



Vladimir Jankélévitch and the Question of Forgiveness

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The essays focus on the work of Vladimir Jankélévitch as a moral philosopher, particularly that aspect of his work dealing with the question of forgiveness. They treat topics such as the place of moral philosophy in relation to his work as a whole, his relationship to contemporary French thought, and the backgrounds of classical Judaic tradition and world literature. The centerpiece of this tableau is Jankélévitch's book *Le Pardon* (Forgiveness).

Chief among the distinguishing characteristics is its rigorous defense of what might be termed a forgiveness free of the entanglements that taint the common understanding of forgiveness—what Jankélévitch refers to as pseudo-forgiveness. The advocacy of forgiveness in the name of political or social expediency, as well as the psychological benefit for the victim, are similarly repudiated.

In their place, Jankélévitch substitutes a radical forgiveness that is “initial, sudden, spontaneous”—not able to erase the past, but able to create a new future and, thereby, a new relationship to the past. He does not permit even this future, however, to serve as forgiveness’s justification. For him, beyond all justifications, beyond justice itself, forgiveness is a gift akin to love.

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Editorial Review

Review

A latter-day humanist in the tradition of Montaigne, the essays of the French-Jewish philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch display a delicacy of insight and a depth of feeling as applied to the broadest range of themes—music, laughter, nostalgia, evil, irony and death. In this volume, a distinguished group of philosophers and historians turn their attention to the essay on forgiveness for which Jankélévitch is best known. Cast into high relief by the horrors of mid-twentieth century European history, the questions raised herein retain a moral urgency undiminished by time and no less of relevance today. (Peter E. Gordon, Amabel B. James Professor of History, Harvard University)

About the Author

Alan Udooff is professor of philosophy and religious studies at St. Francis College. He received his doctorate degree in philosophy from Georgetown University. His publications include edited volumes on Kafka, Rosenzweig, and Leo Strauss.

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