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Forgiveness

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Temporal Decay

If decay is a natural effect of duration, then it is necessary to admit that forgiveness truly confirms and even ratifies the very intention of nature. It is not that the decay of material things or minerals results from the temporality of time, strictly speaking. It is not time itself that transforms things, nor that gradually erodes them (because time is impalpable). It is the action of certain physical factors in time; it is the wind and the sea over the course of years but it is not the years themselves. It is not the minutes that muffle the sound waves of an echo or the vibrations of a diapason that fade, but it is the resistance of the air! On the other hand, the decay of living organisms, if it is accelerated by physical or chemical agents, results above all from a qualitative and irreversible entropy that is essential to a lived becoming. No, certainly, man never bathes twice in a row in the same river. Rather, it is necessary to say more: it is not the same man who bathes two times in a row . . . If we believe Heraclitus, at least the bather would stay the same over the course of his baths, for even in mobility there is an immobile system of reference. We know that Bergsonian superevolutionism renounces this last kernel of substantiality and immutable fixedness. All is change, including the subject that changes. Situations are modified along with the people who are in these situations. Other times, other problems! In this respect, forgiveness is very much headed in the direction of evolution, which always forges ahead. Forgiveness is opposed to rancor as that which makes itself is opposed to what is ready-made. Let us show in what manner forgiveness confirms the natural dimension of becoming and annuls the obstinate resistance of men to this becoming. For in all temporality there is a recto and a verso, a position and a negation . . .

I. To Come Back Is Still to Come to Pass. Becoming Is Always Right Side Out.¹

Becoming, in the first place, is essentially futurity and, secondarily, preterition. That is, depending on whether one looks toward the future or toward the past, becoming ceaselessly posits a future, and with the same stroke and at the same time it deposits a past behind it. Successively, it makes the future present and makes the present past, and it does this in the same movement and with the same continual renewal. Indeed, to construct a becoming, a *recollection* and an *appearing*² are necessary at the same time. But here there are not two opposite movements made for thwarting each other, for if appearing and "settling up" pulled in diametrically opposed directions, they would neutralize each other reciprocally, and, when all is said and done, becoming would come to a halt at dead center. Indeed, becoming qua advent of the future³ is secondarily a factory of memories. But these souvenirs, which are the natural deposit of position just as valleys are the reverse of mountains, fill the imagination and normally print an *élan* and an increased push on futurity, the role of memory being to enrich experience and not to retard the action; on the trampoline of memories, the action leaps higher and more energetically. Such is the effect of the alternative!⁴ Alteration makes what is other come to pass by driving back what is the same. Innovation actualizes novelty by draining the overabundance of memories, by favoring the deflation of the memory. And while the Not-yet becomes a Now, the Now, ipso facto, becomes an Already-more. Tomorrow will be Today, and Today will be Yesterday, and all of this in one single and same direction; such is the intention of becoming, for irreversible becoming has one *direction* and one vocation! All that goes in the direction of the current and of history is, therefore, right side out. Everything that goes in the opposite direction or swims in the countercurrent, meaning upstream, is headed in reverse. It is a matter of becoming in the direction of time and not of coming back to a countertime or against the grain of time . . . Even if the "recollection" is not an "appearing" in reverse, it is more the "coming to pass" that

is the true "coming" right side out.⁵ Does not what has come to pass express the Elpidian⁶ essence of coming, which is entirely hope, adventure, and advent? Coming back is not so much coming in reverse, it is rather in the manner of ghosts⁷ to feign coming, for "coming back" is a simulacrum and a phantom of what has come. As an inverted progression, regression especially is a fundamental immobility under the appearance of movement: it stays stationary more than it goes backward. Recollection is this false coming. But in certain cases it can appear as a wave of return that tends to neutralize futurity. Among all the forms of false coming and of anachronism, rancorous retrogradation, even though it is not literally regressive, is without a doubt the most passionate, for rancor is not a recollection like others; rancor does not consent to evolve, as does recollection; nor does it allow itself to be colored by the chronological succession of events, as does recollection. Rather, the man of *ressentiment*, being similar to the remorseful man, clings and clutches to the preterit and stubbornly hardens against futurity. Aggressive rancor resists becoming; and forgiveness, on the contrary, favors becoming by ridding it of impediments that weigh upon it, it cures us of rancorous hypertrophy. The conscience having liquidated its old objects of rancor resembles a voyager without baggage; with a light step, it goes out to meet life. Or, if one prefers the vertical dimension, conscience, lightened of the weight of memories and *ressentiments*, surmounts the weight like an astronaut and raises itself toward a height in one leap, after having jettisoned the ballast. Make way for novelties! In this way, forgiveness undoes the last shackles that tie us down to the past, draw us backward, and hold us down. By allowing the coming times to come to pass, and, in doing so, accelerating this coming, forgiveness indeed confirms the general direction and the sense of a becoming that puts the tonic accent on the future. Forgiveness helps becoming to become, while becoming helps forgiveness to forgive. In general, rancorous anachronism does not resist the

5. [*Même si le "souvenir" n'est pas un "survenir" à l'envers, c'est bien l'"advenir" qui est le véritable "venir" à l'endroit.* The phrase "venir" à l'endroit" can mean either "coming right side out" or "coming into place," both of which allude to "appearing" (*survenir*) and "coming to pass" (*advenir*).]

6. [Saint Elpidius (d. 422 CE) is mentioned in book 5, chapter 11 of Augustine's *Confessions*. There, Augustine mentions that he was impressed, already when he was in Carthage, with Elpidius's arguments against the Manicheans.]

7. [*Revenants*: Jankélévitch is playing on two senses of the word *revenant*. Taken as a noun, it means "ghost." However, understood as a gerund, it means "coming back."]

1. [*Revenir, c'est encore advenir. Le devenir est toujours à l'endroit.*]

2. [*Pour faire un devenir, il faut à la fois, le souvenir et le survenir.*]

3. [*Devenir, en tant que avènement de l'avenir.*]

4. [Jankélévitch authored a work entitled *L'Alternative* (Paris: Alcan, 1938), and the notion of the alternative is an important theme in his works.]

irresistible force of futurity for very long . . . —In truth, becoming is always right side out, even when it seems to come back. Becoming always forges ahead even when it seems to retrace its steps: apparent steps backward follow in a chronological succession invariably directed toward the future, and that is that. In this way, everyone is in the direction of history, including those who seem to move against the current. The movement that posits in depositing and deposits in positing is position, in the end: this is its last word. Futurity-preterition is futurity in the end, and it is only this. Better yet, preterition itself is a moment of futurity, a futurity that is more rapid in growth, more laborious in aging, a futurity all the same and in every case! *Erchomenos êxei, veniens veniet!*⁸ *Idou erchetai, ecce venit.*⁹ There is only one sole “coming,” and this coming, positive or apparently negative, is becoming itself! For example, however much the events of which our memory holds a recollection have taken place in times past, nevertheless the act by which we remember them surely comes to pass now. The recollected event indeed carries its date in the past of chronicles, but recollection itself is each time a novelty in the present of the chronology. My present memories are an event of this very day. Saint Augustine said this using other terms. And thus, even anachronism too in its way, in its turn, and in its anachronistic manner is a piece of the chronology of which it is an anachronism: anachronism is an untimely episode of temporality. But if anachronism does not reverse the irreversible, then it slows down the tide. Reactionary forces hinder progress without, however, stopping it and a fortiori without inverting its course; on the whole, they do not change anything in the general tendency of evolution. Regression does not go in the opposite direction of progression, regression is simply a retarded progression. Retrogression that believes itself to be retrograde is simply a sluggish progress. Regressive progress, then, only differs from progressive progress in its qualitative tonality. The souvenir is this rallentando of becoming; it does not make becoming come back and it just barely slows it down. And as for rancor, it too acts only as an obstacle and as a retarding cause. Sooner or later, the rancorous person will give in to the omnipotence of time and to the weight of the accumulated years, for time is almost as omnipotent as death, and time is more tenacious than the most tenacious of wills, for it is irresistible! And the rancorous person will grow weary of holding a grudge

8. [See Habakuk 2:3: “It will surely come.”]

9. [See Ezekiel 7:5–6: “Behold, it comes.”]

against his offender before becoming grows weary of becoming . . . No, nothing resists this silent, continuous, and implacable force, this truly infinite pressure of progressive forgetting. No *ressentiment*, no matter how stubborn it is, can hold fast in the face of this mass of indifference and disaffection. Everything counsels forgetting! The memory, which is conquered in advance, can oppose futurity only by a defensive measure that is always provisional and generally hopeless . . . One day or another, in the long run, oceanic forgetting will submerge all rancor underneath its leveling grayness, just as the desert sands finish by burying dead cities and defunct civilizations, and just as the accumulation of centuries and millennia ultimately will envelop inexpressible crimes and undying glories in the immensity of nothingness. We know that Marcus Aurelius cast an eagle’s eye view on this infinity of history that crushes even the most long-lasting renowned figures and on this infinity that annihilates the most memorable exploits: *mikron de hē mēkistē husterophēmia*.¹⁰ Minimal is the longest posthumous glory. By comparison with infinite history, every memory goes toward zero, like a point in space. Centuries follow upon centuries; in the end, it is as if the exploit never took place, as if the hero never existed. And in the end we come to doubt whether the unforgivable crime was ever actually committed. The fact and the nonfact, *factum* and *infactum*, reabsorbed in the one same non-being, become indiscernible from each other. *Ducunt fata volentem, nolentem trahunt*¹¹ . . . This amounts to saying: *volens nolens*,¹² and whether you like it or not, the person has to march in the direction of futurity, to go where time leads him. Sooner or later, time will have the last word. *Volens nolens?* Then, rather *volens!* Since in the two cases the result will be the same, it is better to consent to time and be in full agreement with history. It is better spontaneously to assume one’s destiny, in order not to have to suffer it. Sooner or later? Then, better sooner than later, right away is even better; and in any case as soon as possible! Yes, the sooner the better. Since it

10. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 3.10. [“Discard all else: cling to these few things only. Remember, moreover, that each man lives only this present moment; as for the rest, either it has been lived in the past or it is but an uncertain future. Small is the moment which each man lives, small too the corner of the earth which he inhabits; even the greatest posthumous fame is small, and it too depends upon a succession of short-lived men who will die very soon, who do not know even themselves, let alone one who died long ago.” Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), 22.]

11. [“The fates guide the willing and drag the unwilling.”]

12. [“Whether willing or not.”]

decidedly concerns a dilemma, since temporality in any case will be the strongest, since in any case forgetting will one day or another do its job, and since memory is a lost cause, one might as well forgive forthwith and finish once and for all with the lost cause and a condemned memory. Forgiveness, forestalling inevitable forgetting and inevitable obsolescence, recognizes in sum the invincibility of inexorable destiny, for we can apply what Aristotle and after him Leon Shestov said about the *ametapeistos anagkē*.¹³ In order not to be crushed by the machine of the temporal process, the good memory anticipates its certain defeat, it takes the part of forgetting without getting to the point where becoming compels it, and as a consequence it hastens to forgive. It does not persist stubbornly in conserving outdated modes, in keeping in circulation decirculated currencies, in remaining stuck on outdated hatreds: it favors becoming by accelerating it.

