

Prodigal Forgiveness

(惜しめない赦し)

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【要約】

本論考は、ジャック・デリダによる根源的な赦しの概念を解説するために、まず、英国国教会の元主教リチャード・ホロウェイが2002年に発表した『赦しについて一赦されえぬものを赦すことはいかにして可能か』(On Forgiveness: How Can We Forgive the Unforgivable?) を分析する。ホロウェイは、ジャック・デリダが展開した根源的な赦しという概念を例証するために、新約聖書「ルカによる福音書」から放蕩息子の寓話を読み解いている。デリダによる不可能な赦し(不一可能な赦し impossible forgiveness) という概念の本質を提示することを目指して、本論考はホロウェイが依拠する、この寓話が「赦し」の一例を示しているという従来の考え方に異議を唱える。赦しに関するデリダの厳密な省察を尊重するには、ホロウェイが意図した、赦すことは困難なことであるという考えを単に認識するだけではない。むしろ、赦すことはその言葉のいかなる意味においても一つの力であるのか、さらに赦しは、とりわけて純然たる文学上のテーマとして扱うことが可能であるのかということを問うべきなのだ。デリダの不可能な赦しという概念は、赦しがルカの寓話だけでなく、どんな文学においても描かれうるかを我々に促している。

Summary

In order to explain the French philosopher Jacques Derrida's notion of radical forgiveness, I first analyze the 2002 book, *On Forgiveness: How Can We Forgive the Unforgivable?*, by Richard Holloway, a former bishop in the Anglican church. Holloway reads the Parable of the Prodigal Son from the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament of the Bible in an attempt to illustrate the notion of radical forgiveness as developed by Jacques Derrida. In aiming to establish the true nature of Jacques Derrida's notion of im-possible forgiveness, my reading casts doubt on the conventional idea, followed by Holloway, that this parable provides an example of forgiveness. To respect the rigor of Derrida's reflections on forgiveness, one must not merely recognize that forgiving is difficult – that is Holloway's aim – but, rather, question whether forgiving is a power in any sense of the word and, by the same token, whether forgiveness can be treated as a simple literary theme among others. In my judgment, Derrida's notion of impossible forgiveness invites us to question whether forgiveness can be illustrated not only in Luke's parable, but also in any literature.

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Should forgiveness be named and even
heard, audible, visible—in a word,
phenomenal?
Or, on the contrary, silent, mute, silenced,
unsayable, inconspicuous, solitary?
—Jacques Derrida¹

Literary texts, such as Guy de Maupassant's short story "Le Pardon," announce forgiveness as their explicit subject-matter, while analyses, such as Julia Kristeva's readings of Dostoyevsky's novels, draw out forgiveness as an implicit but decisive theme in literary works — a sort of hermeneutic 'key' that in the critic's hand unlocks the essence of an individual literary or moral vision.² In contrast to analyses that thematize forgiveness on the basis of explicit or implicit illustrations, if one were to read literature in light of Jacques Derrida's reflections on forgiveness, one would have at the very least to take account of the separate "logics" of forgiveness as Derrida depicts them. The question would then emerge whether in so doing within or with respect to a given text or texts one could isolate or identify an act or scene of forgiveness, especially since, the unconditional, as Derrida elaborates it, resists simple identification or illustration. Once one says, "this is unconditional forgiveness," then we can be sure that unconditional forgiveness it is not, or no more; and this is so whether the act, gesture, word, or scene is identified "in the world," "in literature" or, certainly, in a theoretical text. Despite this formidable complication, exemplifying unconditional forgiveness is, in fact, what a sympathetic reader of Derrida, Richard Holloway, attempts to do in On Forgiveness: How Can We Forgive the Unforgivable? My effort is to articulate, in light of Holloway's reading, the obstacles that await such an attempt at "reading forgiveness" as a basis for exploring Derrida's own reading of forgiveness and its relation to literature. Holloway strives to illustrate unconditional forgiveness through a number of examples, including what he describes as his non-traditional reading of the parable of the prodigal son, the totality of which is offered, by Luke, as a quotation of Jesus Christ [Luke 15: 11-32]. A former Bishop in the Anglican Church, Holloway presents the gist of the conventional reading as follows:

The prodigal son insults his father by claiming his inheritance and adds injury to insult by wasting it in riotous living. He 'comes to himself,' goes back and confesses his sin to his father, who forgives and re-instates him.³

For Holloway, what makes his own reading unconventional is that he incorporates aspects of Derrida's reflections to show that, in Luke's narrative, what is illustrated is not conditional forgiveness, predicated as such upon the son's confession, but unconditional forgiveness, which Holloway, following Derrida,⁴ calls a madness of the impossible: "It is a madness of

the impossible, but when it occurs it can create a profound qualitative change in people and events.”⁵ How, then, does Holloway arrive at this conclusion?

Holloway’s four chapters are arranged in such a way that the first three discuss weak or conditional forms of forgiveness as a sort of stepping-ladder to the “level of Derrida’s impossible forgiveness of the unforgivable” that is “reached” in the final chapter, “Redeeming the Chaos.”⁶ This teleological structure reflects the celebratory recasting of unconditional forgiveness that Holloway puts forward, and one consequence of that recasting is that it deprives the unconditional of the radical implications that Derrida ascribes to it. For reasons that I will explain, it removes the “madness” from the impossible, and reduces the impossible, in Derrida’s sense of the word, to the merely improbable. The radical or “mad” implications of unconditional forgiveness include, most importantly, grounds for doubting whether the unconditional could ever become an object susceptible to illustration or exemplification, whether it be in a literary text or “in the world.” At the very least, “mad” in Derrida’s use of the word is synonymous with “paradoxical,” since Derrida’s proposition concerning the impossible disrupts habitual formulations and expectations. For Derrida, the impossible, which he at times hyphenates as “im-possible” to distinguish it from other, common understandings of the word, is a constitutive trait of unconditional forgiveness and not an obstacle that forgiveness could avoid or overcome. As such, it does not have a simply negative or subtractive sense; rather, it involves the irreducible possibility of failure or impurity of forgiveness.

As I will maintain, Richard Holloway’s reading of Luke’s narration of Jesus’ parable, while it may be indebted indirectly to Derrida’s formulations on forgiveness, falls short of their rigor by depicting unconditional forgiveness as simply conditional forgiveness pushed to heroic measures. The definition of unconditional forgiveness as restored rationality or peace, moral heroism, or chaos redeemed that we find illustrated and championed in Holloway’s reading is, in fact, a powerful expression of the sovereignty which, on Derrida’s account, corrupts or disallows unconditional forgiveness. This can be seen in an assumption that Holloway depicts as a motivating background to unconditional forgiveness within Jesus’ parable as recounted by Luke: “I suspect that behind [the unconditional forgiveness granted by the father] there is an attempt to impose some kind of order and rationality on the chaos our conduct has created.”⁷ Holloway thus recasts Derrida’s idea of the “madness of the impossible” as a powerful capacity to reestablish rationality, via madness, and make possibility triumph over fortune or chance. Nonetheless, Holloway’s failure to grasp the stakes of unconditional forgiveness as articulated by Derrida can be instructive. However against the grain of Derrida’s thinking Holloway’s reading is, it repeats a gesture that, in different forms and to different degrees, has occurred widely in contemporary criticism of Derrida. The gesture consists primarily in depicting

Derrida as having taken a pious or moral “turn” in the last approximately fifteen years of his writing and teaching, and it is made by Derrida’s detractors as well as by those who believe themselves his faithful and sympathetic interpreters.⁸

Holloway’s reading will allow me to articulate the reasons why, on Derrida’s account, unconditional forgiveness is neither therapeutic, rational, well-ordered, nor, in its furthest implications, the product of power. For Derrida, forgiveness eludes or resists the theatrical itself, that is, it eludes the manifest, where this implies the essence of anything deemed to be present in the “here and now.” This implication denies forgiveness any self-consistent or self-conserving and self-perpetuating identity. Lacking self-identity, and thus resisting the simple formula of a “thou ought (or ought not) do this (or that),” forgiveness is “chaotic” in the sense that it is born of contradictory and indissociable demands. It can never, therefore, be a simple duty or obligation. These propositions are the crux of Derrida’s account of forgiveness’ resistance to conceptualization.

