

## FORGETTING AND FORGIVING: A NIETZSCHEAN PERSPECTIVE

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Beautiful that war, and all its deeds of carnage, must in  
time be utterly lost;  
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night, incessantly  
softly wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world:  
... For my enemy is dead—a man divine as myself is dead;  
I look where he lies, white-faced and still, in the coffin—I  
draw near;  
I bend down, and touch lightly with my lips the white  
face in the coffin.

Walt Whitman, *Reconciliation*

What is the relation between forgiveness and forgetting? While it is true that one cannot be said to have forgiven another an offense simply because one has forgotten the offense – if only because it is necessary that one *know* the offense for which one is granting forgiveness - nevertheless, common ways of speaking attest to an intuition that there is an important relation between forgiveness and forgetting. For instance, one might respond to a friend's apology by saying, "Forget about it", or simply, "It is forgotten". It may be argued that in such instances, the alternative or accompanying expression "there is nothing to forgive", should perhaps be taken quite literally since the offense in question may be too minor, thus rendering these expressions at best merely incidental and certainly non-paradigmatic cases of forgiveness. Nevertheless, no matter how trivial the offense might be, it is clear that in such exchanges the disavowal of the need for forgiveness is not to be taken literally. There is indeed something to forgive and be forgiven for; in the injunction to the offending party to "forget about it" (speaking of a *forgetting* that has yet to occur and a *deed* that is still to be forgotten) and in the injured party's claim that "there is nothing to forgive" (attesting to a forgiving that *need no longer occur since it already has*), *forgetting* serves

as the token of forgiveness.

Forgiving and forgetting are not identical concepts, but in the expressions mentioned above, forgetting functions as a metonymic substitute for forgiveness. There must be an intrinsic relation that would account for this associative connection between these two concepts. If one were to say, “I forgive you, but I cannot forget what you have done to me”, then it would be tantamount to an admission that one has not yet succeeded in forgiving the other. Such a statement would even cast doubt upon the truthfulness of the claim that one *wishes* to forgive but is unable to. In this case, memory serves as a token of a continuing resentment and of an absence or failure of complete forgiveness.

In Sarah Kofman’s “Shoah”, a poem of lamentation, the refusal to forgive the Nazis arises directly out of the refusal to forget the injustice suffered by its victims – both dead and living – who continue to suffer the memory of the Holocaust in different ways. For Kofman, to forgive the Holocaust is tantamount to nullifying the crime, to denying that an irrevocable crime had been committed and thus, in a sense, to accomplish the crime of “turn[ing] the Jewish people to nothing”; whereas to refuse to forgive is to bear witness to the wrong that the victims suffered. To forget the crime is to double the injury by betraying its victims. Forgiving, in this account, is a betrayal of memory:

Because the “final solution”, the *Vernichtung*,  
is the diabolical will  
Wanting what happened not to have happened  
*Das Geschehene ungeschehen zu machen*  
It is wanting to turn the Jewish people to nothing.  
Without preserving anything. Without remainder. Without *Aufhebung*.  
It is wanting to make the Jews’ existence null, to make  
    them un-happened,  
To gather up the Jews, one by one, to nullify them  
    Up to the last one.  
...  
We will not pardon [*faire grace*] the Nazis for this crime,  
    Render it null, make it un-happened,  
    Nullify it in forgiveness and forgetting.  
We will not listen to Faurisson:  
He does not *deny* the existence of the gas chambers-

He repeats, accomplishes the Nazi deed.  
He negates the event; turns it into nothing,  
Nullifies the crime, pardons [*grâcie*] Hitler:  
Das Geschehene ungeschehen ist!  
So that those who died at Auschwitz  
    May not be the last of the Jews  
    that their memory may not be murdered  
    Let us not forget this Event!<sup>1</sup>

It is in view of the demand to respect the claims of memory and the victim's radical freedom to grant or withhold forgiveness<sup>2</sup> that Derrida insists on the *aporia* of forgiveness, namely, that "forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable".<sup>3</sup> In order to avoid normalizing the horrors of evil and compromising the pure and gratuitous character of forgiveness, Derrida resists all attempts to neutralize the *aporia* of forgiveness by subsuming it to teleological explanations:

