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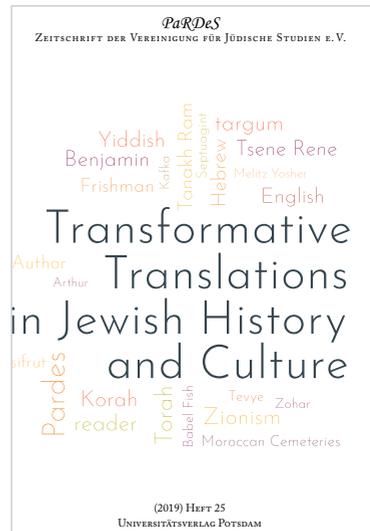
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Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Philosophie morale*, ed. Françoise Schwab (Paris: Flammarion, 2019), 1184 S., 32 €

The reception of Vladimir Jankélévitch (1903–1985) in the English- and German-speaking scene has only recently begun. It happened almost exclusively with regard to the question of forgiveness, first and foremost stimulated by Jankélévitch's role as a key interlocutor in Jacques Derrida's *Pardonnez-moi* (2004). A glimpse at the secondary literature shows this evidence. Aaron Looney's monograph *Vladimir Jankélévitch. The Time of Forgiveness* (2015) stands out in the English-speaking world, together with the collection of essays *Vladimir Jankélévitch and the Question of Forgiveness* (2013), edited by Alan Udoff. Jankélévitch's German-speaking reception is similar, with references in Wiard Raveling's autobiographical recollection *Ist Versöhnung möglich?* (2014) and Verena Lemcke's monograph *Der Begriff Verzeihen bei Vladimir Jankélévitch* (2008). While more than ten of Jankélévitch's books have been translated into German, English-speaking editions can be counted on one hand. Apart from the translation of *Le music et l'ineffable* (*Music and the Ineffable*, 2003) and *Henri Bergson* (*Henri Bergson*, 2015), they all share the aforementioned focus on forgiveness, as we can see through the English-speaking edition of *Pardonnez-moi* (*Should We Pardon Them?*, 1996), *Le pardon* (*Forgiveness*, 2005) and *La mauvaise conscience* (*The Bad Conscience*, 2015).

The fact that many of Jankélévitch's writings have become inaccessible over time, even the original French editions, provides a further explanation of such a partial and late reception. Hence, the reprint of the collection *Philosophie morale* (PM), first published in 1998, must be greeted with enthusiasm. It brings together seven monographs written by Jankélévitch

over three decades. The volume opens with a general foreword by the editor Françoise Schwab, and hereafter every text is introduced with a concise and clear preface. Finally, the volume ends with a bibliography of Jankélévitch's works. *Philosophie morale* offers essays ranging from 1933 – when, at the age of thirty, Jankélévitch published his thesis on the *Mauvaise conscience* – through 1951 – the year when he was appointed professor of moral philosophy at the Sorbonne University – until the publication of *Le pardon* in 1967 – when he distinctly raised his voice in the French debate on the imprescriptibility of war crimes, with particular reference to the Holocaust. These three moments correspond with three essential theses of Jankélévitch's moral philosophy that are articulated throughout the volume: the irrevocability of Evil, the fugacity of Good, and the unsurmountable struggle between love and death.

La mauvaise conscience (1933, PM 31–202) sets up an argument of capital importance for the entire moral philosophy of Jankélévitch: within irreversible time, human beings are free to the extent that they can do and undo what they have done, but they cannot undo the fact-of-having-done. Evil deeds, once committed, are recognized as irrevocable for the moral life to come, and no repentance, no compensation, no expiation can extinguish them. If the human being is determined by the French philosopher as essentially free, bad conscience is the moral scenario stemming from the two fundamental feelings of remorse and regret, which are analyzed in detail throughout these pages. *Du mensonge* (1942, PM 203–288) and *Le mal* (1947, PM 289–372) date back to Jankélévitch's years of resistance against Nazism in occupied France. Evil deeds and mendacity are both linked to a misuse of freedom. Their possibility, Jankélévitch warns us, is given with consciousness as such. Whereas freedom can always choose between Good and Evil (the author clearly diverges from the legacy of Socratic-Christian ethical intellectualism), consciousness can similarly choose between truthfulness and mendacity. At the same time, no evil deed can be integrated into a pre-established Leibnizian-Hegelian harmony: in its irrevocable character, it remains something irreconcilable.

While the Evil is acknowledged as irrevocable and is set therefore as perpetual, *L'austerité et la vie morale* (1956, PM 373–582) explains how the Good, on the other side, is tragically transitory. According to Jankélévitch, it is impossible to stay in a virtuous state: this state must be constantly regained through the event of the instant. Hence, vigilance becomes the fundamental

condition of a moral life, which requires bringing the vital fullness of the instant into the plot of interval-time. Nevertheless, the risk of complacency toward one's good deed should not be underestimated. Between being moral and its consciousness lies a conflict, and it seems to be insoluble. This thesis finds more articulated expression in *Le pur et l'impur* (1960, PM 583–814). Entirely immersed in the stream of time as irreversible becoming, given its character of constant alteration, human beings cannot achieve purity. Therefore, they cannot assert themselves or their deeds as "pure." On the contrary, every situation needs intransigence to discern Good from Evil, and innocence, that is, self-forgetfulness, is finally individuated by Jankélévitch as the sole criterion of purity for the moral action. In the same time period, *L'aventure, l'ennui, le sérieux* (1963, PM 815–990) reflects on three fundamental forms of living in the present time, and comes to similar conclusions. In the adventure (first form), the tension towards the future is constantly exposed to the risk of degenerating into a search for intensity as such. Along this way, the adventure turns itself fatally in the stagnation of boredom (second form). Seriousness (third form), that is existential commitment to the here and now in the protracted time of interval, finally represents Jankélévitch's antidote to the excesses of adventure and boredom. As such, seriousness encompasses vigilance and intransigence towards the fugacity of the Good, recognizing them as key virtues for the flourishing of moral life.

According to *Le pardon* (1967, PM 991–1150), facing irrevocable evil deeds requires the force of forgiveness. Yet, genuine forgiveness is something rare. Instead of providing a comprehensive definition of forgiveness, Jankélévitch phenomenologically individuates its three main features and their corresponding forms of simili-forgiveness, which are currently circulating, and are mostly (and wrongly!) understood as forgiveness. The instantaneous forgiving event is confused with the long process of temporal decay; the extra-legal, graceful gift of forgiveness is confused with an intellectual excuse, which elaborates reasons to forgive; the personal relation, that engages the victim and his/her perpetrator is replaced by a self-help oriented liquidation of the past. *Le pardon* constitutes Jankélévitch's final answer to the moral enigma he raised in *La mauvaise conscience*. Indeed, the struggle between the irrevocability of Evil, expressed by assassinating, and the fugacity of Good, expressed by the loving force of forgiveness, constitute an unsolvable dyad, which substantiates his entire moral philosophy. This is well-condensed in the

biblical sentence “love is as strong as death” (Song of Solomon 8:6, PM 1148), on which Jankélévitch comments in the final pages of *Le pardon*, which also closes the volume *Philosophie morale*.

Thanks to this collection, Jankélévitch’s philosophical reflection on forgiveness can now be understood in its articulated complexity, enormously benefitting from being inserted into the broader frame of his moral reflection.

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