II. Forgetting

And besides, even if the rancorous person does not forget the offense, those around him and new generations have already forgotten in his place. The latecomer, risking being swept up by his epoch, must thus compensate for the anachronism and salvage the general movement. He resembles an instrumentalist who is late and who runs and even leaps several measures ahead in order to get back in sync with the orchestra. In its own way, forgiveness erases a sort of dissonance. Before the discrepancy becomes irreparable, the rancorous person hurries to forgive . . . for history marches on more quickly than the healing of our wounds. The man who has been passed up will survive if he remains contemporary with his time or places himself in the same time as that of his contemporaries. We often say: the circumstances have changed, actuality and opportunity have been displaced, problems today arise in a completely different manner, and so on. Old feelings of

13. [*Ametapeistos anagkē*: the inexorable or that which cannot be persuaded. See Leon Shestov, *Athens and Jerusalem*, [trans. Bernard Martin (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1966), Second Foreword and also book 4, §66. The reference is to a passage in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. See *Metaphysics* in *Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 5.5.1015a31–33: "And necessity is held to be something that cannot be persuaded—and rightly, for it is contrary to the movement which accords with the purpose and with reasoning."]

rancor, inhibited by the present and by the transformation of the historical context, become just as unreal as ghosts, as unreal as superstitious relics, as ridiculous as the outdated dresses of our grandmothers.—The evolution of each individual, including the offender himself, sums up, in its own way, that of successive generations. The person against whom I hold a grudge today is no longer the person who offended me earlier; in short, I continue to have rancor toward someone who no longer exists, toward the shadow of a guilty person, toward a phantom of the sinner. The refusal to forgive immobilizes the guilty person in his misdeed, identifies the agent with the act, and reduces the being of this agent to the having-done. But the misunderstood person protests against this simplification: one lie does not yet make a liar. The person infinitely exceeds the sin in which our rancor wants to imprison him. When we aim at a planet with the intention of hitting the target, it is necessary to take the movement of the planet into account, that is to say, the place that it will occupy in the sky when the rocket is supposed to reach it, and that is not its present place. Without this correction, we would be aiming at an empty place, at a place where there was indeed something at the moment of ignition and where already there is no longer anything. The rancorous person, fixing the offender in his immutable, incorrigible, and definitive essence as a guilty man, also sets out after an empty place. All the despair of *ressentiment* is contained in this powerlessness. *Ressentiment* does not even know whom to go after; the person whom it blames no longer exists!—All is thus dragged along in the general movement of becoming. The epoch that evolves irreversibly, the offender who is no longer the same but another person, and finally the offended himself—all of these advance along the route of time, with unequal speed, whether they like it or not. And just as the rancorous person is a sort of anachronism in full contemporaneity, the rancor of this rancorous person can also be a local anachronism and an outdated element at the heart of the individual. For all the ingredients of this individual syncrasy that we call a psychism do not necessarily have the same cadence, nor do they necessarily march to the same step or with the same speed. All are not regulated by the same diapason, or at the same tempo. Personal life is a complex of lines that are relatively independent and each of which sometimes develops on its own terms. A man in the avant-garde of progress in the social sphere can be completely reactionary in his aesthetic prejudices. A lover of abstract painting can be completely outdated in his musical tastes and prefer Ambroise Thomas to Stravinsky. Similarly, little islands of inactivity—an unconsolated distress, an obsessive

remorse, an old and undigested rancor, the tenacious memory of an unfor-
 given offense—can survive in the midst of a conscience that is wholly mod-
 ern. The articulation and the pluralism of lines of conscience most often
 save us the trouble of resembling the pope's mule that kept its kick in re-
 serve for seven years and that itself wholly became this vengeful kick.¹⁴ In
 general, man is not this mule that is offended, humiliated, and passionately
 obsessed with the fixed idea of revenge. The part of oneself that has stayed
 vindictive and that resists the natural movement of history is generally a lo-
 cal portion of lived life. Rancor often resembles a lump that becoming has
 not yet succeeded in dissolving. While our vital interests are moved accord-
 ing to new friendships and preoccupations of the hour, according to novel
 terms in which problems henceforth pose themselves, a ghost has survived
 in full modernity. A witness of time gone by, the antiquated phantom con-
 tinues to wander in our memory. And this survival is all the more anti-vital
 because it is the survival neither of a defunct love, nor of a ridiculously tena-
 cious fidelity, nor of an out-of-season gratitude, but rather of a truly posthu-
 mous hatred. If the love that we have for a specter is a "bewitched love," then
 rancor itself would be bewitched in two respects—first, because it too out-
 lives its cause, and then because it is the memory of evil,¹⁵ a heinous recol-
 lection and inverted gratitude, which is, on the contrary, *eumnémie* and a
 good memory of kindness. Is not *ressentiment* a type of recognition in re-
 verse? Love at least has not always been bewitched and becomes bewitched
 only beyond the grave, once it is bewitched by magic spells of reminiscence.
 Instead, hatred was already bewitched on the day of the affront, when every-
 thing justified it and when its actuality was indeed alive. What psycho-
 analysis will exorcise this specter from long ago? Time obliges the old-
 fashioned person not only to be a contemporary of the times of everyone,
 not only to mark the same time as his epoch, but also to be a contemporary
 of his own time and to adjust all the contents of his conscience to the same
 "Now." Let evolution carry away our last fidelities, erase our last supersti-
 tions, and dispose of that which survives from an absolute past! Temporal
 forgiveness dissolves the worries and migraines that linger in our present,
 just as time of itself makes the regional dischronisms of chronology proper

14. (Jankélévitch is referring to a story called "The Pope's Mule" ("La Mule du Pape") from
 Alphonse Daudet's *Lettres de mon moulin* (Letters from My Mill) about life in Provence, a work
 that first appeared in 1866.)

15. In Russian, this is the name that we give to "rancor": *zlopamiatstvo*.

disappear. It mobilizes all fixed ideas, consoles sorrows that are incapable of
 being consoled, wards off obsessive remorse, and, in a word, thaws tena-
 cious rancors. It liquidates by liquefying. The man who consents to becom-
 ing and renounces the delight of constant repetition makes fluid the advent
 of the future and lubricates the succession of the before and the after. He
 abounds in the direction of alteration that makes the other come to pass. For
 this man, slippery futurition will dissolve the pebbles of rancorous preter-
 ition that constantly tend to re-form themselves behind us.

III. Decay

The accelerando of futurition necessitates, by its very nature, the ritardando
 of preterition. The advent of the future and the suppression of remem-
 brances are just one and the same process of becoming, considered, as be-
 fore, to be right side out, or, as now, to be in reverse. As long as becoming is
 a continual creation turned toward the future, it counsels us simply to wel-
 come something else, to think of something else, to open ourselves up to the
 alterity of the next day. A conscience without memory continually looks be-
 yond as if nothing ever took place. But as long as becoming retains memo-
 ries, alteration, slowed down by the weight of the past, implies the decay of
 this past, for the return to the status quo ante is impossible in any case. If
 becoming were futurition pure and simple, and incessant innovation, then
 frivolous forgetting would erase the recollection of the offense forthwith,
 at once, and as if by magic. Forgiveness (if we admit that this immediate
 forgiveness, that this instantaneous and continued forgetting merits be-
 ing called "forgiveness") would thus intervene in the innocence of each new
 minute; or even better, forgiveness would be given with the offense, or the
 instant afterward, which amounts to the same thing. Such is the case of a
mens momentanea, of a mind that is instantaneous and without memory, for
 which futurition is reduced to an *aeternum nunc* and a perpetual present.
 So, there is no longer even forgiveness, for forgiveness requires that a min-
 imal delay open up between the offense and the absolution, that we have
 had the time, even if it were ten seconds, to hold a grudge against the sinner;
 it requires that infinitesimal rancor at least have the time to form; for *ressen-
 timent*, a sentiment on top of a sentiment, a sentiment with an exponent,
 does not exist without temporalization. Without this temporalization, with-
 out this interval that perpetuates the injury, where would forgiveness find

something to forgive? But the punctual, inconsistent "consciousness" of which we are speaking is the consciousness of a stupid protozoan that is stuck where it is on account of unconsciousness. Affronts and insults for this carefree consciousness are only will-o'-the-wisps, instantaneous fulgurations, and disappearing appearances. For lived time is not only innovative succession, it is, moreover, the conservatory and depository of memories. And memory, if it is not literally regressive, at least slows down and weighs down the *élan* of the progression. Without conservation, however, innovation would not even be innovative, for it is this mixture of innovation and conservation, the latter slowing down the former and the former pushing on the latter, that manufactures the relative renewal, the name of which is becoming. The new incessantly replaces the old. A present that is always other because it is always the same, a present continually different from the past and yet similar to this past, a present slowly transformed over the course of one thousand imperceptible modifications—this is what is suitable to being called evolution. This becoming, which is jointly futuration and preterition, has futuration itself as a consequence. What is more, the consequence of a progression and accumulation of memories is quite simply called progress. Progress is measured only in reference to experience. Progress represents, as it were, the difference between a pure futuration without counterbalance and a slowed-down futuration. The irreversible itself does not consist in turning its back to the past, for becoming always retains something from this past, but by continually evolving in the same direction. It is prohibited to come back backward; it is not forbidden to hold memories. The impossibility of becoming young again does not entail the necessity of being unfaithful or ungrateful. Insofar as becoming is futuration, its *élan* is slowed down by the weight of memories. But insofar as it is preterition, then it is the patrimony of memories, on the contrary, that is eaten away, nibbled away, and reduced by the *élan* of an innovative and madly extravagant futuration. Our sentiments demonstrate this: if the futurism of the project and of hope is retarded by backward-looking attachment, then attachment to the past by rancor and by remorse, by fidelity, or by regret and by gratitude disintegrates little by little with the effect of futuration. In rancor, there is something that clings on with a desperate fierceness, fighting inescapable becoming. In its turn, fragile gratitude is a type of paradoxical impossible undertaken by the grateful man despite the irreversible, and is sooner or later destined for nothingness. Fidelity is in the same situation. It is miraculous that the faithful person, the obstinate person stands up to the irre-

sistible forces of disaffection and forgetting. Be it a heroic challenge or a mad protest, fidelity keeps its word against all odds. Or rather, it will keep its word . . . until there is a new order! A faithful oath or a rancorous oath, an oath of gratitude or an oath of vengeance, the powerless word that is given wages an unequal battle against all-powerful history, a battle that always finishes badly and always ends up in betrayal. At last, in regret, time's victory is no longer in the future but in the present; and the defeat of man is no longer a menace or a possibility but precisely a defeat. Here something has already escaped; here time has already performed its work! Starting now, presence escapes us, and this is what, in its melancholy way of speaking, the misfortune of nostalgia expresses.—Thus, futuration slowed down by preterition has the progressive decay of memories as a consequence. Successively erasing every trace of the past, and at each minute suffocating the memories that are reborn at each minute, a futuration without preterition would be nothing other than amnesia and continued forgetting; by ossifying becoming, preterition without any futuration would condemn man to mortal sclerosis. Combined, futuration and preterition join together to make forgetting progressive. Halfway between conservation without hope and alteration without memory, forgetting will then appear as a continuous degradation. Memories, instead of being abolished in one fell swoop, weaken little by little and fade before disappearing. This disappearance, which could have been instantaneous, dilutes itself with the passing years. Now it is no longer necessary to say disappearance, but rather discoloration or disaffection . . . Or, using other images: as the conscience, on the route of time, successively distances itself from its past, the echo of this past subsides more and more. It is more and more difficult to be faithful, and finally it is impossible! And forgiveness at last results at the same time from the survival of the past in the present and the incessant influx of novelties. The tenor of our modernity in rancor becomes a little weaker every day. Each day witnesses the dose of *ressentiment* that subsists in us diminish like something left over from old insults, and this occurs up until the day on which the rancorous point ends up by losing itself in the mass of the present-past by disappearing into the accumulation of innumerable memories. In this manner, a rancor that has become infinitesimal destroys itself by dint of running out; at the limit and with habit helping out, moribund rancor itself dies from hunger. As is the case with old anger and old pain, nothing more will subsist of old rancor than a vague memory, which is a phantom rancor or a shadow of anger. For the offended person becomes tired of holding a grudge against