I shall risk this proposition: each time forgiveness is at the service of a finality, be it noble and spiritual (atonement or redemption, reconciliation, salvation), each time that it aims to re-establish a normality (social, national, political, psychological) by a work of mourning, by **some therapy or ecology of memory**, then the 'forgiveness' is not pure – nor is its concept. Forgiveness is not, it *should not be*, normal, normative, normalising. It should remain exceptional and extraordinary, in the face of the impossible: as if it interrupted the ordinary course of historical temporality.<sup>4</sup>

That forgiveness "*should* remain exceptional and extraordinary", in other words, that one should not forgive too easily or forget too quickly, that society is not within its rights to enjoin the victim to forgive those who have wronged him in the name of national reconciliation—this uncompromising refusal to have the "ordinary course of historical temporality" appropriate what injustice has placed 'out of joint' is but the proper response to a traumatological understanding of fault. It is a recognition of the world-destroying, meaning-shattering essence of trauma inflicted by that which is experienced by the victim as unforgivable, as well as an acknowledgement of the human propensity to simply ignore the incom-

prehensible and take refuge in the habitual and the “normal” in order to save oneself the trouble of accounting for the unaccountably real.<sup>5</sup>

Forgetting seems to present itself as an escape from the aporia of forgiveness. As a part of “some therapy or ecology of memory”, forgetting is understood here as an easy solution to the suffering sustained by memory. This is perhaps why in the following passage, although Derrida acknowledges the role of memory in forgiving, he quite forcibly and unequivocally rejects the identification of forgiveness with forgetting:

There is no forgiveness without memory, surely, but neither is there any forgiveness that can be reduced to an act of memory. *And forgiving does not amount to forgetting, especially not.*<sup>6</sup>

In his book *Forgiveness*,<sup>7</sup> Charles Griswold also insists on disengaging forgiving from its identification with forgetting. Although in contrast to Derrida, Griswold does not make the unforgivable the paradoxical condition of the possibility of forgiveness, nevertheless, in the interest of preserving the ethical significance of forgiveness,<sup>8</sup> Griswold insists that forgiveness cannot simply be the “forgetting” of resentment:

... if X stops resenting Y, it does not follow that X has forgiven Y; amnesia, for example, is not the same thing as forgiveness. So forgiveness cannot *simply* be forswearing resentment, even though it does require at least the moderating of resentment. We recognize a different phenomenon, namely that of letting go of resentment for moral reasons, as well as of revenge, without forgetting the wrong that was done, and even in some cases (re)accepting the offender as a friend. This is what we are calling forgiveness.<sup>9</sup>

What does ‘letting go of resentment *for moral reasons*’ mean? It means that forgiveness is understood as a *reckoning with fault* – it has to do with questions of *justice* (whether the offender has shown himself desiring and thus, to that extent, deserving of forgiveness), of the *rightness* of one’s anger and resentment (whether the resentment is proportional to the offence as well as to the offender’s efforts at contrition, reparation, and reform) and of the victim’s *moral character* (what sort of

person does forgiving or resenting make one), as well as of the possibility of re-establishing a *community* with the offender.

Both Derrida and Griswold insist on the necessity of remembrance in forgiveness. Forgiveness demands that the one who suffers not forget but rather be able to remember without rancour. But can we have it both ways? Can we have both memory and forgiving? Or is forgetting in some way necessary for forgiving? And if it is indeed in some form necessary, what would this form consist in? How are we to understand the forgetting that is associated with and functions as a metonymic substitute to forgiving?

Although Derrida and Griswold are right to say that forgiveness is not merely forgetting, I would argue that forgetting is not antithetical to forgiveness or even merely an incidental effect of it, but is intrinsically related with forgiving as one of its necessary conditions because forgiveness is inextricably linked with the reality and *memory* of suffering. Forgiveness is more than an intellectual judgment granted to someone who has offended one. It is a decision that strongly implicates the order of the affects, having to do with feeling anger, grief, humiliation, resentment, and with the desire to retaliate and avenge oneself. To be able to remember a wrong without despising the offender requires that one has become or remains strong enough to endure the memory of past pain without being engulfed by despair and without suffering the memory as a torment of humiliation.