Although Derrida never employs the word to describe unconditional forgiveness, the latter is surely “prodigal,” insofar as, like giving,⁹ it exceeds any strict economy of calculation or exchange. A prodigal forgiveness would exceed all determination of meaning and remain prodigal in its unverifiability. Forgiveness would be “prodigal” in the sense of exceeding reason or measure, but it would always be insufficient, as well, precisely because, among other reasons, it is unverifiable and vulnerable. In short, it could be called both prodigal and impoverished. The excessiveness of the unconditional does not loose itself from the strict economy of moral, ethical, or political conventions. Prodigal forgiveness remains heterogeneous with respect to the necessities of action and conventions in which it is nonetheless ensnared. Its heterogeneous standing with respect to such necessities is not debilitating or simply negative, however, since it also enables the conventions to “function” all the better precisely to the degree that they attempt to obscure the impossible urge to prodigality within them.¹⁰ Although such a formalized description may serve to point out what is insufficient in accounts that assume forgiveness to be a duty, power, or right, it needs to be tested in and against specific readings so that it does not fossilize into a simple prescription of reading or action, much less into a theory of forgiveness. To this end, perhaps a minimal requirement should be that each reading entertain the question of who it is assumed forgives whom or what and in the name of whom or what.

RICHARD HOLLOWAY ON THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

Richard Holloway says of the conditionality of forgiveness that it “was the basis for the emergence of the discipline of private confession in the Christian tradition” and that “the

practice still goes on ... through a priest, a psycho-therapist or your best friend."¹¹ Conventional readings of the parable recounted by Luke frame it entirely in terms of this conditionality, which he defines as follows:

The traditional way to read the parable of the prodigal son is to interpret it as an example of conditional forgiveness at work, through the process of repentance, leading to confession, followed by re-instatement. The focus is usually on the moment of self-realization when the wayward son 'came to himself' and decided to go to his father and confess the sin he had committed. This moment of repentance, which means a radical change of mind, is the act that triggers forgiveness.

....

That is the most usual way to read this parable and the theory of forgiveness that has been based upon it.¹²

The next step in Holloway's reading is to exemplify "the experience of grace or the gift," which he says "is not an instrumental good, a prudent management technique or a damage limitation exercise; it is an intrinsic good, an end in itself, a pure gift offered with no motive of return."¹³ To show how Holloway illustrates this intrinsic good, I first quote, following him, Luke Chapter 15, which depicts the return of the prodigal son:

[20] So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. [21] Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' [22] But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe – the best one – and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. [23] And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; [24] for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.¹⁴

Of this passage, Holloway offers an extended interpretation, the first part of which questions whether the son's actions – his return and the words he speaks – truly constitute an act of contrition. One problem that haunts the conditional logic of forgiveness is that its requiring repentance on the part of the wrongdoer raises the question of whether repentance can ever be verified. Holloway's interpretation exploits this soft point in the logic by reinterpreting the conventionally understood act of repentance on the part of the son as being instead one of a series of calculated, self-serving actions; for Holloway, it is less with a contrite heart than with a pretense of contrition that the son returns to his father. This approach, however, only exchanges one unverifiable state for another. To know whether the son is contrite or not would require one to know his inner thoughts, perhaps even better or more conclusively than the son knows them, although there is no reason to assume that the son understands his own

motivations or actions with any particular clarity or prescience. By assuming that, on his return, the son is at first unequivocally unrepentant, Holloway believes he is able to assert that the father's forgiveness is both unconditional and redeeming or transformative in nature.

[T]he central act is the running of the father to greet the returning sinner. His son had broken the strict patriarchal code of the community of which he had been a part. His request for his inheritance was an insult to his father and should have led to his banishment for rebellion. Instead, the broken-hearted father gives him what should legally have come to him only after his own death. Having abandoned the code that had been carefully designed to contain the anarchic and selfish human spirit, the son sinks even lower and finds himself living with pigs, animals of profound allegoric impurity in that culture. According to this reading of the parable, his coming to his senses was no act of repentance, but a characteristically opportunistic move that was designed to save his own skin.¹⁵

Holloway's maintaining the son's guilt at the moment he appears to be forgiven would seem to echo Derrida's characterization of forgiveness as "an unconditional gift that does not wait for the transformation, work of mourning, or confession from the criminal."¹⁶ Insisting on the son's unrepentant guilt addresses a specific problem with conditional forgiveness, which can be stated as follows: in requiring repentance, one would seem to forgive only those who have already repented and thus already undertaken a process of transformation. This would raise the question of whether the forgiveness offered could still be transformative, redeeming, or therapeutic in nature and whether, in coming too late, as it were, it could even be called forgiveness. In the interview cited by Holloway, Derrida phrases this same line of thinking as a question: "Imagine, then, that I forgive only if the guilty one repents, mends his ways, asks for forgiveness and is thus changed by a new commitment, and that he is therefore no longer exactly the same as the one who was guilty. In this case, can one still speak of forgiveness?"¹⁷ Derrida says that this is forgiveness "contaminated by an economy, a calculation that corrupts it."¹⁸ Although Holloway never shows skepticism towards conditional forgiveness in accordance with this line of thinking and instead bases his skepticism on a general critique of the self-serving calculations that almost inevitably infest conditional forgiveness, he extracts a moral lesson from the parable by insisting on the unconditionality of the father's forgiveness (which is why it is important to underscore that Holloway assumes the motivations to be almost inevitable). To support this assumption, Holloway, as we have seen, first underscores that the son's fleeing should assure his banishment not only from his family but from the entire community and its established set of codes. The fact that, at the point of his return, the prodigal son is, according to the practices of the community as depicted by Holloway,

essentially an outsider, is what Holloway believes makes the father's welcoming gesture extraordinary. Indeed, it is what assures that his gesture is not self-serving.¹⁹

In the second moment of Richard Holloway's reading, the father's generous response is verified by the speed with which he moves to meet his approaching son.

