

オリビエ・アベルによる赦しの概念

Managing the Tragic: Olivier Abel's Notion of Forgiveness

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The notion of forgiveness as elaborated by the contemporary French philosopher Olivier Abel is examined and distinguished from its contemporary and historical sources.

本論文では、現代フランスの哲学者オリヴィエ・アベルが詳細に論じた“赦し”の概念について考察し、現代および過去における認識との違いを明らかにする。

The discursive opportunity or challenge to which the writings on forgiveness of contemporary French philosopher Olivier Abel respond is, above all, the transformation of the idea of forgiveness by means of various inflections of secularism: forgiveness minus the theocratic grip. Although Abel participates to some degree in the contemporary tendency to view forgiveness as a “secular” power that is necessary for the stable functioning of society, he does not de-theologize his discourse as strenuously as, for example, Hannah Arendt does.¹ Abel aims to articulate philosophical and historical dignity for the notion of forgiveness. He writes that “supposedly extraordinary, rare and sublime forgiveness is often only an ordinary and universal obligation for survival, for every society.”² However, rather than consigning the “irretrievable” or “irreparable” to the Last Judgment, as Arendt does with respect to unforgivable offenses, Abel tries to take account of “the irreparable” within a certain economy of forgiveness. Abel argues that forgiveness can respond to two forms of “the tragic.” While the tragic of conflict concerns insoluble discord between parties that stems from their incompatible views, the tragic of the irreversible concerns the nature of historical memory and, in particular, the fact that many disputes are overdetermined in their causality and inherited from distant generations. Abel raises the question of the lack of clarity that may haunt any thought of forgiveness and thus put to doubt one’s very capacity to circumscribe it within a “scene,” which always entails recognized actors (the one who forgives, the one who is forgiven, etc.) and conventionally defined acts of speech. As Abel remarks, in “most real historical situations,”³ confusion reigns over the nature of the wrong, its causality or its author. In describing these complications, Abel

presents forgiveness as a solution, if not a type of “healthy” resignation, to the fact that the economy of debts to which forgiveness responds is partial and imperfect. With his idea of forgiveness as being that which enables one to overcome moral debt and forgetting, Abel is concerned, predominantly, with conceiving an ecology of memory. For Abel, memory — one’s “own” memory — should not remain egoistically focused on the misdeeds done to it alone. Rather, it should have a moral function of allowing one to imagine the suffering of others and a pedagogic function of drawing lessons from injuries witnessed or received.

To the two forms of the tragic, Abel offers two solutions, which are types of forgiving, that he contrasts with a conventional, “moral” forgiveness. Abel’s criticism of moral forgiveness is that it requires an unrealistic degree of clarity and that this clarity, in the rare cases in which it is established, reduces forgiveness to an economy of equivalent exchanges, which economy carries specific dangers. In an essay on the relations between history and forgiveness, Abel maintains that, in its striving to reestablish reciprocity, moral forgiveness “permits the furtherance of the law of retribution, and it knows that one can only forgive that which one can punish.”⁴ For Abel, despite its universal moral function, “[t]his forgiveness presupposes a continuous causal temporality in which good and evil deeds [les biens et les maux] have assignable causes somewhere in the structure of the exchange.”⁵ Consequently, it maintains forgiveness in a logic of conditionality and exchange by striving to encompass that which at first appears irretrievable and without retribution. Moral forgiveness is “a strategy not only for founding social order on reciprocity and exchange, but also for integrating into this ‘coherence’ of the world that which always exceeds the exchange: pain and more generally death, the irretrievable loss of all that cannot be called back.”⁶ In a passage whose final lines evoke the scene of ascetic angst imagined by Gouhier as a path to the possible realization of the infinite, Abel writes that this type of forgiveness relies upon a “final violence” that occurs within a strictly defined, self-enclosed economy of exchange.

