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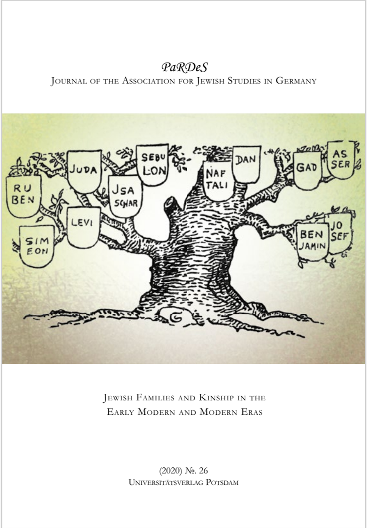
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Peter Banki, The Forgiveness to Come: The Holocaust and the Hyper-Ethical (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 208 p., $ 28.

Much ink has been spilled over forgiveness, much of it critical, especially in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Peter Banki, the son of Hungarian Holocaust survivors, decided to return to this topic for his dissertation in philosophy at New York University in 2009, which forms the nucleus for this book. He begins with Simon Wiesenthal's classic *The Sunflower,* first published in France in 1968, in which Wiesenthal recounts an autobiographical event of being summoned by a dying SS-man ("Karl") who wanted to confess to "a Jew." Wiesenthal distributed this story to prominent Jewish, Christian, and secular intellectuals and solicited their reflections and responses on whether he should have granted forgiveness to the man who confessed his crimes to him. He had remained silent in the encounter, as well as later, when he visited the man's mother in post-war Germany without revealing the son's guilt. For the "Nazi-hunter" Simon Wiesenthal, the question of forgiveness was always bound up with the quest for justice.

Banki finds *The Sunflower's* lasting significance in the "The Survival of the Question," as he titles the first chapter devoted to its analysis (20–48). Wiesenthal's silence leaves the question of forgiveness unanswered, which continues to compel respondents to consider and reconsider the moral, political, and religious dilemmas raised by the Shoah. The Symposium, a collection of commentators that has expanded in every edition and in different translations, exposes the rift between more Jewish- and more Christian-identified writers: Christian-rooted critics find it problematic, if not impossible, to refuse forgiveness, while Jewish-identified writers have the opposite impulse and find it impossible to grant forgiveness in the name of others, the victims, who had been killed at the hands of "Karl." According to the Jewish tradition, it is the victim's prerogative to forgive. God or third persons (priests) cannot forgive in the place of the victim, neither must the community, which is under sacred obligation to render justice. The Jewish-Christian dialogue begun by Wiesenthal's *Sunflower* in the 1960s has motivated Christian theologians to challenge and critique Christianity's instinctive preference for forgiveness, which is deeply rooted in the proclamation of Christ's death for the redemption and forgiveness of the sins of humanity. Centuries of Christian supremacist supersessionism have produced the false antagonism between the "Christian" God of love and forgiveness and the "Jewish" God of justice and vengeance. The primacy of grace over law, and of forgiveness over justice is deeply rooted in Christianity's *Teaching of Contempt* (Jules Isaac, 1960). This antagonism creates a reductionist misrepresentation of both Judaism and Christianity. Banki questions this false dichotomy from the Jewish side and searches for new ways to think about forgiveness after the Shoah from a secular, Jewish, philosophical perspective. The origins of the book as a dissertation are still apparent, and the erudite analysis of various Jewish philosophical thinkers at times overpowers the clear exposition of Banki's innovative thesis.

In his second chapter titled, "Reading Forgiveness in a Marrano Idiom" (49–66), Banki turns to the analysis of Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), who is clearly a major influence on his thinking. In order to reclaim the discourse of forgiveness from Christian dominance, he draws on the theme of hidden traditions. Marranos, hidden Jews, were forced to convert to Christianity by the Spanish Inquisition and lived on the religious boundaries between Judaism and Christianity, intensely alert and knowledgeable about religious codes of the majority culture. Today, Christian discourses of reconciliation have been thoroughly deconstructed, secularized, and globalized in the *Age of Apology* (Mark Gibney, 2008). In his third chapter, "Crimes against Humanity" (67–82) Banki maintains that the post-Shoah world created new laws that encode humanity in the place of God. The law, which includes an expansive and broad list of heinous acts, constructs humanity as sacred, but unlike God, the violation of humanity can no longer be atoned. There is no statute of limitations or possibility for expiation. Therefore, both Jacques Derrida and French philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch (1903–1985), affirm the value of forgiveness within certain limits. In his last chapter, titled "A Hyper-Ethics of Irreconcilable Contradictions" (83–101), Banki turns to Jankélévitch, who is well known for his essay on "The Unforgiveable," an excerpt from *L'Imprescriptible* (1971), but unknown for his book on *Le Pardon* (1967), which was not translated form the French until 2005. In Jankélévitch and Derrida, Banki finds Jewish philosophical voices to build his case for the *Forgiveness to Come.*

This notion plays on Jewish messianic expectations of the "world to come" (*olam ha-ba*), when suffering, injustice, and irreconcilable differences will be settled. The *eschaton*, the messianic fulfillment at the end of times is a shared Christian and Jewish expectation. Its advent is beyond human control and beyond reach, it is a reality that can only be tasted and glimpsed in the present (on the Sabbath, for instance). Speaking of the "forgiveness to come" means to insist on its incomplete, unfulfilled, and unimaginable character. As an eschatological concept, such forgiveness militates against closure and healing, reconciliation and repair. Indeed, the refusal to reconcile is more faithful to this eschatologically loaded concept than any well-meaning gesture that erases and forecloses, denies or diminishes the broken and wounded condition of the present: "One keeps open the possibility of forgiveness more faithfully by refusing to reconcile or forgive in any conventional, that is metaphysical or ontotheological sense. If it happens, it must each time invent its language and its secret" (128). The "it" of that sentence refers to the "joke", which in the tradition of Jewish humor disrupts the relentless reality of enmity and releases hilarity and sympathy. "Jewish humor in its regional specificity retains the prophetic and the messianic: the experience of unspoken compassion in the shared recognition of the impossible, in unconscious forgiveness perhaps and/or forgiveness to come" (130). The joke is a form of communication that goes beyond calculated exchange, an excessive and "hyper-ethical" outreach to the humanity of the other. Jokes upend and reverse power dynamics by exposing and ridiculing the brute stupidity of power. In jokes, victims defy degradation and assert their humanity. In proposing the joke as prototype and channel of native Jewish forgiveness, Banki releases the ethical strictures that maintain frozen dichotomies. Despite the impossibility of forgiveness and the renunciation of closure, healing, and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung,* people wager new relationships and start laughing their way into a moment of shared understanding of human mutuality. And while we may not get there, the idea of the "forgiveness to come" sustains resistance to the nihilism of despair.

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