The pining father sees him before anyone else and runs to meet him [emphasis in original]. This was in itself an extraordinary breach of the patriarchal code, which specified that the greater your dignity the more slowly you moved...The strong love of the waiting father has no interest in its own dignity or status. He rushes out to meet and embrace his disgraced child. It is this abandonment of code and conditionality that is the scandalous heart of the story. The son is clearly forgiven [my emphasis] before he can get a word out...²⁰

Holloway sees in the father's swiftness of foot an abandonment of code and thus an abandonment of conditionality. Could, however, his abandonment of code, and the dignity and authority that the code implies, constitute a pre-condition to the forgiveness granted which, as such, would compromise unconditional forgiveness? This is one question that Derrida's interrogations would invite us to raise. The father's own inclusion in the community – which is never questioned within the narrative and apparently never compromised – suggests that, whatever his intentions, he acts from the place and in the name of the community as one who has power to decide who is in and who is out, who inherits and who does not. As patriarch, the father alone has the possibility of respecting, or contravening, the laws which define his position. Moreover, the son's request for forgiveness, if that is what his return indicates, is not addressed to God, to the community, nor to the family or older brother (all of whom, it could be assumed, were offended or contradicted by the prodigal son's words and actions), but to the father who embodies the community and its patriarchal code. Thus, in receiving his son joyously, the father does so from a position of power even as he appears to abandon that power; it is the abandonment of his code-sanctioned power that defines his gesture as being exceptional. The temporary relaxation of political or civic power is only another modality of wielding the same. The possibility of abandoning code is thus the underlying condition of the father's "unconditional" forgiveness. And this would be true even if the father's motivations or intentions were wholly conciliatory or generous and lacking self-serving motivations of any kind. As we have seen, in a problematic two-fold gesture, Holloway tries to verify the absence of self-serving intentions on the part of the father by identifying a targeted suspension of codified power and, on that basis, concludes that the father acts unconditionally. What is problematic here is that Holloway significantly narrows the import of the unconditional so that it coincides with nothing more than a common idea of conditions, or pre-conditions, that is, conditions met by the one to be forgiven and without which forgiveness is withheld.

What Derrida understands by the unconditional, however, implies, as well, the absence of sovereignty, that is, the absence of power in the widest sense of the word, including the power implicit in manifest language and consequently of so-called performatives. Derrida states this implication clearly in a lecture on the idea of the university: "I say 'without condition' as well as 'unconditional' to suggest the connotation of 'without power' or 'without defense...'"²¹

Richard Holloway's attempt to illustrate unconditional forgiveness is complicated further by his demonstrating the therapeutic effects of the father's forgiveness.

[W]hen [the son] does produce his prepared speech there is a significant omission: "Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son," full stop. There is no opportunistic plea for a job on the farm. This reading of the parable suggests that the father's outpouring of love caused a true change in the son [my emphasis], so that we might say that the forgiveness that was unconditionally given actually caused the repentance that followed it, an exact reversal of the order that is followed in the usual system of conditional forgiveness."²²

Holloway's reading assumes not only that a "true change" occurs in the son as a consequence of the father's actions but that this change occurs despite what is implied in the son's arriving with a "prepared speech." It is unclear what criteria are available to Holloway for him to be able to announce that a "true change" occurs. Since such an intention may be concealed, and its effects delayed, for any length of time, it would seem at the least precipitous to isolate a possible sign of change within the narrative and consider the change assured and final. The substantiation of Holloway's interpretation rests entirely on that which follows the "full stop," which is to say, on what the son does not say, and this is problematic for a few reasons. On the one hand, if the son prepares a speech, it is likely that he gives thought as well to the hazardousness of pressing his case for a job on the farm from the very moment of his return. His declaration that he will make such a speech follows a verse in which he covets the relative comforts enjoyed by his father's servants, which suggests that his strategic ruminations are motivated less by remorse for wrong done to his father, family, or community, than by concern over his material predicament. At this point in the parable, it is impossible to say whether Luke or, for that matter, Jesus, assumes the role of omniscient narrator or whether the son's reported words were first spoken aloud; but, in either case, we have no way of verifying the son's sincerity or of knowing why he fails to request, as it seems that he first intends to do, to be employed as a servant. These are the words that Holloway calls the prodigal son's "prepared speech" (the final sentence of which the son does not utter to his father):

[17] But when he came to himself, he said, How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! [18] I will arise and go to my father,

and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, [19] and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.²³

The fact that, according to Luke, the son first “came to himself” raises the question of whether his transformation – the one that Holloway sees as a “moment of repentance” and a “radical change of mind” provoked by the father’s unconditional forgiveness – was not already underway, and perhaps even complete. To the degree that the son’s remorse, if he felt any, and his determination to change his ways, were sincere, then one might judge him to be already “redeemed,” that is, delivered from the presumable consequences of his actions and worthy, again, of his father’s graces or of a reinstated inheritance; but, as is always the case with such readings, his degree of sincerity cannot be established. Another possibility is that in avowing to himself his depraved or illegitimate state, the son dissociates himself not only from the prodigal one that he was, but from the son who, before demanding his inheritance and departing, had enjoyed his father’s recognition, if not an inheritance. Whether the son’s first declaration was proffered to a (fictional) witness, hypothesized, or simply projected by Jesus or Luke for purposes of moral instruction, his saying that he will request to be treated “like one of the hired servants” suggests that the father’s forgiveness, assuming he forgives, has the effect of reestablishing the son’s rights as son – both in name and in the privileges which befall him. Coming to “himself” could imply that he was no longer the prodigal son; no longer willing to waste his substance with riotous living, and therefore no longer in need of his father’s redeeming gestures (assuming, problematically, that reestablishing the dignity of the son’s title, or the inheritance that might follow, have anything to do with what is called “redemption” or “forgiveness”). The son would still be in need of sustenance, and that seems to be what motivates his double return: first, to “himself,” and subsequently, to his father. Nonetheless, there are no criteria for determining who exactly returns to the father, whether a prodigal, blameworthy, hypocritical, conniving, and unrepentant son motivated solely by hunger and likely to offend once more, or an innocent, enlightened, misfortunate, or once-prodigal-now-redeemed son for whom a redemptive kiss or embrace could only appear a superfluous act (however sincere in intention or warmly received). Holloway’s emphasizing that the son does not actually request, in the father’s presence, and in accordance with his narrated intentions [Luke 15:18], that he be treated “like one of the hired servants” obscures the fact that the son’s mere returning would be difficult to dissociate from a process of reconciliation.²⁴ This is true, as well, since the return is predicated upon and conditioned by a familiarity and commonality of language between the son and father. For this reason, his returning, and all the familiarity that informs it and makes it possible, would already have inaugurated a process of reconciliation, a reconciliation for which the father’s embrace or kiss would only be a kind of exclamation point.

Had a dispute broken out between the two, with recriminations or insults voiced, or blows exchanged, the grounds for reconciliation would still have been under foot.

[20] And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. [21] And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.

The speech appears calculated to the point where, even though, to lend provisional credence to Holloway's interpretation, the son receives an unequivocal sign of forgiveness from the father, the son persists in performing the first half of it. Thus, if one were to follow Holloway's account, the delivery of the lines would be belated or superfluous. Concerning the line that is not reported as having been spoken, on the one hand, if the son is cognizant of the father's forgiveness, as Holloway assumes he is, the unvoiced request to be treated as a servant could seem redundant to the son, since his saying that he is not "worthy" (axiov) can imply that he will have to regain his worth and thus "redeem" himself through labor or other means. In short, in saying, "I am not worthy," he can expect his father to understand a request to allow him, through whatever means, to regain his worthiness or his worth.²⁵ On the other hand, if the father's manifesting an "outpouring of love" is what stopped the prepared speech short – an unverifiable assumption, for sure – one can presume that the son sees in this outpouring reason for not asking at once for a job on the farm. The presumably pregnant silence following the period at the end of verse 21 would hardly be a sign of the transformative power of unconditional forgiveness; it would, rather, fit the calculative nature of a son who, in accordance with Holloway's portrait of him, prepares a speech with his own livelihood in mind and calculates not only what to say but what not to say. Whatever the case, a larger point to keep in mind is that, on Derrida's account, unconditional forgiveness implies not only that it cannot be rendered in its fully assured presence and repeated as such by others or in different contexts, but that it cannot be defined pragmatically, by the consequences that are presumed to follow from it. Yet this is precisely what Holloway's recasting unconditional forgiveness as redemption tries to do.