his offender! Time that erodes mountain chains and makes the pebbles on the beach smooth, time that levels all harshness and consoles all pain, soothing and healing time, is this not the vocation of decay? It appears as the dimension by which the past becomes less and less alive; it is the infallible comforter and the irresistible pacifier. That is to say in one way or another that futurity always has the last word. The erosion of rancor thus presupposes two opposite conditions: a residual past must linger in us in the form of memory, and the compelling movement that pulls us forward must always get the better of retarding traditions, when all is said and done. On the one hand, the traces of the event have to outlive the contingent event of aggression or sin, which causes relations between humans to veer off course. On the other hand, futurity has to make novelty come to pass incessantly, for a well-defined intention does not cease to orient becoming or to watch over the weakening of memory.—As with every qualitative mutation, this weakening is, moreover, irregular and intermittent; and in this, it rebels against scalar gradations. In the long run, time will have done its work; but it accomplishes this work piecemeal. The net result is that evolution will indeed have taken place in the direction of forgetting.—However, it does not take much for the memory to be further away and more vague day by day; no, loss of affection is not more complete today than yesterday, nor less complete than tomorrow! It is true that broadly speaking and after the event, time brings us forgetting and consolation, but it is not true that forgetting is proportional to the age of the memory or to the interval that has passed. It is not true that with each fraction of time there corresponds a proportional attenuation of rancor, for quality, sense, and intention cannot be divided up and, consequently, are incommensurable with the time that has passed or with the path covered. Quality is a totality that is altered qualitatively by always staying total. Decay is, therefore, only a metaphor for fastening down ideas. And just as the general truth about aging might seem to be refuted in detail by apparent periods of rejuvenation, or at least by stabilizations that are more or less long, or at least by a temporary slowing down of senescence, so the uncontestable truth about the loss of affection can find itself temporarily refuted by sudden acts of revenge from memory, by abrupt returns of sorrow, and by subtle outbursts of *ressentiment*. The reactivated preterit momentarily slows down the unyielding process of forgetting and provisionally interrupts the ineluctable consolation that, sooner or later, will console the inconsolable. It is in bereavement that is on its way to withering that

sincere tears reappear: such are these final high fevers that sometimes come to retard the general process of convalescence. However, the temporal “forgiveness” that is more or less slowed down by resurgences of memory will ineluctably have the last word. Rancor does not disappear *by dint of* losing its fine edge, and nevertheless it *finishes up by* disappearing! Put in another way, forgiveness results from an irregular but fatal diminuendo and from an unequal but irresistible decrescendo! . . . As time passes, the returns that the flame makes are more and more rare, the points of *ressentiment* are less acute. *Grosso modo*¹⁶ the curve of rancorous chronology, with its zigzags, stages, and turnarounds, tends toward the zero point of the horizontal; forgetting is a leveling off from below. Without a doubt, the graph of forgetting would have the same profile as the graph of a pain that is irregularly but progressively amortized. For the injured person, life fatally reclaims its place, except of course when the organism that is too gravely affected can no longer repair the consequences of the trauma that hit it. Better yet, if the aptitude of the organism for restoring its health is necessarily limited, then the elasticity of a soul that is pained or offended is practically infinite. Any affront that we do not finish with in time by forgetting, or any sorrow that, under the effect of habituation, does not empty itself little by little of its fervor, becomes parrotry and drivel, the crocodile’s affliction and the crocodile’s fidelity. Of the old rancor that is hardened, lignified, and ossified, there remains hardly more than mimicry without a soul. In such a way, the inconsolable widow who is finally consoled continues twenty years later to celebrate the liturgy of memory, and mechanically performs the gestures, and mechanically pronounces the words of conjugal piety without even thinking of the deceased. The fervor of the anniversary is on the path toward extinction, and one can anticipate that the survivors soon will cease completely to commemorate it. The man of time, a finite creature, is made neither for an eternal penalty, nor for an undying rancor; for such an eternity is really the hell of the damned; for such an inconceivable eternity would actually be unbearable despair for us. In any case, the fact of progressive erasure, resulting from a futurity retarded by the preterit or by a preterit turned back by the future, proves at least that the past does not allow itself to be abolished without protesting. The progressive nature of forgetting measures the tenacity of memory, just as the length of the agony

16. [“Roughly speaking.”]

measures the resistance and vitality of the organism. It does not matter: retrospectively and in the future anterior, time will have gotten the better of our rancor.

IV. Integration

This decay, which is a retarded nihilization, can offer itself to us in a more positive light. For the past rarely disappears without leaving any trace; the work of time in fact consists of integrating or digesting the adventitious event. The adventitious event passes in latency and becomes, as Bergson has shown, an integrating element and a secret component of our present. If decay is a simple attenuation that is physical and passive, then assimilation, adaptation, and regeneration are vital properties. The organism, indeed, appears as a totality that is incessantly deformed and transformed, revised and retouched, altered by the petty accidents of existence. It is life that takes the upper hand by digesting antivital factors, and likewise the character and the person in general are totalities that are at each instant enriched, complicated, dilated, and impregnated by experience. Once assimilated, the fault that is committed and the offense undergone can become invisible ingredients of this experience. Is not the whole value of repenting only in that it makes the misdeed itself contribute to our spiritual enrichment? When the repentant, prodigal son returns to the fold, having finished the circuit of adventures and tribulations, no differential any longer separates him in appearance from the son who stays at home. Yet an invisible *je ne sais quoi*, a completely pneumatic complication that is the ordeal of suffering and temptation, distinguishes him forever. The one who returned and the one who never left are now both at the same point, but an indelible past separates them. This is why, according to the Gospel, there will be more space in heaven for a single repentant tax collector than for nine hundred thousand irreproachable hypocrites.¹⁷ Just as the organism adapts to a strange body, so the offended person arrives at a *modus vivendi* with the offense. The offense that is rendered insensitive and painless, the offense that is transformed into an indifferent memory, the offense that is refrozen becomes an element of our personal past in the unconscious person. For-

17. [See the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, Luke 18:10-17.]

givenness would thus resemble a mediation that integrates the antithesis into a higher synthesis. Is not dialectic conciliation literally "reconciliation," that is, pacification and cessation of all belligerence? So the consciousness passes its time digesting snubs and insults. The insulted consciousness really has a stomach of iron. Or, to use other images . . . the reconciled or repentant consciousness carries, in the form of a scar, the trace of old moral traumas—forgiven offenses and redeemed misdeeds. We will, then, be tempted to consider an undigested rancor or an inconsolable pain as pathological cases. Is it not the medical and soothing function of healing that is curbed here? It is not astonishing that integration is accomplished in time—for time is the natural dimension of mediation, for mediation is essentially temporal. This irreducible element of restorative temporality mediates just as much the expiation of one's own sins as the forgiveness accorded to the sins and offenses of others. Neither repentance, one's relation to oneself, nor forgiveness, my relation to the other, evades this delay. Atonement for the misdeed that was committed and forgiveness for an injury suffered both take time.

V. Neither Futurition, Nor Decay, Nor Synthesis Replaces Forgiveness

Do futurition, decay, and integrationist synthesis suffice to justify forgiveness? Can they serve merely as surrogates? First, as for futurition, to say that time is irreversible succession and continual innovation is to recognize only half of the truth and to pass over the other half in silence. This is to neglect the fact that time is also conservation and perpetuity, and in the end it is to make little of the mnemonic property, which is the essential characteristic of every consciousness. Do not integration and the very decay that naturalism invokes in order to justify forgiveness suppose the persistence of vestiges and the permanence of memories? In this regard, the naturality of time would instead be an argument in favor of rancor!

Conversely, decay is the caricature of grace. Decay, when it appears as the forgetting of wounds that are received and affronts that are suffered, is not in the least a reason to forgive. Indeed, decay, a natural and physical fact above all, expresses the general orientation of vital processes, but it expresses these processes as long as they are headed in the end in the direction of death. For life itself, by virtue of a mysterious contradiction, is vital only

by the death that denies it. This is because lived time is infinitely ambiguous; time is *natura anceps*.¹⁸ Not only is it both futuration and conservation but futuration itself is both progress and retreat, since it is both development and aging at the same time. The living person does not cease to make himself real and to enrich himself by synthesis and apprenticeship—and in the same way he does not cease to consume what is possible to him and to come closer to nothingness. Day after day he sees his margin of hope dwindle in front of himself, until the final instant where, with the last future now actualized and having taken place, the person condemned to death finds himself nose to nose with despair. Or to say it better: being realizes itself in tending toward nonbeing! The singular paradox of temporal ambiguity! For a subject that is interior to itself, what has already been lived is still to be lived, and this indefinitely. But in the overconscious perspective of the witness and according to the objective chronology of calendars, what has already been lived is no longer to be lived, what has already been lived is nothing more than lived! For third parties, the portion of my life that has already been lived is removed by virtue of the irreversible expenditure on the average duration of the human life, which inscribes itself in a lapse of limited time. Such is the time of senescence: eternal at the time and for an globed present, finished objectively and after the event, finished for the retrospective consciousness and the superconsciousness, marked off minute after minute by the ticktock of clocks, and gnawed away little by little by the insect of time! Temporal ambiguity can take another form and encourage optimism and pessimism at the same time. On the one hand, time is the natural dimension according to which sicknesses normally evolve toward their cure; the cure of fevers, the healing of wounds, and the regeneration of tissues attest to the medical and curative virtue of time. The seething of the first pain subsides thanks to this large temporal sedative. Baltasar Gracián contrasts the fecund slowness of “temporization” to haste, which generates stunted specimens.¹⁹ But if time levels off that which protrudes in acute suffering and attenuates crises, then it also deadens the vital reactions of the organism. The leveling off that characterizes the cure of a fever also characterizes the cure of fatigue just as well. Becoming is, then, not only pain that is soothed but also, and ipso facto, biological energy that is blunted little by little: reflexes slow down and traumatisms are more and more difficult to

18. [“Dubious nature.”]

19. *L'homme du cours*, maxim 55. *Le Discret*, chapter 3.

offset. Becoming is, then, not only restoration of form, it is also and in the same manner growing weariness, the next paralysis, stagnation, and, more or less in the long term, inevitable death. Do not, then, make too much haste to rejoice over the consoling virtues of time, for in the last analysis it is death that will have the last word; for in the long run everything settles itself out and falls into place little by little, except for death, which never works out. This equivocal time, this vital-mortal time, in the name of which one advises us to forgive and that is a double-edged sword, is every bit as much at work in the disparity of habitual effects; for if the habit in the moment in which we acquire it manifests the suppleness of the living organism and its effective power of adaptation, then the habit once acquired is nothing more than mechanization and stuttering. The man who grows accustomed augments his powers, but the man who is habituated grows sluggish and tends toward the inertia of matter. Such is the double effect of the temporal procession on our sentiments, and even more so on *ressentiment*: time discolors all the colors and tarnishes the flash of emotions, time amortizes joy just as it consoles pain, time puts gratitude to sleep just as it disarms rancor, the one and the other indistinctly. It dries our tears, but it also puts out the flame of passion. Love loses itself in the sands; enthusiasm is destined for ossification, for mineralization, for fossilization. Time thus conceived would imply a type of fatal entropy. This time is degradation rather than maturation, for if evolution prevails over involution during the first part of life, then in the end it is dissolution that has the last word. Decay, which we invoke in order to justify forgiveness, is thus a continued death diluted by the passing years, a series of little deaths before the big one, or in fact a “mortification.” Can one preach forgiveness in the name of death and withering? Does forgiveness find its justification in our creaturely misery and in finitude in general? This would be to recognize that forgiveness, like forgetting, is a senile weakness and a poverty, a phenomenon of deficit, a headlong flight of consciousness, a letting go of memory and of the will . . . Forgetting is neither just a biological lack of concern, nor just a vital protection against impediments to living and importunate memories. It is another symptom of growing decrepitude; it is sinecure on the recto and negligence on the verso! This forgetful forgiveness is after all more amnesia than amnesty, more asthenia or atrophy than generosity, for it results from anesthesia and increasing apathy. It is not the good and long memory that is a void, rather it is forgetting, a privative phenomenon, that digs a hole in the fullness of memory! And consequently it is vivacious rancor that is tension and plenitude . . . Is fatigue a moral attitude?