It is thus a matter of discovering a “final violence” that rectifies [répare] the violence before. Two possibilities are thus presented: either punishment, which makes one pay for a moral fault by means of physical pain and thus reestablishes equivalence between the pain/evil undergone and the pain/evil enacted [le mal subi et le mal agi]; or “to take upon oneself,” to decide that the violence before was the last violence, to sacrifice one’s vengeance, in a sense, and render good for evil. In both cases, the punishment or forgiveness has a “magical” character: it is a sort of ethical repetition or enactment which “effaces” the physical pain/evil undergone.⁷

For Abel, the most problematic assumption of this type of forgiveness, which he does not stigmatize or dismiss entirely, is that “it applies only to situations that are clear, or made clear by convention, or in which all practical conditions have been fulfilled: one can designate the victim and the guilty, the guilty has recognized his guilt and has asked for forgiveness, etc.”⁸ It is in this, too, that it offers a closed economy of forgiveness. In this figure, “forgiveness recalls that every exchange is a contract, and that if the terms of

the contract are corrupted, the contract is voidable, and can be renewed.”⁹ In other words, the identities or “practical conditions” are established from the outset and this makes the moral debt implied in the misdeed an object of exchange. This object of exchange, in turn, presumes an identity which already seems to offer that which forgiveness, in this sense, is meant to strive for as an end, namely, reciprocity — a reciprocity of perspectives and a reciprocity of power that render a debt by suspending a merited punishment. On Abel’s view, the problem with this limited economy is that

in most real historical situations, one is confronted with insurmountable conflicts in which even the fault is not agreed upon, or with ancient and irreparable deeds, of which past generations were victims, situations in which the crime is too vast too be punished, or too overlapping with others for one to be able to isolate a simple causality.¹⁰

Nonetheless, when history itself does not obey a strict economy based on the identity of facts and mutual recognition of participants, forgiveness, Abel believes, still has a role to play. Forgiveness has a higher function than that of manipulating the closed economy of moral situations insofar as it can also address the overdetermined nature of historical causality and bring compromise to conflicts in which parties lack a common set of assumptions or interests.

Olivier Abel’s concern is that, when faced with such situations in which, he says, “history turns tragic [*touche au tragique*],”¹¹ forgiveness can be swallowed up by either a will to forget or a return to the restricted economy whose insistence on debt repayment may lead one either to seek revenge or to act out, and thus reproduce, the harm of which one was first a victim. To avoid these dangers, Abel proposes two separate logics of forgiveness, two alternative means of confronting the “tragic.” The first logic responds to the “tragic of conflict.” By this, Abel, who is indebted for this idea to Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot’s work in *De la justification* on “economies of grandeur,”¹² means a history in which the memories of various “actors” are incompatible not only because the actors have separate viewpoints but also because they do not have “a common question that would make [them] contemporaries to one another, [and] because there is no possible exchange on the basis of a common principle.”¹³ In this anachronistic conflict wherein “common temporality is itself broken,” “the exchange of memories, the exchange of payable debts, is impossible.”¹⁴ The description of this conflict resonates with the questions of distinctness and silence, if only because the “memories” are incapable of justifying themselves and, in some cases, are unable to respond to questions one would put to them:

There is a corporeity of the historical identities that makes them irresponsible, incapable at some point of justifying themselves; they have a corporeity that prevents them from responding to all questions. As if identity itself were preceded by a debt that is transcendental with respect to all the exchanges that had defined it, or by a forgetting that is vaster and more active than every remembrance.¹⁵

As insoluble as this conflict may appear, the “heterogeneity of language” that Abel has in mind

corresponds, in fact, only to different “forms of life” of which Abel, following Boltanski and Thévenot’s De la justification, cites, as an example, the difference between civic and commercial values. Thus, forgiveness aims to resolve the conflict by offering a “compromise.” The compromise must bring the different protagonists to accept that they “are not in the same language, in the same world, or in the same history.”¹⁶ By accepting that they will never bridge the gaps between them on grounds which serve to justify their respective sets of claims, they enter a space of reciprocity in which forgiveness occurs as a byproduct of their compromise or constitutes the synchronized presentation of their anachronistic non-relation.