On a similar note, Richard Holloway's identifying a "reversal of the order that is followed in the usual system of conditional forgiveness" implies that forgiveness proceeds according to an order, which assumption would seem to lift unconditional forgiveness out of the realm of what Holloway earlier calls "an intrinsic good, an end in itself."²⁶ The idea of an "intrinsic good" also reawakens the presumption of sovereignty that Derrida pointedly critiques in the interview to which Holloway refers. The viability of Holloway's reading would seem to rest upon his demonstrating that the father's gesture of forgiveness precedes any sign of repentance. As I have pointed out, what this assumption misses is that, without even considering the incident of

the “prepared speech,” the mere fact of the son’s returning can signal that the son is already on a path to reconciliation and be viewed by the onrushing father as an indication of repentance. The father would be indifferent to anything the son might say simply because he rejoices at the mere fact of the son’s being alive and present. In abandoning the convention whereby abandoners of the community’s code are deemed no longer to belong to the community, both the son and the father appear to act on a basis of familiarity and mutual recognition or trust. Thus, it would seem, their reconciliation is already underway before the father quickens his pace to meet his son. This is another possibility that Derrida’s reflections would invite one to entertain. While discussing conditional and unconditional forgiveness as they are inscribed within the at times analogous problematic of hospitality, Derrida says that in “unconditional hospitality, the host [l’hôte] who receives should, in principle, receive even before knowing anything at all about the guest [l’hôte] he receives.”²⁷ This “condition” of the unconditional thus places a limit on what is known, or can be known, of the other. The same implication is found in the problematic of forgiveness, even if, in the conventional discourse of forgiveness, one always finds inscribed a minimal knowledge, namely, the knowledge that a misdeed has been done knowingly and intentionally, as well as the memory or persistence of an injury or pain caused.²⁸

In light of these minimal conditions, it is significant that Richard Holloway assumes, in line with the conventional reading of the parable, that the son’s actions are not simply excusable. Excusable deeds are those for which the subject was simply in error or which he or she was constrained to commit; they are involuntary. By contrast, misdeeds done knowingly and maliciously are the only kinds of offenses that qualify as being forgivable or unforgivable.²⁹ Given this distinction, which Derrida agrees is essential, there are aspects to Luke’s narrative that would support the view that the son’s actions do not call for forgiveness. Specifically, one might ask whether the father knows that, in wasting his inheritance in riotous living and shunning a life of familial duty, the son acts knowingly and with malicious intent. Can the father be sure that the son does not act under the spell of a fleeting illusion, or that he went astray in a temporary fit of excusable youthful indiscretion? Rather, it seems that the father knows nothing at the moment he greets his returning son. His gesture does not appear to be based on full knowledge of the nature of his son’s plight. Nonetheless, to forgive unconditionally, the father would have to ascertain that there was harm done and that it was done intentionally and, moreover, that its painful or deleterious consequences persist. It seems that evidence for such minimal conditions is lacking.³⁰

One can observe Richard Holloway’s departure from Jacques Derrida even as Holloway presents himself as supporting Derrida’s views. It is not surprising, for one, that Holloway

identifies in the father's gesture a force for unequivocal good. This marks a prescriptive dimension of Holloway's reading that is common in discourses on forgiveness but absent, for essential reasons, from what Derrida advances. Elaborating on certain of Derrida's assertions in the course of his interpretation of the parable, Holloway writes of forgiveness (while adding his own emphasis) that it "is a madness of the impossible, but when it occurs, it can create a profound qualitative change in people and events. It is important to remember that it is not calculated to do this; it is not calculated to do anything; it is its own meaning, to use Derrida's language."³¹ What Derrida repeatedly questions is whether, in its very manifestation as forgiveness, that is, in its being rendered sensible or intelligible, it still merits the name of unconditional forgiveness. Although Derrida does not deny that forgiveness can have a transformative power, Holloway, in order to cast this end in itself as a profound, transformative power, paraphrases Derrida in a way that glides over the most difficult part of the assertions that they immediately follow. Specifically, in the passage quoted by Holloway, Derrida writes (with my emphasis) that "pure and unconditional forgiveness, in order to have its own meaning must have no 'meaning,' no finality, even no intelligibility. It is a madness of the impossible."

³² The word "meaning," as Derrida uses it here, entails both observable consequences and minimal conditions of intelligibility. In the former case, the presence of a finality – whether this means reconciliation, redemption, reintegration into the community, restored employment, or any other attestable consequence – contaminates unconditional forgiveness as conceived by Derrida and as belonging to the Abrahamic tradition generally. In the latter case, it is significant that the "even" of "even no intelligibility" does not simply link a possible or optional aspect of the impossible, as Holloway seems to have understood it but, rather, draws attention to an aspect that is necessary if forgiveness is to be understood as being unconditional. In other words, forgiveness is not "its own meaning" in the sense of an extraordinary case of a generally perceived or universally acknowledged phenomenon but a "meaning" whose uniqueness is that it tests the very limits of meaning (and in that sense, again, it can be called "prodigal"). As for the parable of the prodigal son, it could be that the son's purportedly dropping from a prepared speech his plea for a job on the farm is an unintended effect of an intrinsically motivated action on the part of the father; however, in that case, unconditional forgiveness would have been rendered fully intelligible, with its sense being fully present within the narrative to the point where it coincides with the narrative, becoming its irreplaceable, immovable "theme," whether or not the father or either of the sons appear to mark conscious awareness that reconciliation or forgiveness has occurred. Far from testing the limits of meaning, this illustration of forgiveness would turn the father's hurried step and the absence of a few words on the part of the son into pregnant signs of a fully realized and transformative unconditional forgiveness.

In contrast to Richard Holloway's attempt to render forgiveness "thematic," the lack of intelligibility implied in the rigorous concept of forgiveness that Jacques Derrida pursues is what could be called its meaning without meaning. This is what Derrida understands by forgiveness stripped of sovereignty. This stripping would be the essential "condition" of unconditional forgiveness. Thus, the "meaning," on which word Derrida consistently places cautionary quotation marks when discussing forgiveness, is not only foreign to any step-by-step ordering but is essentially not therapeutic, including in cases where a therapeutic consequence is presumed to have followed unintentionally. To rest one's interpretation of a scene of forgiveness (or what is taken to be such) on the question of perceived intentions would be to rely on the verifiability of intentions, as if impossible forgiveness were possible only when the forgiver's intentions could be verified as sincere intentions. It would, moreover, assume that verification of whatever sort could settle the matter and bring to light unconditional forgiveness in the fullness of its meaning. The purity of intention of the one who forgives is conventionally deemed a defining characteristic of true forgiveness, and Derrida's relative distance from this criterion is essential; the problem, however, is not only that such intentions cannot be verified, since insidious sovereignty is the real aim of Derrida's reflections. Derrida strives to dissociate sovereignty from unconditional forgiveness since, for one, the assumption that forgiveness has as a correlate the power to punish disallows unconditional forgiveness by confining it to an order of juridical or penal enforcement. Throughout perhaps every discourse on forgiveness up until and not including Derrida's, an essential prerequisite of forgiveness is the power of punishment wielded by the one who would forgive. In this light, it is understandable, given Holloway's misappraisal of Derrida's formulations, that Holloway elsewhere does not dissociate unconditional forgiveness from the exercise of power, including political power, and even argues that, in politics, the royal or presidential pardon best exemplifies pure forgiveness.