Are lassitude and coldness ethical? To forgive out of lassitude, is this to forgive? Certainly not; lassitude is not ethical! Lassitude is shameful; lassitude is unworthy of the moral agent. The very idea that a will grows weary of willing in the long run is injurious for this will. The indefatigable will that never grows weary of willing, or of *holding a grudge* against the guilty person, such a will is antipodal to vague and forgetful desire, just as it is antipodal to ill will. Would time, the principle of forgetting, counsel us to forgive? But in this case here, time, the natural foundation of forgiveness, would also be a reason to show oneself as ungrateful and unfaithful, frivolous and versatile. We will perhaps distinguish good forgetting from bad forgetting . . . We will say: it is not the fact of forgetting itself that matters, rather it is the item that is forgotten that alone is decisive. Everything would depend on the nature of the past that we forget, just as, conversely, everything depends on the memory that we recollect. Depending on whether it concerns a good deed or a bad deed, the intentional quality of the memory changes completely. Forgetting an offense is called "forgiveness," whereas forgetting a good deed, when it is not egoism pure and simple, is called ingratitude or infidelity, lack of earnestness and of profundity, guilty frivolity and thoughtlessness. And reciprocally, a proper recollection of a misdeed is called rancor, whereas a proper recollection of a good deed is called recognition. Forgetting the misdeed and recollection of the good deed are both good, just as forgetting the good deed and remembering the misdeed are both an evil. Thus, a forgetting that is openness and receptiveness with an eye to the future must then be distinguished from a forgetting that is guilty negligence and mortal loss of affection. And the distance between the two types of forgetting is as large as the distance between selflessness and lack of interest.²⁰ It is true. But the asymmetry itself between the two types of forgetting stems from the transfiguring virtue of true forgiveness, and this transfiguring virtue has no relation to temporality. It is the chiasmus between misdeed and love that forms the essence of forgiveness! If the intention behind rancor is to render evil for evil and the intention behind gratitude is to render good for good, then it would be possible to consider forgiveness as a diametrical reversal of ingratitude, that is, as true *grace* that is right side out. For if ingratitude, so to speak, returns evil for good, then forgiveness, being

20. [*Désintéressement et désintérêt.*]

wholly the opposite, returns good for evil. Forgiveness goes beyond commutative justice, whereas ingratitude stays on this side of it. Under these circumstances, would forgiveness not resemble the type of biological amnesia that brings us the forgetting of old sufferings, old sicknesses, and bygone misfortunes and indeed protects the organism against bad memories? Far from it! The forgetting of offenses, when we truly forgive the offender, is not a simple, protective sinecure; the gratuitousness of generous remission here excludes all utilitarian finality. The chiasmus by virtue of which forgiveness denies or contradicts the offending intention thus owes nothing to the naturality of time.

The idea of integration, that is, of a synthesis, is not equivalent to transfiguring forgiveness any more than gradual decay is. We were saying that the forgetful person, off whom the offense glides without leaving the least trace, does not even know what he is supposed to forgive. The rancorous person who keeps the memory of evil in his gut knows what he has to forgive, and whom, but he does not will it. Does the person who swallows and stomachs the offense, who has an iron stomach, and who sins neither out of insufficiency nor out of surplus of memory at least forgive the offender? Certainly not; to stomach is not to forgive! To stomach and to assimilate call more for practical fitness, or for elasticity and utilitarian suppleness, than for generosity. The egoist knows the art of turning the insults that he receives to his advantage and turns snubs and humiliations into profitable lessons. Injuries themselves serve to enrich his experience. He knows how to use snubs in the way ascetics know how to use temptations and trials with an eye to spiritual formation. Who knows, for such champions of forgiving, maybe a snub that is received is an occasion for becoming more perfect! The one who turns the other cheek, not out of love of man as Jesus demanded, but in order to exercise his will and resistance to vindictive temptation, in order to soften his faculties of adaptation, in order to diversify the synthesis, and in order to integrate food that is particularly difficult to stomach into a totality that is always richer is a cunning and voracious man. This is not a generous man. We would do him a small favor by slapping him. His project is to exploit everything, to devour everything, and to lose nothing, not even the windfall of a slap in the face. Is this forgiving? No, this captivating and annexationist synthesis is not opened toward the other. Here, it is only a matter of me, of my profit, of my beautiful soul. Hypocrisy and complaisance, philauty and pleonexy are the true ulterior motives of closed forgiveness.

We would gladly call this simili-forgiveness "spiritual avarice," in the language of Saint Francis de Sales.²¹—There is still something worse. The synthesis that results from a mediation, if it really is a synthesis, takes into account the two extremes or the two contraries that the mediation has reconciled. Is compromise not the *raison d'être* itself of reconciliation and the very function of the middle term? The mediator, when he offers his services and puts himself between the adversaries to arbitrate their dispute, looks to integrate the unilateral nature of the thesis and the antithesis in a higher synthesis that stomachs both; it is thus that concessions have been made on both sides in the course of the negotiation. The injured person has to make do with his appeal to rights. The outcome of the two contrary forces, which for an optimist is at the same time both the one and the other, is for the pessimist neither the one nor the other (*neutra*). Integration, in this regard, is more impoverishment and diminution than enrichment; in this, it resembles the adaptation of a wounded or mutilated organism that settles into a type of *modus vivendi* with its infirmity. If he pulls through after the myocardial infarction, then the person who had the heart attack slowly adapts to his new state. After the stroke, it happens that the effusion of blood is reabsorbed in part and that the damages are offset relatively. The sick person will live, but with a diminished life, or rather he will struggle along by curtailing his lifestyle just like an army that is reduced to a defensive position and that cuts down its effective front in order to survive; for each time the recovery definitively ends in retreat. A trace, a minuscule scar, an irreversible modification that forever prevents the restoration of the status quo remains . . . Like the organism, the wounded conscience offsets its insufficiency, as well as can be expected. The offended person stomachs his humiliation, but this is a laborious and difficult process of stomaching. With habituation aiding, he makes *as if* the injury was nothing and did not occur, but he does not make *that* it never took place. He attenuates the memory of it without annihilating its effectivity. The pain of humiliation is always there, but it has passed into latency, has become invisible, has changed into

21. *Oeuvres complètes* (Vivès, 1872), vol. 4, pp. 230–31 and 277–78. [See Saint Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, trans. Henry Benedict Mackey (Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books, 1995), 534: "Temporal covetousness, by which we greedily desire earthly treasures, is the root of all evil; but spiritual avarice, whereby one sighs incessantly after the pure gold of Divine Love, is the root of all good."]

an aftertaste. Such a forgiveness is far too complex, and it has far too many ulterior motives to be forgiveness pure and simple. And how would this not be strained by scruples and unconscious worries, whereas the function of synthesis is precisely to integrate through fusion the innuendos and understated rancors within a totality? Synthesis is not as much the goal of a moral life as it is the masterwork of a learned chemistry; and combinations that are too cunning would not be able to claim purity. If forgiveness can be reduced to an integration, then grace remains incomplete; some part of the offense will always remain. The offended person secretly continues to hold a grudge against the offender. An imperceptible mental restriction prevents the remission from being absolute and unadulterated. The rancor is held in check, dissimulated, buried in the depths, but it is not, strictly speaking, abolished. Maybe a subtle analyst, an ultrasensitive detector, a diviner armed with his rod would succeed in capturing the radiation that emanates from this subterranean rancor. Or, to use the language of the Stoics here, a drop of perfume diluted in the Pacific ocean is practically indiscernible. But the theorists of "total mixture" claim that the entire composition of this ocean is in effect modified by this drop. Without a doubt, for the nostrils of angels, the ocean has to be imperceptibly fragranced. Twenty years after the offense, perhaps such is the tenor of our rancorous present, such is the tenor of our resentful feelings. Instead of being true forgiveness, integration is a cryptic rancor, or better yet, an infinitesimal rancor, and a rancor that is undetectable and almost indiscernible, that is lost in the mass of the present. However, these negligible traces, which truly are barely measurable, suffice to make an approximating forgiveness and an incomplete liquidation out of forgiveness. Here is the impalpable *ressentiment* that men in general call forgiveness. Does the offended person who does not fully sacrifice his rancor, who does not wholly offer up his condemnation, who does not give up his rights truly forgive? For him, the regimen of very vague and very remote *ressentiment* has supplanted aggressive rancor just as rancor had supplanted angry belligerence. In this way, offended people sometimes resign themselves to undertaking neighborly relations with their former hangmen in spite of terrible memories; these people accept it, they hold out a hand of pacifist coexistence to the hangmen, but not without repugnance. But the heart, as we say, "is not there"! The heart of forgiveness. The heart, that is, the passionate adhesion, that is, the enthusiastic conviction, and the spontaneity, and the *élan* of joy . . . The heart of forgiveness, where is it? Alas! this

forgiveness has no heart; this forgiveness without a heart, like a declaration of love without sincerity, is nothing other than resonant bronze and a resounding cymbal.²²

VI. Unremitting Time Evades Definitive Conversion, the Gratuitous Gift, and the Relation to the Other

True forgiveness, we were saying, is an event, a gratuitous gift, and a personal relation with the other. In a continuous time, where is the event, what does the instantaneous resolution become? If forgiveness rests only on temporality, be it forgetting, decay, or integration, how many years of aging are necessary in order for forgiveness to be considered as established? After what point will the misdeed and the offense be forgiven? And why at such and such a moment rather than another? Decay, by itself, interminably accomplishes its work as memory grows fainter in the fog of the past and as the old lapse becomes blurred at the horizon in passing through all the gradations of scalar attenuation. Or, to use other images: unremitting time nibbles away at, and day after day consumes, the substance of the memory. *Greater and greater* becomes our lack of concern, and *less and less* passionate becomes our rancor. Less and less and greater and greater mean, that is to say, in all cases, little by little! Infinitely, of the first rancor, there remains nothing more than an infinitesimal rancor . . . But at what moment does the pianissimo diminish into silence, the hardly visible into the invisible, and the almost nothing²³ into the nothing? At what moment is the last thread of fidelity broken? At what moment has the event itself come to pass? Never, responded the Megarics—for the Megarics invoked the *acervus ruens*, denying the event and the transformation in general. Many famous sophisms were born of this aporia . . . Is the process going to drag out until the end of the centuries? Until centuries of centuries, if there were not death, then an echo of the old rancor would expire in silence. The glow of memory, if there were not death, would never finish illuminating the night of forgetting. But

22. 1 Corinthians 13:1. ["If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."]