In what follows, I will argue that although forgiveness is intersubjective, it also has a subjective aspect. It presupposes a certain quality of relatedness to the self that constitutes the capacity to forgive. It is in the context of this self-relation that I wish to locate forgetting as it relates to forgiveness. In particular, forgetting belongs to the aspect of *pathos* in this self-relation. The ambiguous nature of forgetting as being halfway between activity and passivity, between agency and receptivity, comes to light in Nietzsche's notion of *active forgetting*.

If forgetting is both an activity (a doing) and a receptivity (a way of being affected), and if as such it constitutes an element of forgiving, then forgiveness, too, is implicated by the double nature of forgetting. Forgiveness is an act that one does, a judgment – or the non-judgment? – that one grants the other from the depths of one's being; but at the same time, forgiveness is also something that *comes to* the forgiver, a relational disposition of the sufferer's being that cannot be summoned to oneself to pronounce to another by sheer force of the will.

Although on one hand, it can be said that one can forget because one has forgiven, on the other hand, could we not say that one forgives only to the extent that one *can* forget? To think that forgetting is merely an after-effect of forgiving is to misconstrue the relation between forgiveness and forgetting due to the presupposition that forgiving is a pure act of the will and forgetting, merely a passive amnesia. By complicating our understanding of forgiving and forgetting as both act and passion, we gain a better appreciation not only of the fragility of forgiveness but also of the unexpected strength afforded us by our forgetting.

### *Forgiveness and Power*

Hannah Arendt posits a connection between forgiveness and power. According to Arendt, forgiveness preserves the power of humans to act by preserving the power to begin new actions. Given the fact that the plurality of agency naturally gives rise to inevitable and unanticipated transgressions, without forgiveness, human beings would be tied to the unforeseen and unavoidable consequences of their actions.

But trespassing is an everyday occurrence which is in the very nature of action's constant establishment of new relationships within a web of relations, and it needs forgiving, dismissing, in order to make it possible for life to go on by constantly releasing men from what they have done unknowingly. Only through this constant mutual release from what they do can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new.<sup>10</sup>

This “constant mutual release from what they do” is at the same time a “constant willingness to change their minds and start again”. Arendt situates forgiveness in the context of the web of relations formed by actions. Within this perspective, Arendt asserts that trespassing “needs forgiving” without making a distinction between the trespasser's need to be forgiven or the need of the trespassed to forgive. Presumably, the “constant willingness to change ... minds and start again” includes both each person's willingness (or need?) to change his mind about himself as well as about the other – on the side of the transgressor, this would consist in repenting, and in the case of the transgressed, in forgiving and

letting go of his resentment. As a result of this changing of minds, the mirroring burdens of guilt and resentment are lifted and the relation between persons is maintained, making it possible for both agents to “start again” and “begin something anew”.

Presumably, since agents are mutually implicated and implicating in the web of actions and their unintended effects, no agent is ever entirely blameless or unharmed. Likewise, insofar as no one in this regard is radically evil. In this context of the mutuality of agency and transgression, one’s willingness to forgive can also be seen as a confession of one’s own need for forgiveness, just as one’s appeal for forgiveness also functions as a promise to – in turn – forgive.

Arendt’s succeeding comments about the limits of forgiveness and human power show that there is a reciprocal relation between power and forgiveness: not only does forgiveness preserve the power to act, but it also *presupposes* that this power exists, that one somehow remains *able* to either forgive or punish. Where this power is destroyed, there – where radical evil has occurred – forgiveness, as well as punishment (the other, more manifest mark of power), is no longer possible. The line would have been crossed between trespass (*hamartia*) and offense (*skandala*),<sup>11</sup> between what is forgivable (and punishable) and what is unforgivable and hence can only be subject to divine – no longer human – judgment:

The alternative to forgiveness, but by no means its opposite, is punishment, and both have in common that they attempt to put an end to something that without interference could go on endlessly. It is therefore quite significant, a structural element in the realm of human affairs, that men are unable to forgive what they cannot punish and they are unable to punish what turned out to be unforgivable. This is the true hallmark of those offenses which, since Kant, we call ‘radical evil’ and about whose nature so little is known, even to us who have been exposed to one of their rare outbursts in the public scene. *All we know is that we can neither punish nor forgive such offenses and that they therefore transcend the realm of human affairs and the potentialities of human power, both of which they radically destroy wherever they make their appearance. Here, where the deed itself dispossesses us*

*of all power*, we can indeed only repeat with Jesus: ‘It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea’.<sup>12</sup>

The difficulty of course is that it cannot be decided in advance what is forgivable and what is unforgivable. The problem arises not only from the fact that, as Arendt admits, “so little is known” of what is so-called radical evil (we could say that our understanding is also rendered powerless by such deeds), but from the paradox that it is forgiveness itself which, in the act of forgiving, retroactively determines the forgivable as such. Moreover, as Derrida insists, against Arendt's schematic differentiation between the realm of the forgivable and the unforgivable, it is the unforgivable that we experience as calling for forgiveness. As Derrida points out, it is that deed which one cannot excuse or understand, and not merely the wrong that the agent had “done unknowingly” that one recognizes as having to be forgiven. It is the unforgivable that tests the human power to forgive. I bring up Derrida not in order to settle the question of the possibility or impossibility of forgiveness, but merely to point out the centrality of the idea of power in the question of forgiveness. In light of the idea that injustice dispossesses humans of power – the power to act and the power to punish or forgive – we can read Derrida's insistence on conceptualizing forgiveness at the limit of the unforgivable as underscoring the idea that the unforgivable is a test of the human, all too human power to forgive.<sup>13</sup> To say that we cannot decide beforehand what is forgivable and what is unforgivable apart from the struggle to forgive what appears to us as unforgivable is to say that there is no way to determine in an abstract and general way the limit of our power to act, to forgive, and to begin anew.

### *Nietzsche on Power and Forgetting*

Guided by Arendt's analysis of action and forgiveness, we have come to understand injustice (both in the sense of forgivable transgressions and unforgivable crimes) as a dispossession of power, in particular, the power to begin anew. Without the exercise of the power to punish or forgive, human beings remain indefinitely lodged in a course of mutual resentment and retaliation, unable to move beyond past bitterness onto new paths. Implicit in the power to initiate new actions is the power to forget – the power to counter the tendency to repeat the past in the unremitting recollection of traumatic suffering.

But what would it mean to speak of forgetting as a power? Isn't forgetting another form of dispossession? Is it not in fact a suffering of a loss of memory and hence to some extent a loss of self? It is to Nietzsche that I now turn for a conception of forgetting in terms of power and with a view to its creative possibilities. In the Second Essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche distinguishes an *active forgetfulness* from a “mere *vis inertiae*”<sup>14</sup> that is to say, a merely passive wearing away or effacement of memory due to an inertness, a kind of impassivity that is unable to retain impressions as memory.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to this, Nietzsche conceives of active forgetting as a “positive faculty of repression” necessary for keeping “psychic order” since “our organism is an oligarchy”:

To close the doors and windows of consciousness for a time; to remain undisturbed by the noise and struggle of our underworld of utility organs working with and against one another; a little quietness, a little *tabula rasa* of the consciousness, to make room for new things, above all for the nobler functions and functionaries, for regulation, foresight, premeditation (for our organism is an oligarchy) – that is the purpose of **active forgetfulness**, which is like a doorkeeper, a preserver of psychic order, repose and etiquette: so that it will be immediately obvious how there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no present, without forgetfulness. The man in whom this apparatus of repression is damaged and ceases to function properly may be compared (and more than merely compared) with a dyspeptic – he cannot “have done” with anything.<sup>16</sup>

Nietzsche's *active forgetfulness* is a difficult notion to grasp because it designates something halfway between action and passion, between agency and receptivity. It is an act that belongs to the individual, indeed as a sign of its good health, but an act which consciousness itself does not possess, but upon which the possibility of consciousness rests. For Nietzsche, the “*tabula rasa* of the consciousness” is possible only because time and again one “close[s] the doors and windows of consciousness”, choosing to “remain undisturbed by the noise and struggle of our underworld of utility organs working with and against one another”. It is interesting to note that consciousness buys itself the peace

and quiet necessary for its functioning not by comprehending or mediating, certainly not by being constantly aware of the “noise and struggle of our utility organs” but simply by disregarding these. Consciousness needs some un-consciousness for it to be.