The closest we come to [pure forgiveness] in human politics is the royal or presidential pardon that is offered to convicted criminals. Here no attempt is made to extenuate or explain away the crime; the criminal simply throws himself or herself on the mercy of the sovereign authority and the pardon comes, if it comes at all, as an unmerited gift [my emphasis].³³

Holloway appears satisfied with the targeted suspension of a codified power – in this case, a power to punish or refuse inheritance. The exercise of power, even where it remains only potential, is found, implicitly or thematically, in conventional definitions of forgiveness. As can be seen in the following comments, it is the precise condition which Derrida critiques in the writings on forgiveness of Arendt and Jankelevitch as being that which compromises unconditional forgiveness. Derrida argues this point in the interview "On Forgiveness" by

observing that,

Each time forgiveness is effectively exercised, it seems to suppose some sovereign power. It could be the sovereign power of a strong and noble soul, but also a power of State exercising an uncontested legitimacy, the power necessary to organize a trial, an enforceable judgment or, possibly, acquittal, amnesty, or pardon. If, as Jankelevitch and Arendt claim (I have stated my reservations on this subject), one forgives only where one can judge and punish, and thus evaluate, then the establishment or institution of an instance of judgment supposes a power, a force, a sovereignty.³⁴

This is why Derrida, in line with another strain of Jankelevitch's thinking, says that the "notion of forgiveness remains foreign to the juridical and political orders."³⁵ Indeed, for Derrida, there is no proper "order" in which one could place forgiveness, and that is why he says that he believes "in the absolute heterogeneity between the movement or the experience of forgiveness on the one hand and that which is too often associated with it, which is to say, statutes of limitation, acquittal, amnesty; in a word, forgetting in all its forms."³⁶ That is why it is necessary to distinguish rigorously, as does Jankelevitch, between forgiving and forgetting, since the former entails the integral memory of a past misdeed, whereas the sense Derrida gives to the word "forgetting" in this context indicates that he characterizes all forms of reconciliation as a kind of forgetting, since they attenuate the misdeed.

Returning to the parable of the prodigal son, the father's not respecting code, whether he does so consciously or not, resembles clemency rather than unconditional forgiveness and, as such, is closer to reconciliation. In the critique of clemency put forth in the introductory essay to Vladimir Jankelevitch's *Le Pardon* that Jacques Derrida would certainly subscribe to, Jankelevitch defines clemency as a form of simulated or false forgiveness wielded by sovereigns in the first, political sense of the word.³⁷ In this critique, Jankelevitch argues that the sovereign is too powerful to be offended by his presumptive offender; he is never wounded or offended personally, and thus his relation to the offender is only indirect; clemency is thus "'intransitive;' it is literally solitary in its magnanimity."³⁸ However, as the sovereign is not offended – for Jankelevitch, the sovereign would have to feel rancor [*rancune*] to be offended – there is no real offender, either, and, thus, there are no grounds for forgiveness. Derrida's radicalization of this type of argument can be seen in his questioning whether forgiveness is even a "power" or "human possibility," which he sees as correlates to the power of punishment that is only exemplified, and not monopolized, by the authority of a political sovereign: "This human possibility is the correlate to the possibility of punishing – not of avenging oneself, of course, which is something different, to which forgiveness is even more foreign, but of punishing in accordance with the law."³⁹ As Derrida remarks to Elisabeth Roudinesco, he "would

be tempted to think that forgiveness does not respond to its pure vocation, assuming it can ever do this, unless it forgives the unforgivable and thus raises itself above law [droit], beyond any possible sanction. Forgiveness is and must remain heterogeneous to the juridical.”⁴⁰ In short, to the degree that the father exercises power (even as he relaxes a code as described by Holloway), the heterogeneity is compromised and thus so is the possibility of unconditional forgiveness.

To assess Richard Holloway’s reading of the parable of the prodigal son, it is important to keep in mind that, throughout much of his book Holloway ascribes the impossibility of forgiveness to the limited capacities of most human beings and argues in the final chapter, alongside his reading of the parable, that the impossibility can be overcome by certain figures of extraordinary moral courage. These figures he calls “moral geniuses.”

One of the dismaying things about history is that there never seem to be many of these moral geniuses around. It is notoriously difficult to apply the politics of even conditional forgiveness to conflicts between groups or nations; it is almost impossible to apply unconditional forgiveness in these situations [my emphasis].⁴¹

In stating that unconditional forgiveness is “almost” impossible, Holloway turns impossible forgiveness into merely exceptional or unlikely forgiveness. It is in this final gesture that Holloway’s unwitting departure from Derrida is best seen. For Holloway, the impossible can be overcome by “charismatic figures” who “bear in their bodies the suffering of their people, yet are able to transcend the pain and lead them beyond it into the peace of forgiveness.”⁴² They become, in essence, superhuman, or God-like in their humanity. Their humanity is raised to universal dimensions: “Such people become representative or archetypal figures who outgrow their own particular humanity and become universal figures.”⁴³ Holloway goes as far as to claim that the “only person who fully exemplifies this kind of impossibility today is Nelson Mandela.”⁴⁴

Precisely because the heroic strain in Richard Holloway falsifies Jacques Derrida’s understanding of the “impossible,” criticisms levied at Derrida over his supposedly championing an absurdly idealistic idea of forgiveness that summons humanity to moral heroism, or a “mad” idea of forgiveness for which “mad” is synonymous with “exceeding most persons’ abilities” would be aptly levied against Holloway.⁴⁵ The implication is that by “mad” Derrida also understands that forgiveness must retain the evil deed in its entirety, must endlessly reproduce the willed evil as well as the pain or damage that may have resulted from it. The retention implied by the idea of forgiveness is thus “mad” because it reproduces that which it forgives. Every affective transformation that weakens the pain or to any degree heals the wound diminishes and, in a sense, forgets the evil deed. Thus, if forgiveness is possible, the evil must persist in its perniciousness. It cannot be warded off in advance, weakened or effaced.