23. [*Le presque-rien*: This is an important element of Jankélévitch's philosophy. See the three-volume work *Le Je-ne-sais-quoi et le presque-rien* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957; and Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1980).]

just as the decrescendo of rancor would not be able to prolong itself indefinitely and just as adversaries are pressed to eliminate their old disputes, the law determines in an authoritarian manner the date of legal elimination for their benefit. This arbitrary decree precipitates things, accelerates the interminable process, and with a single and assertive decision picks up the lazy adagio of forgetting. Such is the *raison d'être* of prescriptive delay. Frivolous people, who more or less already have a light heart, will have the *right* to have a light heart twenty years after the crime; juridically, they will have a light heart. It is legitimate to have a grudge against a criminal for twenty years, but after the twenty-first year, one becomes rancorous! With full rights and from one day to the next, the unforgivable is thus forgotten. What had been unforgivable until May 1965 has abruptly ceased to be in June 1965. It is indeed necessary to set a date, is it not? And so official forgetting begins tonight at midnight. What a mockery! If we have to have a waiting period, why wait twenty years? why not right away? why not forgive in the instant itself that immediately follows the affront? This is the case in which one can say: now or never! Jesus urges the humiliated person and the person who is slapped to turn the other cheek, but not twenty years after the slap, not after much thought, not after having slept off the affront and having sought to forget, but rather forthwith. Without a doubt, he thought that temporization and the state of uncertainty would add nothing to the gratuitous gesture, and rather that forgiveness would offer something resembling the spontaneity of a supernatural reflex. Is forgiveness not a first movement like undeliberated charity or like pity? So it is true that forgiveness is always a *fiat*, an event, and an act. The only decisive forgiveness is the one that comes to pass in the suddenness of the instant. To leave it to decay or the passing of the years is thus to drown the unexpected instant and to evade the discontinuity of the conversion that forgiveness inaugurates. Indeed, when forgiveness is refused, then mere time does for itself, very slowly and approximately, that which the offended person has not been generous enough to do. But conversely, in one moment and in one blink of the eye, forgiveness does that which naked time would need years to accomplish, and, without a doubt, to leave unfinished.

Such are the two insufficiencies of a duration that is given over to itself. On the one hand, raw time does not at all possess the conversionary and transfiguring power of forgiveness. For all that, the man in mourning, consoled by the very ancientness of his old sorrow, has not metamorphosed his sadness into joy, nor found positive reasons to be happy. Parched and eroded

by the effect of time and habit, the primary emotion quite simply has been cooled down, the source of the tears is dried up—nothing more! An indifference, perhaps tainted by melancholy, has taken the place of sorrow . . . And likewise, the emotion of anger perpetuated by chronic *ressentiment* does not little by little change into an *élan* of love. With the passing of time, rancor has simply become an automatism without conviction. The high pathic temperature of anger cannot keep itself up. The fever has died, and just as irascible congestion had given way to rancor, so rancor gives way to apathy. Forgetting has thinned hostility into indifference; it has neither inverted it into love, nor converted it into love, because a decrescendo is not an inversion! The passage from more to less, traversing all the degrees of the comparative, would not know how to replace this complete change, this conversion from contradictory to contradictory that forgiveness supposes. Do the progressive relaxation and the convalescence that duration brings us have even the least relation with the intention of forgiving? Even if they lessen rancor to the extreme limit of subtlety, then decay and integration are never the advent of a new era and never found a new order. By themselves, they are incapable of inaugurating positive relations between an offended person and an offender intimately reconciled. The disintegration of an old, passionate complex that crumbles, decomposes, and falls to dust, such a wholly negative disintegration is in no way foundational. As with conversion, true forgiveness is by itself capable of building a new house for a new life.—On the other hand, time, of itself alone, is not a permanent guarantee against old *ressentiments* that are quelled and soothed little by little. The flame still smolders in the room where memory is, and it can reawaken the fire. What tells us that rancor will not be reborn from the cold cinders of forgetting, that the flame of anger will not wake up from the embers of rancor? No, nothing tells us this. Nothing tells us—to use another idiom—that the tumor of rancor will not be reformed or that the wound will not reopen. So, admit it right away: a rancorous person who is cured solely by the accumulation of the years is poorly cured and is prone to relapses. For forgetting, which the simple passing of time brings us, is a superficial remedy, a precarious and provisional solution, and the peace that we owe it instead resembles a truce. The one who withdraws his rancor under the general anesthesia of time, and who has, consequently, evaded the surgical operation of the instant and of conversion, such a person who has not recognized the decisive event will remain obsessed by a humiliating memory. The only healing that is definitive and complete is the one that the injured person, if he

had the strength, would give to himself in a sudden decision taken once and for all. This decision would contrast with immanent temporality just as, according to Schelling, the sacrifice of Christ would contrast with the successive ordeals of Dionysus. The grace of the redemptive decision would not content itself with making a fever fall; it guards against fever, and it even excludes the possibility of fever. It does not simply put the final touch on rancor; it renders rancor impossible; it extirpates rancor down to the roots. It is up to us to see if man is capable of such a decision.

We have just verified that since forgiveness is an instantaneous event, it is necessary to admit that the continuous and immanent time of evolution, incubation, and maturation has nothing in common with the act of forgiving. No more is the gratuitous gift, which is the second characteristic of forgiveness, implied in a becoming where nothing comes to pass or appears. Forgiveness is forgiveness only because it freely can be refused or graciously conceded prematurely and without any heed to legal deadlines at all. Is an absolution that automatically and ineluctably intervenes when the term has arrived a forgiveness? No, a fatal forgiveness is not forgiveness, for this is not a gift, or rather, this is a gift that *gives* nothing. And besides, it gives nothing to *no one*. Here indeed is the third mark of forgiveness: the relation with someone. Not only does the negativity of forgetting not imply this relation, but it rather excludes it; the forgetful person, ceasing to have something against the offender, breaks off any relation with him. Forgiveness is an intention, and this intention is quite naturally directed at the Other, since it addresses itself to a sinner, and its *raison d'être* is to absolve, since it looks him in the eyes. Does naked time have an intention? Indeed, time is oriented; indeed, it goes somewhere. Time looks at the future, but it does not look at the other; it does not have eyes for the second person and it does not even make an exception. In this sense, time is rather blind. And solitary! For, the anonymous future is never either the personal correlate of or the loving partner in an immediate allocution. Likewise, time is indifferent to good and evil, is just as ready to serve evil as it is good, and is ethically neutral. Days and weeks flow in the same way for repentant people as for unrepentant people without there being any differential element that permits a distinction between the time of good people and the time of wicked people. In this, time resembles generous nature, of which we were saying that it loves everyone, which is to say that it loves no one, for a universal dilection, without a predilection that favors, is more of an indifference. To speak the language of Leibniz here: what naked time lacks is the *Potius quam*, or the *Rather-than*,

or, said otherwise, the principle of choice and of preferential discernment. We showed how the time of forgetting, which is supposed to counsel forgiveness, would just as well counsel frivolity, superficiality, and fickle inconsistency to us, for there is forgetting and forgetting! Moreover, time counsels no matter what to no matter whom, pell-mell and indistinctly. And as it works for the most opposed parties, it likewise furnishes arguments and excellent reasons to everyone. This indifference, so perfectly foreign to any discrimination, is particularly ruthless in forgetting. From what people say, forgetful nature is without rancor, but its unconcern has no moral significance, for the unconcern of a renewal that absolutely does not take note of the past is just as much an absence of gratitude and fidelity. Innocent springtime glows for wicked people as well as for good people . . . Each year, trees blossom in Auschwitz just as they blossom everywhere, and grass is not disgusted to grow in these places of inexpressible horror. Springtime does not distinguish between our gardens and the accursed plain where four million offended died by iron and fire. "It is the beautiful springtime that makes time glow."²⁴ And time shines, shines, alas! as if nothing had happened. Beautiful springtime does not have a bad conscience. In all truthfulness, it does not have a conscience at all, neither a good one, nor a bad one . . . On the contrary, the forgetful man possesses a conscience that could remember, remain loyal, and hold the past in the present. The forgetful person possesses a memory and does not use it, or uses it only to recall the most insignificant incidents, for in the order of naturality without intention, derisive memory is the worthy counterpart of derisive forgetting.

VII. Naked Time Does Not Have Moral Significance

We were heading down the wrong path in general when we searched from within temporality for the justification for forgiveness; for the pure and naked time that we envisage as futurity and conservation is by itself a natural and unjustified fact and is incapable of justifying anything. At least, such is the case of raw and substantial time, with abstraction being made from every superadded specificity; such is the case with nude chronology,

24. [This refers to a musical piece—"C'est le joli printemps" ("It is the beautiful springtime")—composed in late 1942 by Francis Poulenc with the text written by the poet Maurice Fombeure.]

considered independently of every ethical and psychological addition. If we begin by investing unqualified temporality with all sorts of moral qualities, it is not surprising that we find them in it. But it is not the temporality of time that is redemptive, it is the virtues themselves with which we have invested it. In the time of expiation and penitence, for example, it is not the years themselves that redeem the criminal, rather it is the rigor of the expiatory and penitential ordeal; it is not raw duration but the duration of suffering. For the apprentice of the penal apprenticeship, it is purgatory itself that is supposed to give a "purifying" value to the span of time. In this respect, from all evidence, four years of vacation on the Riviera will not have the same effect as four years of forced labor. Four years without another determination are then an indifferent delay; indifferent is the length of a delay of which we do not specify the content. And, in moral life, indeed, time is less important than the manner in which one passes or occupies time. And besides, if empty time does not have moral significance, time filled by expiation itself, even though able to have such a significance, renders forgiveness useless; for the one who expiates obviously does not have need that one forgive him!—More precisely yet, the lapse of time that we invoke in order to justify the prescription is a biological process but not a moral progress. Without a doubt, twenty years weigh more on the shoulders of an aging man than do twelve months, but how would this mass of inert time that has passed, or how could the purely quantitative accumulation of the past, be endowed with this mysterious power to absolve the criminal? That the repentant person possesses such a virtue in himself can be understood—for repenting implies a drama and a moral life: a moral life, that is to say, acts of contrition: a moral life, that is to say, burning regret accompanied by the wise proposal to do better in the future by courageously taking on the suffering. The repentant person turns and returns the memory of the misdeed and endeavors to redeem it. The time of repenting, in opposition to the twenty hollow years of the prescription, is thus a meditative and contemplative plenitude. What is operative in repenting is the sincerity of the regret and the intensive ardor of the resolution. Repenting is redemptive because it is, first, an active will of redemption. But is prescriptive time, the time of forgetting and decay, something other than a delay that is empty, negative, and above all passive? This time, without events, does not have a history, and as such its story cannot be recounted. Separated from every task as from every effort, reduced to the single, inert automatism of futurity, empty time is a lazy time, *argos chronos*, and, to express it better, a dead

time. Such is in certain cases and for the man of action the biological time of germination, maturation, and growth; such is too up to a certain point the therapeutic time of healing and recovery. Here it is still a question of a fecund time that demands to be guided by interventions of man, to be started over again, or more simply not to be bothered, for the time-doctor needs one to help it, or acknowledges that we accelerate it. Precautions are indeed necessary to allow the medicine of becoming to work and to push aside the obstacles that would hinder its action. However, and even in this case, the role of man sometimes confines itself to not disrupting the process at all and to not evading the successive phases at all. It happens that human participation in time, that our cooperation in its work, and that our collaboration in its labor do not go beyond this. The laborer buries the seed in the ground, and then he goes to rest. He waits for springtime to awaken it and for the teluric forces to make it germinate and be fruitful. What is most essential is that he puts his confidence in invincible time.²⁵ This is why we are told: Let time be, time flows all alone, time works in our place! Nonetheless, the time of farmers works only for those who already work. But it also happens that man has nothing to do, for example, when time is reduced to the pure, incompressible thickness of weeks, months, and years: such is the case with boredom or waiting. Here it is a question literally only of killing time; to kill time or, better yet, to sleep it away if necessary, or to render it numb with "pastimes." Here, it is a question only of patiently enduring the duration . . . Is it patience that alone is necessary, that supposes infinitesimal tensions and a nascent cooperation with temporal work? There is nothing left to do but to allow the ineluctable work of futurity to complete itself, to allow the clepsydra to empty itself, to allow the hands of the clock to turn, to pick off the pages of the calendar. Wait for the sugar to melt and for the moment to come . . . Wait for the coming years to come to pass! Time takes charge of all! In contrast to the work that pushes a bit and reorients time in the preferred direction, the man in the state of uncertainty is present qua passive spectator in the unfolding of the film. It thus suffices to consult chronology, which will decide by itself if the adversaries are ready for reconciliation, if the hour