Forgiveness is here the virtue of compromise in the sense that it allows one to abandon the dispute, but without making a definitive judgment on the heart of the matter: it presupposes that... in the irremediable dispute between the two narrations or arguments one has tried to construct a sort of compromise that breaks with the interminable replaying of the two separate versions.¹⁷

What Abel describes here resembles a kind of Christian universalism for which, in the end, all are forgiven, without distinction between wrongdoers and victims: “One accepts to forgive [On accepte de pardonner] without looking further into which roles will be played by one another in the scene: at bottom, there will be no more forgiver and no more forgiven.”¹⁸ However, if it is to be assimilated to forgiveness in this way, the idea of a harmonious effacement of roles that occurs on “neutral” ground, which is to say, on ground that is a composite language, world, and history, raises a number of questions: Who, in such a neutral space, accepts to forgive? By whom is forgiveness accepted? By whom is it offered? And following what misdeed? What makes forgiveness a pertinent notion in the first place? Does a “heterogeneity” of perspectives alone call for forgiveness? Could forgiveness occur in a scene in which it is the stated aim? Must these identities be effaced or unknown as such for forgiveness to occur?

Perhaps some light can be thrown on these questions if one considers the use Abel makes of Boltanski and Thévenot’s De la justification, on the one hand, and of Hegel, on the other. Concerning the first, it is significant that Boltanski and Thévenot explicitly put compromise in the service of a greater good. In incorporating Boltanski and Thévenot’s idea of compromise, Abel thus describes a notion of forgiveness that, in the interest of forestalling recriminations and violence, renders all participants anonymous, and all specific claims and identities, not to mention time frames, subordinate to the demands of appeasement and compromise. As Boltanski and Thévenot explain,

This objective [of compromise] is realized by seeking the general interest, which is to say, not only the interest of the engaged parties but also the interest of those who are not affected by the agreement... Compromise suggests the possible discovery of a principle capable of rendering compatible judgments that are based on objects belonging to different worlds [of justification].¹⁹

Boltanski and Thévenot’s study aims at overcoming the problems of cultural relativism by identifying demands that are common to conflicting or disparate economies or systems of justification, each of which

remains justifiable in its own terms. Abel develops his notion of forgiveness in light of their study while striving — unconvincingly, I think — to demarcate this notion from a Hegelian conception of forgiveness, in which two parties renounce their respective claims to self-sufficiency and join one another in a higher purpose. Specifically, in The Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel accredits forgiveness (Verzeihung) with the task of establishing a general dialectic of recognition and thus equality with the other as means to concretize moral conscience.²⁰ In Verzeihung, which signifies mutual forgiveness and recognition between the Beautiful Soul and the Acting Conscience, Spirit, as the manifest intersubjective unity, finds that its two opposing, paradigmatic spirits are reconciled, and that this brings about the “phenomenal presence of a spiritual totem... [wherein] [a]bsolute Spirit is explicitly present in the world, appearing necessarily in the midst of the mutually reconciled consciousness.”²¹ This process of reconciliation, moreover, is predicated upon the essential sameness of the other: “With Hegel, the other is always the other of the same, belonging necessarily to the movement of the exteriorization, of the alienation of the same, balanced by a return movement of the other towards the same across the different states of the process. Thus, the opposition and its play remain within the same, the other being always in solidarity with it.”²² The problems of identity and indistinctness raised by Abel at the outset are thus assumed to be resolved through a reconciliation like the one which occurs between the Beautiful Soul and the Acting Conscience (which distinction loosely parallels the conventional opposition of the unconditional and conditional, insofar as the former indicates universality; and the latter, particularity). It is significant, moreover, that the “same” of the scene in which the Beautiful Soul and the Acting Conscience are reconciled is assured by language: “The Word of reconciliation is the objectively existent Spirit, which immediately apprehends the pure knowledge of itself qua universal essence in its opposite... a reciprocal recognition which is Absolute Spirit.”²³ The word of “reconciliation” [Das Wort der Versöhnung] is the word by means of which reconciliation is enjoined.²⁴ In other words, a common language serves as a minimal assurance of reconciliation, whether or not what is spoken in language strives explicitly to reconcile, forgive, or heal. Similarly, for Abel, the compromise between different worlds is delivered by means of a composite language [un mixte entre plusieurs langues].²⁵ However “mixed” or “composite,” such language assures that the “other” in Abel’s formulations is never entirely other. Thus, the “heterogeneity” of which he speaks is only a play of opposites within the same. It is a soft or provisional difference which is tempered or neutralized for the sake of a common good.