Moreover, one has always to keep in mind that, for Derrida, the “im-possible” is not simply the contrary of the “possible,” nor is it exactly non-negative or dialectical. It is not part of a process that, overwhelming impossibility itself, leads to healing or to a cure. It is, irreducibly, the condition of both the possible and the impossible. Or, as Derrida says, “forgiveness, if it is possible, if there is such a thing, is not possible, it does not exist as possible, it only exists by exempting itself from the law of the possible, by impossibilizing itself, so to speak, and in the infinite endurance of the im-possible as impossible.”⁴⁶ Thus, the equivocal is essential to the structure of forgiveness. “Chaos” could be a name for this equivocalness, but, unlike the chaos identified by Holloway, which is only a temporary lapse or aberration, it is unredeemable: it can neither be paid off under any conditions nor liquidated by the scandalous prodigality of a noble or bountiful figure. Contrary to this at once enabling and limiting idea of the “im-possible,” if one wanted to exemplify forgiveness as fully realized, or made fully possible, by saying, “He or she has forgiven,” or “He or she forgives,” then one would have to preclude the possibility that the forgiving might have been corrupted or feigned in any way. But as this possible corruption or fraud is constitutive of forgiveness, by precluding it, one excludes forgiveness. Furthermore, the statements, “I forgive” or “I forgave,” which are even more unfathomable than the theoretical claims of another’s forgiving, have, as implicit corollaries, “I can” or “I may,” and it is precisely this assumed power, or potential, that the impossible, in Derrida’s understanding, is meant to question. The point here is that, in implying that I am able to forgive, such declarations set the scene for an economy of exchange in which I give that which I presume that I embody or possess. In short, this scene depends on the conditions or pre-conditions that unconditional forgiveness is conceived to elude. That is why Derrida tries to dissociate “I can” from “I forgive” (in addition to problematizing the sovereignty implied within the “I”).⁴⁷ If my forgiving is only the realization of a potential within me, then, in claiming to forgive, I only exercise a power within me and I do not forgive. I do not expose myself to what is impossible in forgiveness. Forgiveness would be confined to a subject-centered, fully conscious economy; and thus, it would not be prodigal. It would give only what it has, what is its own. By contrast, forgiveness, if such a thing exists, would herald an unforeseeable event that, in its prodigality, would exceed the expectations and capacities of the conscious subject; it would exceed any attempt the subject might make to incorporate it as its own. Therefore, impossible forgiveness, if it could occur, would consist not in overcoming the impossible but in doing the impossible, where the modality of doing is such that it could not be the realization of a potential within me or the object of my cognition or knowledge. Given that the criteria for forgiveness should exceed one’s conscious appraisal, Derrida asks, “How can I be sure that I have the right to forgive and that I have effectively forgiven, rather than forgotten, neglected, or reduced the

unforgivable to a forgivable misdeed?"⁴⁸ Being sure that I have such a right or power would imply that I could dispense forgiveness at will, that I could repeat my gesture in the supposed fullness of its original intention and meaning, knowing in advance that I could bring about a fully accomplished act. That is, in fact, what "I forgive" insinuates, since in saying "I forgive," I promise, in essence, to remain forgiving. If I did not, then the forgiveness would not have been absolute; it would have been conditioned by circumstances or promises from another, such as the promise on the part of the one "forgiven" to repent, reform, or to offend no more. Derrida speaks of this pronouncement in "Le ruban de machine à écrire":

Forgiveness, excusing, remitting another's fault, and the absolute absolution are always proposed, if I can put it this way, in the figure of 'the last word.' Would forgiveness that does not offer itself as the assurance, the promise, the meaning, in any case, of a final word, or of an end of history (even if only in the virtualizing logic of 'sooner or later'), still be forgiveness? From this comes the troubling proximity that forgiveness bears with the final judgment – which, however, it is not. It transcends all judgment, whether penal or non-penal... I forgive you has the structure of the final word.⁴⁹

Pronouncing forgiveness in this structure of the final word cannot, however, mean requiring a promise or guarantee of change on the part of the one who is forgiven; and this fact signals the vulnerability of forgiveness. To forgive unconditionally, I would have to forgive that which hurts me and may destroy me, even in a case where the intention to hurt or destroy me is clear.

As we have seen, Richard Holloway's appropriation of Jacques Derrida is meant to answer the question of how "human beings might even find it possible to forgive the unforgivable."⁵⁰ Giving an answer to this question, as Holloway does by means of a self-described unconventional reading of the Parable of the Lost Son, posits, explicitly in some cases, conditions by which impossible forgiveness is rendered possible. It thus submits the unforgivable to what Derrida would call a form of forgetting. The father in Jesus' parable represents this strong or noble soul all the more so for the fact that, unlike the secretive Abraham as Moses recounts his being called to sacrifice Isaac, the father of the prodigal son pronounces, in the final two verses of Luke 15, what appears to constitute the "moral" of the parable. In addressing the elder son, who appears indignant at the liberal reception his brother has received, the father says,

[31] ... Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. [32] It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found.

In this way, the father's saying that all he has is the elder son's marks a kind of thematic

climax. The father is capable of giving everything not only to the younger son, but to the older son, as well. Both sons can have all that the father has and by this they can be reconciled to one another. Then again, perhaps the son's prodigality only matches that of the father, and in this we could see the prodigal son as being the father's inheritor in more than a material sense.

The father's prodigality is, in fact, ambiguous: either it indicates that, being a man of inexhaustible bounty, the father gives what he has, gives all that he has, unconditionally, without counting or calculating; or it indicates that the father gives what he does not properly possess, namely, forgiveness, understood as that which only God can give; and, in this case, the father is an allegorical representation of God. On the first understanding, one could deploy Jankelevitch's critique of the "generous one" [*le généreux*] in which he argues that, like nature that "makes flowers for everyone, for the good as well as the evil," and thus shows no preferences, the generous do not hierarchize their values and thus lose their direct relation to the other: "the generous one does not know whom to forgive."⁵¹ One might object that, although the father does not place his sons within a hierarchy, he shows a clear preference for his family and thus respects at least the "directness" of his familial relations. However, in presenting himself as unconditionally generous to the family, the father overrides with his own capacity for giving the importance of both the event and the person that might call for forgiveness. His bountifulness is made available to his sons or his family more than it responds to a single person or to a single deed. Moreover, unlike forgiveness in any sense of the word, it is promised in advance. On the second understanding, which is closer to a conventional reading, one could at least appreciate how it is that the father can give all to one son and still give the same to the other. This is more than a quibbling over the sense of the father's words "all that I have is yours," which can also be restrictive in meaning, and thus indicate that the little that he has left is the elder son's. The point here is that the conclusion that forgiveness occurs in this parable hardly settles questions surrounding the sons' inheritances (e.g., Will the elder son be forced to share his inheritance with the younger son? What are the limits of the father's wealth and possessions? Does the elder son also have to "forgive" if unrest or fratricide is to be avoided? Is prodigality itself the more significant inheritance of the younger son?). One could support this reading by arguing that unconditional forgiveness is respected as such, for instance, through the silent and welcoming gestures of the father; nonetheless, if the father acts as God or as a conduit to God's forgiveness, he is still caught in a bind between not only rivaling sons, but the rivaling ideas of forgiveness and justice. On this reading, the father's "forgiveness" of the younger son offends the elder son's sense of justice and desire for equity and the conflict remains unresolved. For this reason, one could argue that, in being unjust, it is perhaps the father who must ask for forgiveness (just as, on another possible reading, it may

be the father who has to ask for forgiveness for his presumption that the younger son's actions even called for forgiveness, if that is the presumption he makes). If a more convincing attempt were made at ascribing a role to forgiveness in the parable, the parable could be read as a conflict between these competing ideas. Perhaps the parable, as a fictional device employed by Jesus and relayed by Luke, protects the narrators from having to make a constative statement of the sort, "This is (or was) forgiveness." Implicit, in this device, would be the recognition that fictional forgiveness is not actually forgiveness. However, if fictional forgiveness is not forgiveness, then how should one account for their relations?