25. Mark 4:26-29. ["And he said, 'The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.'"]

of forgiving has sounded. To forgive, for Sophists of bad faith, is to abandon oneself to the unfolding of hours and days; it is to leave it up to the process that inevitably will make next Sunday's expiration date or the fixed term for the prescription come to pass. A forgiveness that is conferred prematurely evokes a harvest that is untimely . . . Neither more nor less immoral! Fear forgiving too soon and not too late! And we, we would say the opposite: beware of forgiving too late! At least the repentant person gave himself the penalty of expiation. Unlike courageous repenting, forgiveness that is conferred by the calendar resembles a rather cowardly and facile consolation. The repentant person works to free himself, but here the offended person and the offender especially wait to be released. As for the offended person, he does not himself intervene in the irresistible and infallible operation of the years; we do not ask him for his opinion. Again, we insist: the blindness of raw time does not provide us with any means of distinguishing between the condemned person who has expiated his crime for twenty years and the cheater who hid in Monte Carlo for twenty years after his crime. The second criminal, having had the luck to escape capture and to make himself forgotten, quite simply played a good trick on justice. Nothing happened during these twenty years! A remission without pain—that is the convenience offered to happy cheaters. If they economize their time in purgatory, they will wake up free one beautiful morning without ever having had something of which to be acquitted.—Thus for the Sophists of the calendar and of the hourglass time in and of itself would possess I know not what medicinal virtue. And for us, it is rather pain that would be purifying. For them, as for us, and despite Schopenhauer, pain is not inherent in the essence of time. Pain is continued in duration, but in itself it is distinct from painful time. The relation of the attribute to the substantive indicates as much. Time is only sometimes painful because it can also be painless or even agreeable. Pain is always more or less temporal, but time itself is not necessarily painful; time is distinct enough from pain that it could rather be the remedy for it. Time is a *medicina doloris*; acting as a sedative and an analgesic, the morphine of time attenuates old pains and makes old sorrows sleep. But it does not follow that the temporal medicine of pain is, in one fell swoop, the moral medicine for sin: first, because the sin of the offender and the rancor of the offended are not "sicknesses" at all. Furthermore, if costly heartbreak is, as we think, the condition of true forgiveness, then the time that soothes the wound must render this forgiveness less true, less authentic, and less meritorious. There is almost nothing left to forgive, therefore nothing is

really forgiven. Twenty years is a sufficient sedative that exempts us from all sacrifice. The temporal palliative, leveling the bumps and the rough patches of moral life, in sum serves only to spare us from suffering.

Man, qua moral being, fulfills his vocation in time, but as a biological being he has neither a vocation nor an intention and contents himself with becoming and aging, for aging is not intentional. To confuse biological evolution and psychological becoming with the moral life is, without a doubt, one of the most Machiavellian forms of ill will. Moral life is not a process but a drama punctuated with precious decisions. Moral progress advances only by the deliberate effort of a decision that is intermittent and spasmodic and in the tension of an indefatigable starting-over. The will, willing and willing again incessantly, does not rely in any measure on the inertia of the acquired movement, does not live on the laurels of accumulated merit. And thus, with each instant, moral progress begins again from zero. There is no other ethical *continuity* than this exhausting *continuation* of "relaunch" and resumption. Moral progress is thus laboriously *continued* rather than spontaneously *continual* or *continuous*, and it resembles a recreation rather than a growth. Abandonment to slippery continuity, in the current of duration and in the rocking chair of becoming, is not the moral life. And the gentleness of abandon in turn has nothing in common with the crisis of forgiveness. Asceticism, and not the rocking chair: such is the moral life. The time of moral life forbids sleepers to give in to letting themselves go in a life of immanence and expectation.

VIII. Time Cannot Get Rid of the Fact of Having Done

Raw becoming, without any other specification, is the mode of being of man as he is, but forgiveness is the gesture of man as he ought to be. In the measure in which it is a duty, that is, in as much as it is, if not always rationally justified, then at least supernaturally, paradoxically, and categorically required, forgiveness is of the order of value. And value, unless it is monetary or a style, *has worth* independently of any chronology. It has value, not a temporary *validity* like a passport, but an atemporal *value*, not by making exceptions for delay or for such and such circumstantial determinations, but absolutely, *haplôs*, that is to say, it is "worthwhile" purely and simply. It "has worth," that is all that there is to it, and without an adverb of degree, of man-

ner, of duration, or of place. How would this normative gesture result from the succession of seasons and years? Matured by summers, formed by experience and habit, it is no more capable of forgiving the guilty person than it was on the day of the affront. This is the place for saying again: now or never!—But the atemporality of the law of forgiving comes into conflict with the atemporality of the misdeed to be forgiven. Here let us distinguish more clearly the personal offense from the moral misdeed properly speaking. The offense wrongs only the self-esteem and the self-interest of the offended person, and consequently even when justice is at issue, the rancor that the offense arouses in the offended person always has a character that is more or less selfish and passionate. We can understand that natural phenomena such as forgetting, decay, evolution, and aging take hold of natural passions such as *ressentiment* and susceptibility. It is useless to explain (though this erosion is not forgiveness) why this quick-tempered emotion has to weaken as time passes, become vindictive rancor and then an indifferent image. A perpetual anger is incompatible with the entropy of becoming and the status of the finished being.—We already find it even harder to understand that a cruel mourning can subside solely because of the effect of time. Each person is indeed unique and irreplaceable, and the loss of one of these irreplaceable persons is no better compensated twenty years after his disappearance than the day itself when it happened. The situation is the same whatever the moment of time happens to be. The void (at least this void) will not be filled. The "hapax" (at least in its incomparable haecceity) will not be replaced. The death of the irreplaceable would thus have to leave us inconsolable. Indeed, it is a fact that the inconsolable will not remain eternally distressed. In the long run, the inconsolable is consoled. We say "one has to live"—which is not a response, at least not a philosophical explanation. The as yet unconsoled man, who is consolable in the end, will find other beings to love . . . other beings, but not that same one! The one for whom he weeps, the one for whom he will cease to weep is lost forever. Approximating consolation, miserable compensation! In any case, the fact is there: the one who has the right to be inconsolable is well and truly consoled. The irreplaceable is, in fact, replaced. This mockery that is similar enough to the mockery of a love that is eternal at the time and provisional after the fact—what a beautiful subject for Pascal's irony! The oath of loyalty is always broken . . . yet it is no less sincere! The contradiction of the inconsolable-consoled has, in our misery, become so normal that an

eternal sorrow, as painful twenty years later as on the first day, would easily pass for a pathological case.²⁶ The absolutist who feels in all of its rigor the despair for the irreplaceable—that cannot be compensated has to be a type of sick person: he is sick about not being able to liquidate that which cannot be liquidated!—But the absurdity of temporal pacification is still more striking when the act to be forgiven is a sin, that is, when values are at stake. Sin is an attack on values, but as values themselves are invulnerable, indestructible, and atemporal, the attack is always in vain. After the insult, justice and truth remain just as before; the lying and injustice of man do not make them hot or cold. There is never any damage, not a scratch, and consequently no injuries to heal, no ruins to stand back up . . . Values, which are outside of history, no more enter back in on a beautiful morning under the pretext that man has violated them. Being suprahistorical by essence, they do not become historical and thus datable on day D and at hour H of the misdeed. Afterward, just as before (and is there even an “after” and a “before?”), chronology remains without any relation to axiology and without any effect on it. With values finding themselves intact immediately after the attack, one of two things follows: either in this relation there is nothing to be forgiven, everything being forgiven in advance—for values have not become aware of anything; or (which amounts to the same) there is something unforgivable in the very fact of the attack. The attack on values thus confirms what we were saying about the act of forgiving: it is now or never!—One will say that values are atemporal—but the crime of the man who raises a hand against them is not, and the victims of the criminal even less so. This crime is an event that carries a date with it and that comes to pass one beautiful day on the calendar. The flux of becoming, insofar as its successive moments continually drive each other back into forgetting, exercises indeed an erosive action on the misdeed; it trims the circumference, it nibbles away at the contours. The victims of the infamy will not come back to life, but the material consequences are repairable, and in the same way the memories with which the crime leaves us are more and more vague. Physical repercussions and psychological effects do not cease to abate. In the long run, we were saying, the traces of an infamy become so insignificant that there are no longer either any apparatuses or any sensory organs subtle enough to detect them and measure them. The crime, forced back into a past that is further and fur-

26. Pierre Janet gives examples thereof in *L'Évolution de la mémoire et de la notion du temps* [The Evolution of Memory and of the Notion of Time] (Paris: A. Chahine, 1928).

ther away becomes almost doubtful and improbable.—But at the center of the physico-psychological envelope there is at the same time an ethical spark of the intention and a metaphysical knot that we could call the *quoddity* of the misdeed. The intention, which is very brief, can change, for it is an imperceptible shock and a fugitive shuddering of will. But time, properly speaking, *tempus ipsum*, has nothing to do with it. It is the man who of his own initiative evolves by conversion and a thoughtful will. On the other hand, the elusive movement of sin constitutes an event; for the initiative of liberty creates destiny. The Quoddity is that element of destiny that is inscribed in the metaphysical nucleus of the misdeed. With time, all that has been done can be undone; all that has been undone can be redone. But the fact-of-having-done (*fecisse*) is indefeasible. We can undo the thing done, but we cannot make it so that the thing that was done never happened, we cannot, as Cicero says, following Aristotle, make an *infectum* from a *factum*. Or, more simply, the effects of the misdeed can be repaired, just as every defect lends itself to repairing. But malevolence, that is, the fact of bad will in general, that is, the sole fact of having one time willed evil, that is, the sole fact of having had a bad intention, this is what is inexpiable, strictly speaking. Sin, par excellence, is this evil quality of intention, which, being impossible to locate in the action committed, comes to pass in the very occurrence of the misdeed. In the space of the flash of lightning and in the time of the blink of an eye, the ill-willed design has been conceived. Certainly the bad intention could have been as fleeting as a disappearing appearance, could have lasted as long as sparks last, flashing and extinguishing in the same instant . . . : the semelfactive instant is no less of an eternal instant, *aeternum nunc*, and it is already too much that it was possible! It is already too much to have had merely the intention! It is already too much merely to have thought about it! To commit a crime is an act that happens once in the chronicle, but the fact of having committed it will always last! Such is the paradox of *atemporal semelfactivity*. Thus, the fact of having-taken-place, which is the misdeed reduced to the pure advent of the event, is in itself eternal. Eternal or rather imperishable—for it is not atemporal at both ends. Culpability has indeed begun, although it does not have to finish. The commission of the misdeed happens in a history that previously knew nothing of it. Does not this temporal initiative that decides in favor of the atemporal, and that is infinitely surpassed by its own consequences, in itself sum up all the asymmetry of our freedom? So then the thing that was done has begun and will finish, instead of the fact of having done, once having begun, never finishing.