The idea of a common good, for which forgiveness would be employed in such an economy bent towards compromise and reconciliation, is clearly at odds with a rigorous notion of unconditional forgiveness. The reason I return to this point is not to impose the idea of unconditional forgiveness dogmatically upon Abel’s or Boltanski and Thévenot’s respective projects; rather, it is because Boltanski and Thévenot themselves seem to be aware of its demands. This is apparent in a passage from De la justification that Abel does not refer or allude to in which Boltanski and Thévenot write explicitly about forgiveness. Boltanski and Thévenot seem, in their own way, convinced of the difficulty of allowing forgiveness to enter into the

sort of explicitly negotiated exchange of language that is implied in their own idea of compromise. They portray forgiveness as a renunciation of all form of judgment, as a “movement,” and as an “emotion.” For Boltanski and Thévenot, if one tries to justify forgiveness in language, forgiveness gets swept up into an alienating generalization; consequently, rather than result from or necessarily serve a principle of higher good, forgiveness, in their view, remains dependent on the presence of the individuals between which it occurs and thus can never be applied to a given situation as a generalizable principle:

The expression of forgiveness in emotion rules out [repousse] the use of language which always carries the threat of comparison [rapprochement] and, particularly, of language at work in the rendering of facts [procès-verbal] orientated towards the proof of evidence... Forgiveness can only take place in the presence of persons and is thus not generalizable. Action resumes after forgiveness without the consequences of the crisis having been drawn and without the lessons gained by inquiry, or possibly, by judgment, having been exploited [mis à profit].²⁶

Perhaps Boltanski and Thévenot mean to suggest that this form of silently expressed “emotion” that is ungeneralizable and limited to the scene in which it occurs and in the presence of those to whom it is directly relevant is, like their idea of compromise, based on the “aim of a good that is of a higher level than the forms of the common good that it brings together.” However, if that were the case, their comments would suggest a much more fragile notion of forgiveness than what Abel describes as a response to the “tragic of conflict.” Being ungeneralizable and resisting even “the use of language,” forgiveness would remain an unverifiable hypothesis and depend on the presence of a given set of “protagonists,” that is, on the “who” and the “what” of any scene in which forgiveness is thought to occur. Nonetheless, this restriction is not without its problems.

Insisting upon the “presence” of those concerned as a condition for forgiveness is similar to Arendt’s defining the “faculty of forgiveness” as being dependent upon “the condition of plurality.” Although, in one passage, Boltanski and Thévenot mark their skepticism about the idea that forgiveness must occur in or by means of language, both of these conditions — presence, or, in Arendt’s case, plurality — are aimed at keeping forgiveness from being the affair of a single individual. For these authors, forgiveness cannot be self-reflexive. One can never forgive oneself. In the case of Arendt’s reflections, one might question the very possibility of our ever “being closed within ourselves,” which condition, she says, signals the impossibility of forgiving and promising. As we have seen, for Arendt, forgiving and promising are social phenomena that save individuals from isolation and assure them their freedom and identity, which means, in short, their humanity. To be “closed within ourselves,” outside of action and speech, would be to resemble automatons that are pushed to and fro by the forces of a reactionary and obsessive vengeance. (It is not clear, in Arendt’s account, if this ever occurs or if it even poses a threat of occurring.) Without action and speech, there would result not only solipsism, but the inability to act creatively; that is, to act in a way that is not pure reaction or repetition of a previous act. As for Boltanski and Thévenot’s