“No happiness, . . . no hope, no pride”, Nietzsche writes, “without forgetfulness”. And since without forgetfulness, one “cannot ‘have done’ with anything”, might we not add, “no forgiveness”? *Ressentiment* comes about when unable *either to retaliate or to forget*, one who has suffered harm from another “cannot ‘have done’ with anything”,<sup>17</sup> and is lodged in a state, which Nietzsche acerbically likens – more than likens – to dyspepsia, in which “this apparatus of repression is damaged or ceases to function properly”.

The metaphor of dyspepsia suggests a connection between memory and *ressentiment*, which is not to say that the two always coincide. Not all memory is resentful remembering, although some kind of memory is necessarily characteristic of *ressentiment*. In the Second Essay, Nietzsche offers a nuanced account of the relation between memory and forgetting within the context of a genealogy of the sovereign individual. In GM II 1, active forgetting is presented as a natural tendency, in fact a vital need, that the human animal had to counter to some extent and even suspend in some cases by breeding in itself the “opposing faculty” of memory, in order for him to give birth to the sovereign individual by becoming “*calculable, regular, necessary*”.<sup>18</sup>

Now this animal which needs to be forgetful, in which forgetting represents a force, a form of *robust* health, has bred in itself an opposing faculty, a memory, with the aid of which forgetfulness is abrogated in certain cases – namely in those cases where promises are made. This involves no mere passive inability to rid oneself of an impression, no mere indigestion through a once-pledged word with which one cannot “have done”, but an active desire not to rid oneself, a desire for the continuance of something desired once, a real *memory of the will*: so that between the original “I will”, “I shall do this” and the actual discharge of the will, its act, a world of strange new things, circumstances, even acts of will may be interposed without breaking this long chain of will.<sup>19</sup>

How is this active memory to have been bred in man? Nietzsche speculates that this opposing will to remember, to extend one's will into the future, to remain the same, could not have been easily attained and had to have been "burned in" by painful means:

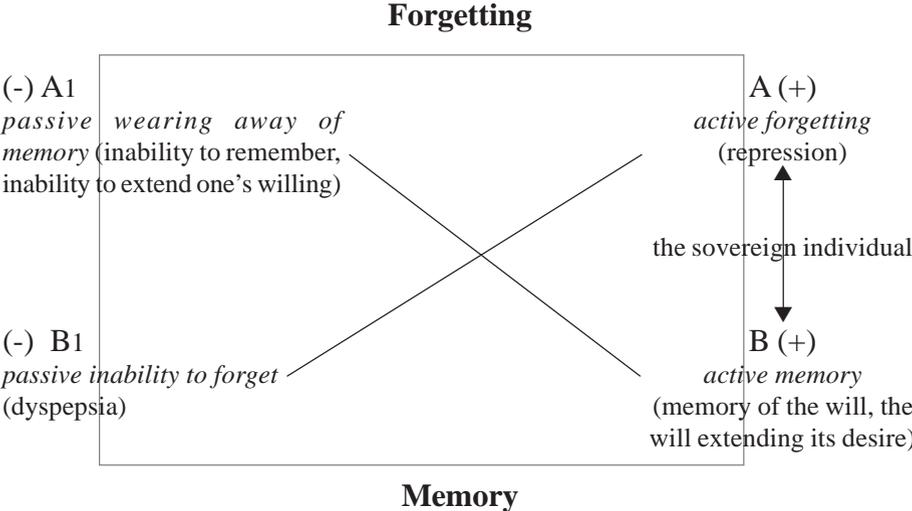
One can well believe that the answers and methods for solving this primeval problem [i.e., memory] were not precisely gentle; perhaps indeed there was nothing more fearful and uncanny in the whole prehistory of man than his *mnemotechnics*. 'If something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to *hurt* stays in the memory'—this is a main clause of the oldest (unhappily also the most enduring) psychology on earth.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, Nietzsche posits a direct causal relation between pain and memory. But how could pain as a purely passive experience of subjectivity possibly give rise to the human being's sovereignty? How can suffering give rise to self-rule? Wouldn't pain itself have to be taken in hand, somehow tamed and overcome, in order for it to make way for the creative "I will"? Although Nietzsche asserts that "only that which never ceases to *hurt* stays in the memory", we should also observe that a remembered pain is in some way a different pain; it is somehow a duller pain, which is to say, to a certain extent, a forgotten pain. It seems that a dose of forgetting is necessary for remembrance. Might we not say that the Nietzschean *revaluation* of values is in a sense a grand, historical deployment of the active faculty of repression? In taking pride and pleasure in his own power, freedom, and self-mastery, doesn't man temper through his forgetting the remembrance of the *pain* which was the price of his self-mastery? In other words, in order for suffering to give birth to the sovereign individual – to conscience, to the "privilege of *responsibility*, the consciousness of this rare freedom, this power over oneself and over fate"<sup>21</sup> – instead of merely leading to *ressentiment* and the bad conscience, man not only had to cultivate memory but also the active forgetting which would enable him to master suffering instead of succumbing to servitude to pain.

