulated in the following way: “Forgiveness cannot be granted, ... unless forgiveness is *asked for*, explicitly or implicitly asked for” (Derrida 2001b: 27). The second axiom states 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” (Derrida 2001b: 27). Derrida finds both of these presuppositions problematic.

Regarding the first axiom, Derrida argues that the very concept of forgiveness inherently has in it a requirement of forgiveness, which means, then, that one has to forgive even when the wrongdoer does not ask for it:

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 (Derrida 2001b: 28).

In other words, Derrida claims, that a condition to ask for forgiveness contradicts the very notion of unconditional forgiveness. If forgiveness is to remain unconditional, it will include the requirement to have even no condition of asking for forgiveness.

Regarding the second, Derrida does not provide an argument for finding this axiom problematic, but there are enough hints in “To Forgive: The Unforgivable and the Imprescriptible” that point at the direction in which Derrida is willing to go. Later in the text he formulates a question regarding this axiom which seems to extend the human plane in two directions at once:

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 debate 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 (Derrida 2001b: 44–45).

Thus, Derrida invokes the divine forgiveness as a possible and, perhaps, necessary element to consider. This, of course, is not new neither in the history of the concept of forgiveness, nor in the 20th century French philosophy. Levinas, for one, was among the thinkers that thought that only God is capable of true forgiveness. More controversially, Derrida is willing to consider animal forgiveness, which grants the right of a moral agent to an animal: in that case it has to be capable of guilt, as well as forgiveness. Derrida for his purposes justifies this inclusion on the grounds of phenomenological experience:

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 (Derrida 2001b: 47).

Finally, the last point of disagreement is based on Jankélévitch's equation of irreparable with the unforgivable. For Jankélévitch there are things that cannot be forgiven – these are things where damage is so great that it is beyond repair; when the abyss of the tragedy is so deep that the bottom is not visible. Derrida wants to untangle this connection: “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” (Derrida 2001b: 31). This could be seen as an attempt not to merely untangle related terms, but also to unjoin the spheres: forgiveness is of the moral order, which attempts to discuss ideal principles, the imprescriptible is of the legal order that concerns itself with juridical matters of the state, while the irreparable is a descriptor of the factual order that concerns itself with actuality. Thus, we could say that Derrida is careful to treat them in their respective domains and not to confuse them in one knot.

It is not our goal to try and defend Jankélévitch in these disagreements. The purpose of this article is to track the influence of Jankélévitch to Derrida and for this purpose it is sufficient to note the points where these influences reach a point of diversion.

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that Derrida makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of forgiveness. He is certainly right to emphasize inner tensions – the aporias – that are inherent in the very notion of forgiveness as such. At the same time, in order to fully appreciate Derrida's input, one has to go back to Jankélévitch, who lays the ground and develops the conceptual apparatus, which Derrida later makes use of. The idea of forgiveness as a gift and as a transformative interpersonal event is fundamental to Derrida's thought and is given articulation in the work of Jankélévitch. Even the idea that forgiveness is inherently contradictory and paradoxical, as we have shown, it remains at the core of Jankélévitch's understanding of forgiveness. Derrida, who certainly acknowledges his debt to his predecessor, makes full use of this contribution in order to develop it further. Therefore, I contend that Derrida's work on this problem should be seen as a continuation and expansion of Jankélévitch's work rather than a new original conceptual approach.

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## DEKONSTRUOJANT ATLEIDIMĄ: JANKÉLÉVITCHIAUS ĮTAKA DERRIDA

## Santrauka

Straipsnis aptaria Jacques'o Derrida atleidimo kaip esmiškai aporetinio fenomeno sampratą ir parodo, kad ji yra visiškai priklausoma nuo Vladimiro Jankélévitchiaus sampratos, kurią šis išplėtojo XX a. viduryje. Nors pats Derrida niekuomet neslėpė įtakos, kurią Jankélévitchius padarė jo mąstymui, Derrida skaitytojai nenoromis pripažįsta šią įtaką, o kartais tiesiog nežino apie ją. Straipsnis parodo, kad atleidimo aporijos, aptariamoms Derrida, yra visiškai priklausomos nuo atleidimo kaip dovanos ir tarpasmeninio įvykio supratimo, kurį pasiūlė Jankélévitchius. Dar daugiau, Jankélévitchius pats giliai suvokė vidines atleidimo prieštaras, kurias liudija prieštaravimas tarp jo dviejų tekstų šia tema. Straipsnis baigiamas trumpu takoskyros tarp šių dviejų mąstytojų aptarimu.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: Derrida, Jankélévitch, atleidimas, aporija.