assertion, the questions of an evil done, of the negative consequences it may have produced, and of the person or persons whom it has affected and of who may therefore question whether another can be forgiven, are not questions that can be circumscribed with the simple recourse to “presence.” This is especially true when one considers that, even if I, as the one harmed or offended, find myself alone, for instance, in a room, face-to-face with my persecutor, I cannot speak without appealing to the other in and of language. And this other “other” corrupts the presumed intimacy and directness that holds in the face-to-face relation by, notably, giving the scene over to the structurally necessary, unavoidable possibility of repetition, exportation, generalization and parody. Moreover, from Boltanski and Thévenot’s characterization of forgiveness, it follows that, insofar as it is defined as a relation of “presence,” which implies the exclusive, mutually and self-comprehending consciousness and recognition of two persons (in both senses of the word “recognition”), forgiveness cannot be subsumable entirely to a larger framework of justification, whether the framework is defined by the “common good” or any other teleological requirement for the healthy functioning of society. Since Boltanski and Thévenot seek in De la justification to found agreements on “a form of generality that [they] call a common superior principle,”²⁸ if one were to add the conventional requirement for forgiveness that a misdeed has been done willfully, then if the roles, and thus the “presence” of the “forgiver” and the “forgiven” are also effaced as they are in Abel’s characterization of “compromise,” can one still speak of “forgiveness?” Boltanski and Thévenot’s skeptical characterization of forgiveness appears to violate their very concept of compromise by resisting its movement to a generalized, and generalizable, neutral ground. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that in developing his idea of forgiveness as social compromise, Abel gives full weight to their idea of compromise and none to their idea of forgiveness. However, the idea of compromise as he develops it instrumentalizes forgiveness by submitting it to a higher principle and reinscribing it into a limited economy that resembles what Abel had hoped to displace or marginalize under the name of “moral forgiveness.” Nonetheless, this tension is already present in De la justification.

Whereas in some of the characterizations that Boltanski and Thévenot make, unspeakable, ungeneralizable forgiveness, which is dependent for its existence on the presence of those whom it concerns, can find no neutral language or principle of higher good that would not destroy it; in others, it is reduced to a form of forgetting. This equivocalness evidently stems from Boltanski and Thévenot wanting to neutralize aspects of forgiveness that seem to present a threat to the harmonious resolution of conflict. It is perpetuated in other assertions in which the authors state that the “movement of forgiveness opens the possibility of a forgetting that allows one to avoid the work of totalizing past actions that is necessary for judgment... More surely than judgment, forgiveness marks a clean break with the inquiry by disqualifying it.”²⁹ If one forgets the misdeed, and disqualifies any looking into it, then, according to any conventionally understood notion of forgiveness, one has not forgiven; one has simply forgotten.

It might be helpful at this point to recall, again, the canonical distinction between forgiving and

forgetting that Abel himself draws upon. As Haddon Willmer argues in his entry on “forgiveness” in the Oxford Companion to Christianity, forgiveness involves some element of forgetting but is not itself a form of forgetting. In the following lines from the same entry, Abel’s basic argument can also be recognized, as well as the idea of an “art of forgetting.” In forgiving, only a certain type of memory — a memory of evil that disempowers the evil remembered — which is to say, a hygienic memory, is called upon, established, or restored. As Willmer says,