What is at stake in the question whether a person has an unimpaired capacity to forget actively or whether he is of a type that is constitutionally unable to have done away with anything is the quality of one's relation to pain. Does one have an active or a reactive relation to suffer-

ing? Nietzsche shows that *ressentiment* is a reactive pathos – it proceeds from weakness rather than being an expression and affirmation of one’s own strength. Unable to overcome his suffering by forgetting it or by avenging himself upon his enemy, the resentful person impotently deals with the suffering by enshrining it, and taking his satisfaction in identifying himself with it, and even finding his justification in it.

Nietzsche’s account of *ressentiment* is undergirded by an understanding of memory and forgetting in which each of these concepts is doubled by the distinction between their active and passive (reactive) form. Nietzsche’s treatment of memory and forgetting may be schematized in the following way:



B1 is compatible with the reactive pathos of *ressentiment*. In *ressentiment*, the inability to avenge oneself leads to the inability to forget and be done with the injury suffered. As to A1, apart from contrasting it to active forgetfulness, Nietzsche does not say much about passive forgetting<sup>22</sup> (forgetting as a mere *vis inertiae*). Nevertheless, we could extrapolate that just as active forgetting (A) and dyspepsia (B1) are antithetical to each other, so active memory (B) would also be opposed to a merely passive forgetting (A1) – a “forgetting” that may be more precisely considered as an *inability to remember*, an

inertia against memory. Sovereignty would be impossible to attain for such a subject who is unable to remember, someone for whom even pain fails to be a teacher. Such a person would be unable to remain one in himself; for such a person, the absence of *ressentiment* would be a mark not of strength, power, and well-being, but merely of an absence of an integral, and well-ordered self.

It is in the positive and necessary tension between active forgetting (A) and active memory (B) that Nietzsche locates the struggle of the individual to attain sovereignty. Active memory is the temporal extension of one's will. It is at its core the will to will the same, to will oneself as the same, as *one* will. But while this will for stasis has to run counter not merely to the passive tendency to forget but also – and possibly with greater difficulty – to active forgetfulness, it nevertheless *requires* the capacity to forget. Active forgetting has to clear a space within the cacophony and struggles of the internal world, for there to be room for memory to descend and take root. To remember is to select. For every *yes* to which memory tenaciously clings, there had to have been a multitude of denials that forgetfulness had to discharge: experiences, feelings, desires, pains, pleasures which in the mysterious depths of our internal world, the self chooses *not to will* continuously for and as part of itself. And when memory threatens to buckle under the weight of its own remembering – or, to use Nietzsche's metaphor, when memories sit undigested in the pit of one's stomach – memory needs forgetting to overcome itself. Memory allows man to will himself, to will the same will through time, but self-overcoming, the capacity to will something new or, more precisely, to renew the very willing of oneself, cannot be had without the activity of self-forgetting.