The thing done appears to disappear progressively by the effect of becoming, but the fact of having done makes itself eternal as a disappearing appearance. Little by little, the inert time of continuation erases *that which* has been done, but it has no hold over the *fact-that*. Through aging, that which has been done, *res facta*, becomes *practically* zero: so be it! But how would time ever make it that the *fecisse* was absolutely nothing and did not happen? But how does one go about it so that what happened never happened? It is of little importance that the crime of twenty years ago left an infinitesimal recollection in the memory of men. It is of little importance if, at the limit, this barely existent recollection, if this almost nonexistent recollection is indiscernible from forgetting, if the last echo of the crime has expired in silence, if the little flame of reminiscence has almost extinguished itself in the shadows; that is not the question! The number of years has nothing to do with the affair. Even if the crime were committed twenty years ago, the commission of the crime committed would not be any less horrible; simply the idea of having been able to commit it would not make it any less disgusting. Besides, on what would decay act? What would it find to wear away? The thing-done has a form, a volume, and a mass. On its morphology, we can understand that the years have a type of influence. Time precipitates the ruin of the form—or if not time itself (for it does not have any teeth for gnawing at things), at least the physical factors that act temporally and that dull, refine, and lessen the form, in the way bad weather levels the contours of the ground and the profile of mountains, or in the way the ocean gnaws at cliffs and smoothes pebbles. But the having-done! what influence over the “fact-of-having-done” will the accumulation of years be able to exert in order to make the ridges round, gnaw away the contours, exhaust and wear away the frame? Time necessarily leaves intact that which is devoid of all massiveness, or in other words that which is without consistency or resistance and finally without substantial existence. And for the same reasons, the quoddity of the misdeed, being “hard-wearing,” is similarly incapable of being integrated and assimilated. It does not allow itself, in the manner of any new experience (the recollection of a voyage, for example), to be integrated or totalized in a higher synthesis. It is not digestible, and in turn it is not physically enriching. Subsequent good actions, following upon the bad one, are juxtaposed with it, but without absorbing it or without transfiguring it from the inside. The bad intention has become good for a long time, but the good one has not absorbed the *fact* of the bad one, just as it has not destroyed the *eternal* fact of having *one time* missed out on love. The good one and the

bad one stay forever incomparable. And though this quoddity had liberty as its source and responsibility as its consequence, it remains in our history as a foreign body. All the burn and all that is incurable of remorse lie in the impossibility of integrating that which we cannot, however, renounce. If time does not chew on the quoddity of the misdeed, it is because it is impalpable and pneumatic, so to speak. The thing-done falls under the senses, but the fact of the having done is of the order of *sense*, since it is an eternal event that is triggered by an intention. The fact is labile because it is tangible. It disintegrates and falls into ruins insofar as it ages, like the temples of Greece. But the *fact of the fact*, but the fact with its exponent, but the fact to the second power, evades the corrosive action of duration.

In sum, what is the action of time on the *fait accompli*, on the intention of doing, and on the fact of having done? On the one hand, time erases the accomplished misdeed.²⁷ Or maybe it would be more exact to say that the misdeed that was committed becomes temporally blurred, which is to say, little by little, for time is nothing other than the indifferent, passive, and entirely docile dimension of all our experiences.—On the other hand, the intention, as we saw, is transformed without time’s having anything to do with it. If time all by itself, if time without drama suffices to metamorphose a sinner, and if the intention, like wine, improves with age, then without a doubt it would be useless to take seriously the spontaneity of the conversion and the autonomy of the will. In maturing the ethical disposition, providential time would take charge of our improvement; the automatism of progress and of continuous perfection would release us from all penitence and from every moral crisis. However, it is man himself who lifts himself up out of the swamp by the sweat of his brow. It is man himself who saves himself by the deliberate, initial, and attentive effort of his will without looking to economize on the sufferings of remorse or on the sacrifices of repenting and of contrition. But time, the primary and natural given of lived experience, is incommensurable with the normative order of value; and value, for its part, is of a *wholly other order* than time. As we were saying, there is no common measure between chronology and axiology. In other words, “conversion” does not depend on the chronological circumstance; the date is here indifferent. What influence can age exercise on the value or antivalue of an intention? In order for temporality to have this transfiguring effect and these absolving virtues, it would be necessary for it itself to be a value capable of

27. [*Faute accompli*.]

recouping the antivalue of the ill-willed person and of transmuting malevolence into benevolence. But no one can explain whence it can draw this magical power, or how it can set about exorcising the guilt of the guilty person.— In the third place, the ethical inefficacy of temporality is heightened by a metaphysical powerlessness. We were asking why raw time would render the guilty person less guilty. Let us now ask why it would render the misdeed of the guilty person less serious, and a fortiori, why it would annul it. Time can attenuate or erase the misdeed that was committed, but not get rid of the commission of it. It neutralizes the *effects* of the misdeed, but it cannot destroy the *fact* of the misdeed. Time cannot make it so that what came to pass did not come to pass, for it would be contradictory that the same thing was at the same time done and not done; if, then, the having-done is not capable of being destroyed, then it is because the contradiction is not capable of being surmounted. In order to reconcile the contraries, a synthesis that is skillfully mediated, a wise compromise, or a good mixture suffices; but in order to unify contradictories, a miracle is necessary. . . . We will have to research whether forgiveness is not just this very sudden miracle, this miraculous coincidence of position and negation. It is not sufficient to say that the having-done is *physically indestructible* or inexterminable; it is this destruction itself that is *logically impossible*. Consequently, to claim to make a tabula rasa of what was is very close to being an absurdity. As for that, we can *make as if*, but we cannot *make it that*, we can make it as if that which happened did not happen, but not that what happened did not happen. Gods themselves would not be able to do anything. The minor gods of mythology, specialists in marvelous details, unusual metamorphoses, and disappearances of all kinds, cannot do the impossible, that is to say, that which in no way *can be allowed*. As for humans, they neutralize the defeat by revenge; victory serves to make them forget the humiliation of the debacle and the shame of capitulation. The advocates of prescription admit among themselves that Auschwitz never existed; they do not speak of it anymore. But every now and then a secret remorse, attesting to the indestructibility of the “having-taken-place,” reminds them of the point at which this fiction is fragile. The impossibility of destroying has the impotence of man as its verso. Considered from its positive side, it is nothing other than the necessity of the quoddity. The notion of the Imprescriptible, in general, refers us to this diptych of an impossibility and a necessity. The French Parlement proclaims that crimes against humanity are *a priori imprescriptible*, that is, *are not allowed* to be prescribed. Granting the fact that it is a question of an

absolute principle, temporary prorogation of the prescriptive delay has to be considered as a miserably empirical measure; the moral dilemma would be just as acute thirty years after the expiration date as in the twentieth year. Strictly speaking and theoretically, every misdeed is imprescriptible, since every having-taken-place, from the moment in which it takes place onward, becomes eternal: the having-taken-place of the personal offense just like the having-taken-place of the moral misdeed, and that of peccadillos just like that of atrocious crimes. The attack against the humanness of man has something inexpiable where the quoddity lays itself bare. In cases that are literally “venial,” the liquidation of the penal action can pass for beneficial approximation. On the other hand, the prescription of a colossal crime is a monstrous caricature of ordinary prescription and in fact makes manifest the absurdity of it.

When it is a question of a personal offense, we can say that time, of itself alone, is neither an efficacious forgiveness, nor a lasting forgiveness, that it lacks charity, that it implies neither the event, nor the relation of one heart to another, nor the gratuitous gift. We were contending that the empty continuation and the savage interval in no way replace repenting. But we were not able to deny, and we even presupposed, that the renunciation of hate and the conversion to love are still the supreme end. We were questioning only whether the long road of becoming was the straightest and most sincere path for arriving at peace. However, as soon as it is a question of a misdeed, to take time into consideration becomes injurious for scorned values. We were feeling doubts about the efficacy of evolution; now we are facing a moral dilemma. The idea that we can pass the eraser lightheartedly over an attack against values is in itself something of a sacrilege. And could one here even incriminate the “rancor” of rancorous people? Can we reproach the all too tenacious memory of those who refuse to make a complete break with all of this? Imprescriptibility is no longer in the psychological plan of memory. Loyalty to values, unfailing attachment to justice, and respect for the truth are not “memories.” And the refusal to betray reasons for living in the name of a supposed right to life, such a refusal is no longer a rancor. No one, save by cynicism or coquetry, professes rancor out loud, or admits to being rancorous. And even the egoists who foster a shameful personal *ressentiment* and a shameful desire for vengeance against the offender at least take the trouble of justifying and sanctifying their passion in the name of principles; they confuse their rights with a real right or their cause with the just cause, and accuse their adversaries of injustice. But a crime against humanity

is not my personal affair. To forgive, in this case, would not be to renounce one's rights but to betray *the* right. The person who "harbors rancor" against the criminals of such a crime literally *has the right*: the right and, what's more, the duty. Better yet: is holding the crime against the criminals really "holding a grudge" against whoever it may be? The loyal man who refuses to make peace and speak to his brother is not a sullen and more or less stubborn child. The sullen person will cease to be sullen when his sullenness has lasted for a sufficient time; he will cease his protest when the rancor has entirely melted. No, the serious and loyal man is not a capricious protestor. What one takes as rancor in him was rigor. Values themselves, indeed, do not have need of our rancor or of our rigor since no infamy, however monstrous it may be, would be able to reach them or make us doubt of their perpetuity. But the millions of exterminated people, they have need of our rigor. These exterminated people are not a motive for sullenness or for a quarrel. Rancor, a frivolous passion, puts the tortured person who bears a grudge against his torturer on the same level with the torturer against whom he bears the grudge. The tortured and the torturer, they are in short blurred. In this, rancor does not differ very much from coquetry. Far from being the suspension of all relations, it is rather the institution of a new mode of relations. Such are the very provisional relations that the people of the world establish between themselves when they are *on bad terms* with one another. The person with scabies is quarantined and without a doubt we judge that forty days amply suffice to rid him of the contagion of the scabies. Well, we ourselves are not on bad terms with torturers. Our "rigor" simply would like to express that there is *no relation* between their crimes and time, not even a relation of rancor. And there is then no reason for time, of itself alone, to render them less serious. In this respect, forty days and forty centuries have exactly the same weight. Time that levels the greatest misfortunes, time that smoothes, time that redeems proposes to us in vain the conveniences of disaffection: the years pass over the stationary situation, without soothing the disaffection.

IX. Do Not Ratify the Naturality of Disaffection

Or perhaps it is necessary to reason in more general terms. That remission goes in the spontaneous direction of natural evolution is in no way an argument in favor of remission; such an argument would rather be an objection.

And what an objection! In other terms, the naturality of forgiveness, if forgiveness were natural, would rather be a reason never to forgive. Since when has morality had the function of imitating nature or of reproducing traits of it? Because painting itself refuses to be purely photographic and to copy what is given but rather draws its inspiration from it, reshapes it, stylizes it, deforms it, or adds a supplementary vertebra to the female body, as Ingres did, it is all the more reason for moral life to begin with the derealization of reality. Realism itself, in art, is realist only because of this nascent idealization. And similarly, the "conformity to nature" of the Stoic sage has to be understood not in the sense of a conformism that is slavishly naturalistic, but rather as the search for a rational profundity hidden in what is perceptible. Better yet, it suffices for art to be unreal or surreal. Ethics, on the contrary, wants to be scandalously, paradoxically antireal. Its goal is not at all to transfigure what is perceptible, but to renounce pleasure; its function is not at all to ratify nature but rather to contradict it, to refute it, and to protest against it. The object of the renunciation, far from being an indifferent given upon which to elaborate, is a passionate temptation to be combated; this object is attractive and thus deceitful for it is supposed to seduce us in order to trick us. The vocation and the "categorical prohibitive" are the two aspects, the one positive and the other negative, of this absurd and supernatural exigence.—Justice, for example, is there not to confirm violence or to reinforce force, which in fact by themselves, already tend to prevail, but rather to give a supplement of strength to weakness, of which it has need in order to compensate for the physical disadvantage of weakness with a moral advantage, and, conversely, to disadvantage the physical advantage of strength. Justice disadvantages the unjust advantage of some and provides advantages to the unjust disadvantage of the others. For one cannot have all the advantages at the same time! That would be asking too much! The one who already possesses the physical advantage of strength, of wealth, and of undeserved honors cannot claim in addition to increase his many advantages on account of a moral advantage. One cannot be a happy shark and be right also, or monopolize, in defiance of the alternative, that which is impossible to accumulate. One cannot at the same time obtain a chair in the Académie Française and refuse it, devote oneself to all the distinctions at once, or be rich and seem poor. Allow something for those who are poor and alone; at least allow them the very humble dignity of misery; do not contest their inalienable strength of weakness. Without justice, inequalities left to themselves would not stop growing. Everyone knows that money goes to the rich,