Forgiving, as pardon of guilt or remission of debt, liberates from the past. This liberation is sometimes seen as analogous to forgetting: God in forgiving ‘remembers your sin no more.’ Some forgetting is inevitable in human life; it may preserve sanity and to some degree support forgiving, but it is not a clue to its essence: forgiving is always a way of reckoning truthfully with what is wrong and hence is a way of remembering, in which the past wrong is not denied but deprived of its power to shape the future. It is not pure remembering, in which the past stays with us, but a remembering which enables the transformation of the past so that it no longer destroys joy, peace, and love... When forgiving is effective, evil is remembered, but no longer sets the agenda for the future or consumes peoples’ lives. Where forgiveness is understood as intrinsic to reconciliation, remembering is especially inescapable, for the persons reconciled do not have identity without memory.³⁰

It is clear in Abel’s discussion of the irreversibility of the consequences of our actions, which is the second type of conflict to which he says forgiveness responds, that Abel views forgiveness not as a forgetting or disqualification, pure and simple, of a misdeed or harm, but as a hygienic and pedagogic form of memory that frees one from both resentment and thoughts of debts unpaid and conserves important lessons for the future. This constitutes Abel’s explanation for how, in forgiving, one can break with both the debt and forgetting. Abel argues, in a conventional way, that forgetting exposes one to the risk of repeating the traumatic past. Wishing to protect against such repetition, he describes forgiveness as constituting a certain modality of forgetting that releases one from a debt owed to oneself and opens one to debts owed to others. For Abel, the debt that is tied to a traumatic and resentful memory “makes it impossible for one to act anew.” It thus excludes from one’s engagements anything that could offer a different perspective. This leads Abel to describe a forgiveness whose partial forgetting makes it unable to say all that had first called for it.

In designating the irreparable, the intractable, that which cannot be entirely put into words, forgiveness (in conformity with its probable etymology) accepts that there is loss, debts that are no longer debts, and possibilities that are no longer possibilities. It undertakes this work of mourning without which there would be no work of giving birth or of the possible resurrection of another present.³¹

What Abel means by the intractable is described not in terms of the horror of any particular crime but,

rather, as a problem of “ethical identity.” This problem stems from the fact that

our acts are detached from our first intentions, become autonomous, and completely escape us. The immediate ethical circle by means of which what the agent does corresponds to what the patient undergoes... is so completely stretched here that ethical responsibility becomes problematic. This is a zone in which I am irresponsibly responsible for the unintended and sometimes unforeseeable consequences of my actions.³²

Stating that “there is loss” thus describes a situation that precedes the responsible subject’s decision to forgive or not to forgive, rather than the consequence of the subject’s taking a costly initiative to render forgiveness where none is merited.

The overdetermined nature of the scenes in which forgiveness is summoned to play its part is, for Abel, what makes the scenes “tragic.” Overdetermined circumstances of pain or injury lead to some degree of loss — one can’t identify the wrongdoer or wrongdoers, one forgets the circumstances of misdeeds and their consequences — and to the “tragic” of this situation forgiveness responds by not insisting on the repayment of the most traumatic debt. There are too many debts, and the debtors are too ill-defined, for one to have to take the most painful debt to heart. However, rather than simply canceling all debts, which would be an obvious form of forgetting, one keeps in circulation debts that are less debilitating, debts that are more general and anonymous and less likely to make one’s memory morbid; for Abel, this means debts that are owed by us to others for overdetermined reasons and not debts that are owed to us by those who have harmed us in a determinate way. The plurality of debts, which involves our own memories but foremost the memories of others (in both senses of the genitive), now becomes the “intractable” :

Far from blessing the forgetfulness [that consists in scapegoating others for wrongs of the past], forgiveness breaks with it. It breaks with the ordinary world in which everything is forgotten without ever being paid for or forgiven. It reopens memory, it ‘recalls’ the debt — no longer that which could be paid back, but the unmanageable debt [la dette intractable] towards those from whom we have received everything, those from whom we have taken everything, those to whom all of this will be passed on.³³