Since monothematism appears to be the reigning strategy of reading that is brought to bear upon parables, perhaps the father's gesture of presenting himself as one who gives prodigiously is analogous to the totalizing gesture of any thematic or parabolic reading (of this parable or of others). In each case, the gesture neutralizes any competing theme that might challenge the univocal resolution of the parable (as, for instance, the theme implicit in the indignant son's concern for justice and equity). In this vein, Jean Grosjean and Michel Leturmy state, in an annotation of their edition of the New Testament, that Luke 15 is "constructed on the theme of God's mercy/forgiveness [*de la miséricorde*]." Moreover, this theme, they point out, is bolstered by the repeated refrain that runs from one parable to another (within the one parable) [Luke 15: 6, 9, 24, 32]: "Rejoice with me, I have found (my sheep, my piece of silver, my son) that was lost."⁵² Thus, it thematizes the themes, bringing the various scenes of Luke 15 into line with thematically divine forgiveness, where this force, and this theme, signal the return of the same, or the same returned to the nearly same, and celebrates the reconciliation, enabled by God's forgiveness, of fellows or families.⁵³ As such, the multi-parabolic parable marks the celebration of the same and presumes a total effacement of the injury, insult, or misdeed that momentarily, fictionally threatens it.

* * *

Let me now take stock of what my own reading has advanced till this point. Richard Holloway fails to grasp the import of Derrida's reflections on the unconditional even as he claims to champion them by reference to the New Testament and Nelson Mandela. One could thus respond to Holloway (and a host of writers who make similar assumptions) by demonstrating that Derrida's interest in forgiveness only deploys an argumentation that is worked out in his earliest writings and is in no way motivated by a pious admiration for religion or a prescriptive enthusiasm for heroic acts of forgiveness.⁵⁴ However, it would be more fruitful to explore the implications of the fact that Holloway's attempt to illustrate unconditional forgiveness is symptomatic of much larger trends, global trends that, apparently infused with a particularly massive line of doctrinal Christian thought, assimilate the language

of forgiveness with ethical, political, and juridical discourses and state-sponsored movements of reconciliation.⁵⁵ Forgiveness, on this widely circulated understanding, amounts to a cure that permits, or constrains, a disunited community to reunite and attempts to efface the trauma of past misdeeds.⁵⁶ Indeed, what Holloway proposes as a reading of Luke 15 is what Derrida, in a colloquium of French-speaking Jewish intellectuals entitled “How To Live Together?,” describes (in English) as a “healing away.”⁵⁷ In a sense, Holloway is justified in this, since the conditional understanding of forgiveness has always been present within the so-called Abrahamic heritage, although one can hardly conclude, for that reason, that in his reading he illustrates forgiveness. Concerning the parable of the prodigal son, one cannot judge, on the basis of a reading that relies entirely on the criterion of sincerity – the son’s insincere repentance, the father’s sincere forgiveness, etc. – what exactly takes place. One can raise doubts with respect to the possibility that forgiveness is requested or granted, and one can suspect that the harmony that is presumed to return to the brothers remains on dubious grounds. Nonetheless, since the poles between which Holloway’s reading, and my reading of Holloway’s reading, have navigated, seem only to have determined what is problematic about a reading that sets out to identify or illustrate forgiveness, the question needs to be raised of how literature, a notion at once evident and elusive, relates to such scenes.

Derrida says that, if forgiveness happens, “it should exceed the order of presence, the order of being, the order of consciousness, and happen in the night. The night is its element.”⁵⁸ In light of this, the question remains what it would mean to read within this element, to read within the night. To correspond to the pure concept of forgiveness as Derrida formulates this in accordance with the Abrahamic heritage, forgiveness must remain essentially “secretive,” which does not mean “hidden” so much as it means not phenomenal in the sense of audible, visible, or, one could say, theatrical. Since unconditional forgiveness never manifests itself as such, how would one analyze forgiveness that does not show itself, that is not granted or requested visibly, knowingly? If thematizing forgiveness in particular is necessarily problematic, what can an analytic reading that lingers on the language of forgiveness hope for?

Notes

¹ In Safaa Fathy, "D'ailleurs, Derrida" (Paris: Gloria Films, 2000). All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

² Julia Kristeva, "Dostoyevsky, the Writing of Suffering, and Forgiveness." *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) 173-217. See also "Dostoïevski, une poétique du pardon," *Le pardon: Briser la dette et L'oubli* [Forgiveness: Breaking (with) the Debt and Forgetting], ed. Olivier Abel (Paris: Editions Autrement, 1993) 78-90. Guy de Maupassant, "The Pardon." *That Pig Morin and Other Stories*, trans. Ernest Boyd (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1923). In a different tradition, see William H. Matchett, *Shakespeare and Forgiveness* (Santa Barbara: Fithian Press, 2002). On Matchett's teleological, thematic reading, although at first it is only a convenient plot device for happy play resolution, forgiveness is introduced schematically into the plot of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, is developed further in *The Merchant of Venice*, and finds its fullest treatment as the very subject-matter of *Henry VIII*. As Matchett writes, "What first appeared merely as an early way out has become a difficult discipline, the single human action which, touched by the divine, can offer a stay against inescapable adversities," 37.

³ Richard Holloway, *On Forgiveness: How Can We Forgive the Unforgivable?* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2002) 65.

⁴ Jacques Derrida, "On Forgiveness." Trans. Michael Hughes. *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (New York: Routledge, 2001) 45; "Le Siècle et le Pardon." *Foi et Savoir* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2000) 120.

⁵ Richard Holloway, *On Forgiveness* 85.

⁶ Richard Holloway, *On Forgiveness* 36.

⁷ Richard Holloway, *On Forgiveness* 66.

⁸ See Martin Hägglund's "The Necessity of Discrimination: Disjoining Derrida and Levinas," *Diacritics* (Vol. 34, Number 1, Spring 2004) 40-71.

⁹ Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), esp. 34-70, 108-172.

¹⁰ Cf. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 66; *Donner la mort* (Paris: Galilée, 1999) 95-96.

¹¹ Richard Holloway, *On Forgiveness* 58, 59.

¹² Richard Holloway, *On Forgiveness* 60-61, 61.

¹³ Richard Holloway, *On Forgiveness* 78.

¹⁴ As quoted in Holloway, *On Forgiveness* 79, trans. unknown.

¹⁵ Richard Holloway, On Forgiveness 80, 81.

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, Sur parole: Instantanés philosophiques [In Speech: Philosophical Snapshots] (Paris: Editions de l'aube, 1999) 138.

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, On Cosmopolitanism 38-39, (modified); Foi et Savoir 114.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, "To Forgive: The Unforgivable and the Imprescriptible," trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Questioning God, ed. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001) 46.

¹⁹ The purportedly daring gesture promises no apparent personal reward to the father, and Holloway takes this to mean that it is not self-serving; however, the "apparent" absence of self-serving motivations can never ward off the cynicism of a Rochefoucauld, which is only energized by the presumption of disinterestedness.

²⁰ Richard Holloway, On Forgiveness 81-82.

²¹ Jacques Derrida, L'Université sans condition [The Unconditional University] (Paris: Galilée, 2001) 18.

²² Richard Holloway, On Forgiveness 82.

²³ Luke 15, The New King James Version (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1982). All quotations from this translation unless otherwise noted.