happiness goes to the happy, who have no need of it, and is denied to the unhappy who would have so much of a need for it. Material superiority goes to the powerful to augment their power disproportionately and monstrously. In the end, good luck smiles on those who already have it; instead of replenishing the void of bad luck as it should, good luck is scandalously attracted by the abundance of luck! What would you say about justice if it gave itself over to the service of billionaires or if it flew to the aid of sharks and ogres? You would say that it was a laughable justice, a revolting deception, a horrible caricature, or better yet, a cynical injustice! Nietzsche, the defender not of orphans but of sharks, finds that the weak are still not weak enough, or that the brutes still are not strong enough. The brutes had need of being justified too! It is the last superiority that they were still lacking . . . Let us here respond to the advocate of the brutes. Justice is not made for favoring the one who already has all of the favors of nature. Justice is the compensatory mechanism, or, if one prefers, the allopathic remedy that neutralizes the contrary with its contrary; it takes the opposite course to the superiorities of the fact; it is just compensation and the just "chiasmus." Thus, it goes to the aid of the weak, helping the widow and the orphan, defending the humiliated and the offended, assisting the oppressed and the exploited, and arming the unarmed. Being the consolation of the afflicted and the rampart of the poor person, it protects the miserable person against the avalanche of miseries, for misfortunes, as they say, never come alone! Far from being in complete agreement with the inequality that is always growing and the lack of equilibrium that is incessantly aggravated, justice puts the breaks on the "more and more" of pleonexy, of compulsive desire, and of passionate frenzy; it reverses the tendency of feverish overstatement. Moderating justice impedes every crescendo and every accelerando, compensates every auction, and deflates every inflation; in the end, it stops the proliferation of abuses.—In the dimension of time, such is also the typically moral function of fidelity. If there is a temporal weightiness, and if becoming, as the factor of forgetting, designates to the person the direction of least resistance and the path of repugnant ease, then, on the contrary, the duty of fidelity would indicate to us the path of the greatest resistance, which is the most difficult and austere path of all. To swim with the current, to go where the wind blows, to allow oneself to be led by fashion, to consent to the declivity of time, is this not just conformism itself? The duty of fidelity refuses these temptations. It does not go in the direction of nature, but, as with all duties, it goes in the opposite direction, against the current, that is to say, upstream.

Thus, it is headed not only in the opposite direction from tropisms and from instinct, but also in the opposite direction from inclination. Or, more modestly (because no one is able to make becoming come back), the horizontal of fidelity holds back the consciousness that is ready to slide down the inclined plane of forgetting, and in this way it retards stupid disaffection. And just as justice stands in the way of the exaggerations of pleonexy, so fidelity thwarts frivolity and stops us halfway down the incline. Indeed, if we set innovative futurition in opposition to certain purely mechanical forms of verbal attachment and drivel, then it is fidelity that may seem inert. But it is no longer the same if we set cordial fidelity against the geotropism of forgetting and of ingratitude. When rancor is a simple spite and a wholly negative stubbornness, then forgiveness is a duty of charity; but when in reality the so-called "rancor" is an unshakable fidelity to values and to martyrs, then it is forgiveness that is a betrayal. We often hear that the rights of life, the general evolution of the historic situation, and the necessities of reconciliation should in the end prevail over outdated *ressentiments*; and we are criticized at the same time for the tiresome monotony of our stories and of our rancors. We are no longer, so it seems, "up to date." But first of all it is not so much love for one's neighbor that inspires the apostles of reconciliation, it is rather practical commodities; this is the perspective of attractive relations. Charity has nothing to do with it. They present as duty simply that which they wish to do and which they do out of egoism, cowardice, and frivolity. That is right, blame forgiveness. Can giving in to the impetus of general reconciliation, the communicative warmth of a superficial sympathy, and the unrefined good-naturedness of daily relations pass for a moral attitude? Similarly, the old torturer who has retired from torturing is without a doubt a placid citizen and a family man: the enormity of his crimes can no longer be seen on his face. As for the sympathy that this easygoing face can eventually inspire, it is impossible to find names other than stupidity, sordid vulgarity, or spirit of approximation. This type of fraternization would rather make us disgusted with forgiving. Indifferent people, unconcerned people, those who always think nothing happened and for whom not even the perspective of associating with torturers would be very disgusting, would do better not to invoke forgiveness and to spare us their sermons. One does not even see why they would talk of reconciliation when they were already reconciled with the criminal on the day after the crime, when they have never demanded an explanation from the assassins. On the other hand, can one seriously criticize loyal people for slowing down the course

of history and for upsetting the relations of people among themselves? Let us respond that the litanies of rancor will not prevent anything and that the partisans of general liquidation can in any case be without anxieties. No matter what happens, forgetting will be the strongest, forgetting will have the last word in all cases. One day, sooner or later, the ocean of forgetting will submerge all, and our powerless despair will itself finish by giving in to the irresistible tidal wave of indifference or the rise of new interests and of new preoccupations. Like a wisp, triumphant modernity will sweep away the cult of the past and the piety of memories. For the present, that is, ambient everydayness, besieges us in all aspects and does not cease to invite us to forget bygone things; this is the pressure of each minute. The present does not need us to remember it expressly since it is always there; the present has no need of anyone; the present itself takes care of its own defense without waiting for the counsel of lawyers. Forgetting does not, then, have as much need that we preach it, and it is indeed pointless to recommend it to people. There will always be many swimmers in the waters of Lethe. Men already have too much of a tendency to forget and they ask only for that. Why exhort them to follow the road that they have such a need to follow otherwise and that they will follow in any case? This would be to precipitate a fall that is already rendered inevitable by the gravity of instincts, to fortify this irresistible gravity by a moral acceleration, to subscribe to the brutal superiority of the present, and fly cowardly to the aid of victory. By nature man is indeed egoistic and cowardly enough for moralists not to believe that they are obliged to "overdo it," to keep nudging, to help the coward find excuses and honorable pretexts. And if forgiveness were this glorious pretext? The *raison d'être* of the moral imperative cannot be to be in agreement with the direction of facility. Moreover, how would facility be good and normative? The conjunction of duty and desire would be an incredible godsend, and the merit of Kant is to have denounced the eudaimonism of this optimism or the doubtful status of this "harmony." It is not the present that needs our aid; it is rather the past. It is not present people who have need of our loyalty, it is the absent ones. Yes, it is the past that demands to be ceaselessly recalled, expressly recollected, and piously commemorated. The past, no longer existing, needs that one honor it and that one be loyal to it; for if we ceased to think about it, then it would be completely annihilated. The past will not defend itself all alone! As the past is inactual, it is indeed necessary that we spontaneously take the initiative to go to it. It is, thus, the frivolity of some that renders necessary the fidelity of others; this fidelity is perhaps the re-

morse of the frivolous. But let the frivolous reassure themselves, for memories will never be as burdensome as interests. Moral fidelity to the past is, then, always of a protesting nature. This protest, which is essentially ethical, is itself a desperate challenge and sometimes provocative of the natural forces. The moral man, reduced to the defensive, protests solemnly against the inevitable triumph of forgetting. Against this all-powerful strength of becoming, what can the thinking reed²⁸ do if not protest: a Platonic protest, an impotent protest, which, however, is one of the forms of moral sublimity! For this loyalty is loyal to the point of the absurd and in spite of the absurd, paradoxically loyal to that which is anachronistic and useless. . . . When universal disaffection wins us over in turn, when everything counsels the one who loves not to love, a solitary and absurd voice recommends unflinching loyalty to us. Remember. Do not forget. Do not be like vegetables, ruminating animals and mollusks that at each instant forget the preceding instant and never protest against anything. And conversely, when everything counsels us to erase, to liquidate, and to absolve, a voice in us protests, and this voice is the voice of rigor; and this voice orders us to continue to be the witness of invisible things and of innumerable things that have disappeared. This voice tells us that the real is not only made of things that are palpable and obvious—good business, beautiful travels, and good vacations. . . . No, vacations are not all that there is! And in the end, it, this voice, speaks to us of the crimes without name that were perpetrated, the mere evocation of which fills us with horror and shame.

Thus, there is an imprudent manner of recommending forgiveness to us that rather is a means for making us disgusted with it. Time, far from justifying forgiveness, renders it suspect. The ensemble of the moral problem that forgiveness has to resolve is, indeed, situated outside of time; first, values, which are atemporal, then the sin, which began but which is atemporal *a parte post*. The sin can do nothing to values, and values, consequently, do not have need of being restored. The misdeed, once it is committed, in some respect juxtaposes its faulty atemporality with that of values without influencing it, and the conversion even of the faulty movement is accomplished outside of all evolution and in the instant of sincere remorse. And it is also the atemporality of gratuitous forgiveness that, outside of every progressive restoration, can alone sever the Gordian knot of faulty atemporality. This

28. [See *Pascal's Pensées*, intro. T. S. Eliot, trans. W. F. Trotter (New York: Dutton, 1958), 97 (S347).]

grace is not acquired little by little with passing time, and the number of years does not yield any right over it to the guilty person. Or, in other terms, the agony of the misdeed, prolonged as long as one wills, never will produce a result comparable to the instantaneous gesture of forgiveness; forgiveness is not a chronic mortification. Forgiveness, as we will see, again finds a direction if one gives oneself the trampoline of an unshakable, good memory that alone projects the offended above the offense, that alone confers on grace the *élan* and the spring of which it has need. The discontinuity of forgiveness is rendered possible by the fullness of memories. Nothing could be more evident: in order to forgive, it is necessary to remember. Rancor is the strangely contradictory condition of forgiveness; and conversely, forgetting renders it useless. For forgiveness jumps into the void, leaning on the past. In the dwindling of time, we have nowhere found the plenitude of fidelity that had given a sense to the sudden rupture, to the gracious gift, and to the relation with someone. Decay and forgetting are not events and they have no intention. Indeed, they end up by reducing rancor to zero, but they finish, and how slowly, where forgiveness had begun. Let us repeat it here: the heart is not there! As for the heart of forgiveness, we have not found it.

2

The Excuse: To Understand Is to Forgive

Confidence in intellection is in all respects more philosophical than is confidence in time and the virtues of forgetting, for at least intellection is an activity of the mind and it results from a personal effort of the human being, whereas time flows all alone, independent of our initiatives. Confidence in intellection presupposes a certain philosophy of evil, which is precisely intellectualism, and we rather would like to be able to say *intellectionism*—for if intellectualism is the philosophy of the intellect, then it is “intellectionism” that is the philosophy of penetrating intellection. This “intellectionism” itself bases its indulgence on the negation of sin. “Intellectionism” is a theory about misdeed, and the intellectionist has an opinion about the nature of the culpable act, whereas the forgetful person does not have any opinion about anything at all and moreover intrinsically does not look to account for his need for reconciliation; forgetting is not a philosophical theory, and those who preach forgetting do nothing other than use the fickleness and sloth of men, their amnesia and their superficiality. For what is forgetting if not a void and an absence? In short, forgetting, decay, and integration are three analogies, one psychological, the other physical, and the last one biological, that possibly allow for an interpretation of the thawing of rancor; but here every normative pretension would be usurped. Let us reconcile because history urges us to do it, because such are the exigencies of life and the necessities of good neighborliness, because duration soothes all *ressentiments*, because, because . . . But this because is not a *because*: it does not indicate the grounds for reconciliation; it simply gives an explanation of reconciliation. Let us do as time does, seeing as time invites us to do it, or so it seems. Time, indeed, passes without turning back . . . Now, this is not a “reason,” and not even a physical cause, let alone, an analogy. To conform to the directive of the natural process, simply because it is natural,