Breaking with the ordinary world, for Abel, thus means overcoming the risk of a “morbid memory” [une mémoire malade] that is “unable either to forget or to efface, and thus incapable of remembering anything else.”³⁴ In the morbid memory, one traumatic event pushes out, and clouds over, all other memories, thus making all memories appear in the same morbid light. Overcoming morbidity requires the difficult establishment of an economy or ecology of memory. This is achieved by altering one’s identity. To be able to “discern vital forgetting from facile amnesia,” forgiveness must alter the identity of the one who would forgive:

Here and there forgiveness must introduce an alteration in identity itself, to assert that identity is not the only important thing in life; it dis-identifies [désidentifie], it also frees one from an

excessive obsession with identity. With it, memory is no longer the interminable narrative of the past, or more exactly the interminable guarantee of an identity; but the memory of other things past, and thus of other things possible.³⁵

There are reasons for questioning whether such an alteration should be called forgiveness. What Abel describes here is the willful, conscious, calculated exchange of a traumatic event in memory for other, less traumatic debts. The exchange recalls Hannah Arendt's view that forgiveness amounts to changing one's mind, to diverting it from trespasses to new initiatives and actions. Abel's solution to conflict is partly a strategy for coping much like that described as forgiveness by Arendt, but, as we have seen, it also has elements of Hegel's notion of forgiveness (Verzeihung), despite Abel's attempt to demarcate his conception from that of Hegel. This is seen in Abel's depiction of forgiveness according to Hegel:

For Hegel, forgiveness is precisely that which terminates the ethical cycle begun by the tragic. Yet Hegelian forgiveness depends on each party's renunciation of its particularity. That is to say, it depends on reciprocal withdrawal [désistement], on the acceptance by the protagonist of his disappearance as a self-identical being, on the consent of the forgiver and the forgiven to become other than himself.³⁶

Similarly, even though Abel defines "the tragic" as the fact of "not being able to become other than oneself,"³⁷ the "others" within the economy are forced to inhabit "a mixture of several languages."³⁸ Abel adds to this an explanation that echoes Hegel's remark on das Wort der Versöhnung, which is that "the words that announce forgiveness, while refusing the clarity of a situation wherein one is the forgiver and the other is a forgiven, are fragile words."³⁹ The fragility of the words is shared by identities made fragile. To the impossibly overdetermined scene in which no clear identity emerges as being fully at fault, one thus substitutes other candidates for indebtedness, even if this entails dividing, displacing, and diminishing one's own identity and dispersing one's attention among the many. Nonetheless, the healthy memory, it seems, in this way only returns one to the initial state of over-determination. Thus, Abel's idea of breaking with the debt and forgetting only argues for the most conservative of motivations. Even as it accounts for the fact that, within the economy, there is loss, it neutralizes particular claims so as to maintain the harmony of the economy of exchange as a whole. Consequently, in light of the solutions proposed by Abel, it is unclear how fault can be attributed to any of the not wholly responsible actors in such scenes. Moreover, it is unclear how forgiveness is implied, or warranted, in what Abel describes as the tragic of the irreparable. The solutions return one to the overdetermined, indistinct economy in which identities are reduced and a general state of general excusability reigns. Thus, despite the fact that he identifies that which by its indistinctness or overdetermination resists being managed within a strict economy of exchange, Abel reintroduces, via the detour of Hegel's Verzeihung, on the one hand, and Boltanski and Thévenot's idea of "economies of grandeur," on the other, a notion of forgiveness that redistributes the "tragic" economy in such a way that it becomes a relatively stable one. As such, the essentially limited

and calculated nature of the economy remains unchanged. In such an economy, the “proper” of one’s own memory is traded in for the alterity of others’ memories. Moreover, this occurs for the sake of a general memory that one assumes is, on balance, non-obstructive, well-adjusted, univocal and hale. For Abel, forgiveness responds to the tragic overdetermination of moral situations with a strategy for enhancing the presumed cohesion of a community or group; it is a process engaged for a greater good in which one swaps traumatic memories and overdetermined scenes of wrongdoing for the sake of memories unpleasant that, with adjustments, seem manageable.