²⁴ The son's suggestion that he might be treated like "one of the hired servants" could imply that his being redeemed might be assured, or, in another way, that his not being redeemed might be compensated, through the trade-off of physical labor. As so often in matters of mercy and grace, the economical sense of the word "redeem" resonates in this possible implication of the son's idea.

²⁵ The colon or semicolon that appears directly before the omitted line in almost every English translation could further support the idea that the request to be employed as a servant was merely illustrative of the idea of not being worthy.

²⁶ Richard Holloway On Forgiveness 78.

²⁷ Jacques Derrida, Manifeste pour l'hospitalité (autour de Jacques Derrida) [Manifesto for Hospitality (with Jacques Derrida)] 98.

²⁸ Derrida says that "forgiveness that leads to forgetting, or even to mourning, is not, strictly speaking, forgiveness. Forgiveness demands the absolute, intact, active memory – both of the evil and the guilty one." Jacques Derrida and Antoine Spire, Au-delà des apparences [Beyond Appearances] (Bordeaux: Le Bord de l'eau, 2002) 62.

²⁹ This useful distinction is made by Vladimir Jankélévitch in Le Pardon (Paris: Editions Mouton, 1967) 79-138, Le Mal [Evil] (Paris: Arthaud, 1947), and in Philosophie morale (Paris: Flammarion, 1998) 367-371.

³⁰ One might also argue that the son's getting caught in a land that is hit with famine makes his misadventure look more like excusable misfortune than condemnable behavior.

³¹ Richard Holloway, On Forgiveness 85.

³² Jacques Derrida, in Holloway, On Forgiveness 85.

³³ Richard Holloway, Of Forgiveness 78-79.

³⁴ Jacques Derrida, On Cosmopolitanism 59 (modified); Foi et Savoir 133.

³⁵ Jacques Derrida and Elizabeth Roudinesco, De quoi demain... Dialogue [What Will Tomorrow ... A Dialogue] (Paris: Editions Galilée) 261.

³⁶ Jacques Derrida, Sur parole 136.

³⁷ Vladimir Jankélévitch, Le Pardon 12-15, 22, 89-91.

³⁸ Vladimir Jankélévitch, Le Pardon 13.

³⁹ Jacques Derrida, On Cosmopolitanism 112 (modified); Foi et Savoir 112.

⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, De quoi demain 264. Jankélévitch makes arguments that could be used to support Derrida's insistence on forgiveness' heterogeneity with respect to the juridical and the possibility of sanction, while others could be used to oppose it. This unresolved tension within Jankélévitch's thinking stems from his dissociating forgiving and the power of punishment while, at other times, maintaining the latter as a characteristic or criterion of forgiving. For example, whereas Jankélévitch offers this definition, "To forgive is to relieve the guilty one of his punishment or a part of his punishment, or to liberate him before carrying out his punishment," he also claims, in the same passage, that "forgiveness belongs in fact to the extra-legal, extra-judicial domain of our existence... justice, with its sanctions, disappears entirely in the fog of evasive approximations... Thus the mere idea of a right to forgive destroys forgiveness," Le Pardon 17, 16.

⁴¹ Richard Holloway, On Forgiveness 86-87.

⁴² Richard Holloway, On Forgiveness 87.

⁴³ Richard Holloway, On Forgiveness 87. Cf. Gouhier, A., Pour une métaphysique du pardon [Towards a Metaphysics of Forgiveness] (Editions de l'Epi, Paris: 1969) 18, for a similar figuring of moral transcendence.

⁴⁴ Richard Holloway, On Forgiveness 87. For Derrida, Mandela was admirable less because he embodied forgiveness or because he conserved and reproduced within himself an infinite sense of justice than because he admired justice. From this perspective, Derrida develops original reflections on what it means to admire justice, which development amounts, in one sense, to accounting for what it means to envisage the unconditional while never embodying it or fully realizing it. See Derrida, "The Laws of Reflection, Nelson Mandela, in Admiration," trans. Mary Ann Caws and Isabelle Lorenz, For Nelson Mandela, ed. Jacques Derrida and Mustapha Tlili

(New York: Seaver Books, 1987) 13-42.

⁴⁵ I am alluding, in particular, to the following commentaries on Derrida: Kristeva, Julia, "Forgiveness: An Interview," trans. Alison Rice, *PMLA* 117:2 (2002): 278-287. Morin, Edgar, "Pardonner, c'est résister à la cruauté du monde," *Le Monde des Débats* Feb. 2000: 24-26.

⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Questioning God* 48.

⁴⁷ Derrida analyzes the "psycho-phenomenology" of the ego in "Le parjure, peut-être ('brusques sautes de syntaxe')," [Perjury, Perhaps ('Brusque Leaps in Syntax')] *Etudes françaises* 38.1-2 (2002): 15-57, esp. 29.

⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida, Gad Soussana and Alexis Nouss, *Dire l'événement, est-ce possible?: Séminaire de Montréal pour Jacques Derrida* [Speaking the Event: Is it Possible? Montreal Seminar for Jacques Derrida] (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001) 94.

⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Papier Machine* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 2001) 67-68.

⁵⁰ Richard Holloway, *On Forgiveness* 15.

⁵¹ Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Le Pardon* 14, 82.

⁵² *La Bible: Nouveau Testament*, ed. Jean Grosjean and Michel Léturmy (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971) 229.

⁵³ Vladimir Jankélévitch insists that, because of the prodigal son's having repented, "he who came back and he who never left are now at the same point, but an indelible past [of suffering and temptation] separates them." In alluding to Luke 15: 1-10, Jankélévitch says that this separation makes heaven a more likely destination for the prodigal son than for his brother. *Philosophie morale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998) 1019. Jankélévitch's assessment raises the question of inheritance. Does the younger son find his monetary inheritance renewed? Does he inherit a moral lesson concerning forgiveness or reconciliation? In an apparent allusion to Matthew 19:30, Matthew 20:16 and like passages, the fact that the elder son remains on the outside, while the younger son has been received within, suggests not only a reestablishment of the younger son's rights, but a reversal of expected fortunes.

⁵⁴ Derrida's reflections on forgiveness are in line with the non-ethical opening of ethics whose possibility he first described in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) 139-140; *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1967) 202.

⁵⁵ Pope John Paul II, for instance, in his World Day of Peace message of December 8, 2001, wrote that, "Only to the degree that an ethics and a culture of forgiveness prevail can we hope for a 'politics' of forgiveness, expressed in society's attitudes and laws, so that through them justice takes on a more human character." *The Catholic Exponent*, 4 Jan. 2002: 15, 20 (20).

⁵⁶ Far from trying to dissociate forgiveness from political or juridical discourse, Paul Ricœur

calls for the introduction of forgiveness, “the poetics of ethical life,” into the process of imaginative integration necessitated by Europe. See “Quel éthos nouveau pour l’Europe?” Imaginer l’Europe, ed. Peter Koslowski (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1992) 107-116. Two general works now treat this question of the relation between forgiveness and politics: from an Anglo-centric perspective, there is P.E. Digeser, Political Forgiveness (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); the other, which is primarily attentive to French-language sources, is Sandrine Lefranc, Politiques du pardon (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2002).

⁵⁷ Jacques Derrida, Comment Vivre Ensemble? Actes du XXXVIIe Colloque des intellectuels juifs de langue française, ed. Jean Halpérin and Nelly Hansson (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001) 208.

⁵⁸ Jacques Derrida, Questioning God 53.

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