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Notes

- ¹ See Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (University of Chicago Press, 1958); in particular Chapter 33, “Irreversibility and the Power to Forgive,” 236-247.
- ² Olivier Abel, “Tables du pardon,” Abel, Olivier, ed., Le Pardon: Briser la dette et l’oubli (208-233) 229.
- ³ Olivier Abel, “Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l’histoire,” Esprit 7 July 1993 (60-72) 61.
- ⁴ Olivier Abel, “Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l’histoire,” 60.
- ⁵ Olivier Abel, “Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l’histoire,” 60.
- ⁶ Olivier Abel, “Tables du pardon,” Le Pardon: Briser la dette et l’oubli 229.
- ⁷ Olivier Abel, “Tables du pardon,” Le Pardon: Briser la dette et l’oubli 230.
- ⁸ Olivier Abel, “Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l’histoire,” 61.
- ⁹ Olivier Abel, “Tables du pardon,” Le Pardon: Briser la dette et l’oubli 231.
- ¹⁰ Olivier Abel, “Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l’histoire,” 61.
- ¹¹ Olivier Abel, “Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l’histoire,” 61.
- ¹² Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, De la justification: Les économies de la grandeur (Paris: Gallimard, 1991). By “economies of grandeur,” the authors mean “legitimate forms of the common good.”
- ¹³ Olivier Abel, “Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l’histoire,” 63.
- ¹⁴ Olivier Abel, “Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l’histoire,” 63.
- ¹⁵ Olivier Abel, “Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l’histoire,” 63.
- ¹⁶ Olivier Abel, “Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l’histoire,” 64.
- ¹⁷ Olivier Abel, “Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l’histoire,” 65.
- ¹⁸ Olivier Abel, “Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l’histoire,” 65.
- ¹⁹ Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, De la justification 338.
- ²⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Mind, trans. Baillie (London, 1961) 642-694; Phénoménologie de l’Esprit, trad. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, (Paris: Aubier, 1991) 417-514.

- ²¹ Howard P. Kainz, Hegel's Phenomenology, Part II: The Evolution of Ethical and Religious Consciousness to the Absolute Standpoint (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1983) 123.
- ²² Rodolphe Gasché, "The Heterological Almanac," On Bataille: Critical Essays, ed. with an introduction by Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995) 159.
- ²³ G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Mind, trans. Baillie (London, 1961) 677.
- ²⁴ It is in the film by Safaa Fathy, D'ailleurs, Derrida (First Run/Icarus films, 2001), that Jacques Derrida draws attention to the word "reconciliation" in the Hegel passage.
- ²⁵ Olivier Abel, "Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l'histoire," 65.
- ²⁶ Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, De la justification 434, 434-435.
- ²⁷ Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, De la justification 34
- ²⁸ Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition 240.
- ²⁹ Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, De la justification 34.
- ³⁰ Haddon Willmer, "Forgiveness." The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought 245-247.
- ³¹ Olivier Abel, "Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l'histoire," 69.
- ³² Olivier Abel, "Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l'histoire," 68.
- ³³ Olivier Abel, "Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l'histoire," 69.
- ³⁴ Olivier Abel, "Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l'histoire," 70.
- ³⁵ Olivier Abel, "Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l'histoire," 70, 71.
- ³⁶ Olivier Abel, "Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l'histoire," 64.
- ³⁷ Olivier Abel, "Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l'histoire," 64.
- ³⁸ Olivier Abel, "Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l'histoire," 65.
- ³⁹ Olivier Abel, "Ce que le pardon vient faire dans l'histoire," 65-66.