What does Nietzsche teach us about forgetting? *First*, forgetting understood as active forgetting is properly conceived as an *active pathos*. It is a *pathos* in the sense that it belongs to the realm of the instinctive, unconscious drives rather than in the sphere of conscious willing. However, it is not for this reason merely passive. This active forgetting is creative; it is indispensable to the revaluation of values and the creation of new ones. It is a primal expression of an individual's wellbeing to be able to push back, to set aside, to reject what it does not wish to internalize, and to be able to clear a space for a new movement, a new formation, a new ordering of values, rather than indiscriminately succumbing to the oppressive burden of old injuries and to the inertia of

past formations and encrusted ways of being. Forgetting is an activity, a negative act of creation in the way that the expulsion of breath is no less an essential part of breathing than inhaling.

Secondly, for Nietzsche, forgetting (whether active or reactive) occurs within the context of comparative exercises of power. This means that forgetting – and especially active forgetting – is to be understood agonistically in at least two levels: *First*, as has been noted, there is the struggle between memory and forgetting. *Secondly*, the painful struggle of memory and forgetting finds its impetus and expression in the interpersonal level, specifically, Nietzsche suggests, in the sphere of contractual relations:

It was here [i.e., in the sphere of contractual relationships] that *promises* were made; it was here that a memory had to be *made* for those who promised; it is here, one suspects, that we shall find a great deal of severity, cruelty, and pain. To inspire trust in his promise to repay, to provide a guarantee of the seriousness and sanctity of his promise, to impress repayment as a duty, an obligation upon his own conscience, the debtor made a contract with the creditor and pledged that if he should fail to repay he would substitute something else that he ‘possessed’, something he had control over; for example, his body, his wife, his freedom, or even his life [...]. Above all, however, the creditor could inflict every kind of indignity and torture upon the body of the debtor [...].<sup>23</sup>

Keeping in mind the distinction between active memory and a mere inability to forget, it is crucial to note that for Nietzsche, promise-making is not the effect of memory – one promises not simply because one cannot help but remember one’s obligations. On the contrary, memory – active memory – is created as an exigency of promise-making. It is in order to prove oneself worthy of the esteem of others, to prove that one’s word is worth its weight in gold, so to speak, that one creates memory, this active faculty of extended will.

Just as memory is conceived by Nietzsche from an agonistic perspective of individuals “calculating power against power”,<sup>24</sup> forgetting likewise begs for an agonistic interpretation in the interpersonal plane. This agonistic interpretation of forgetting is not immediately apparent in

GM II because the notion of “active forgetfulness”, is overtaken by memory and promise-making in the interest of giving a genealogy of the sovereign individual. If “forgetting” seems to drop out of consideration, it is simply because it is replaced by the *discharge of obligation*, either in the form of repayment or punishment. Both memory and forgetting are framed within human beings’ exercise of their power against one another and upon themselves, in which they make claims upon one another and assert their own worthiness to make these claims.

In GM II, which is devoted to the genealogy of the bad conscience, guilt is placed within a constellation of ideas which include indebtedness, punishment, justice, and – at the limit of justice – mercy. Before the birth of the bad conscience, using “the criteria of prehistory”,<sup>25</sup> that is to say, before the birth of the human genius for self-torment, guilt in the sense of “personal obligation”<sup>26</sup> is conceived in connection with indebtedness. “Personal obligation” is experienced as measuring up to others. To harm another is to incur a debt, which one ought to pay back by accepting punishment from one’s creditor. According to Nietzsche, for this primitive sort of morality, “everything has its price; *all things can be paid for*”:

... it was rather out of the most rudimentary form of personal legal rights that the budding sense of exchange, contract, guilt, right, obligation, settlement, first *transferred* itself to the coarsest and most elementary social complexes [...], together with the custom of comparing, measuring, and calculating power against power. The eye was now focused on this perspective; and with that blunt consistency characteristic of the thinking of primitive mankind, which is hard to set in motion but then proceeds inexorably in the same direction, one forthwith arrived at the great generalization, ‘everything has its price; *all things can be paid for*’ –the oldest and naïvest moral canon of *justice*, the beginning of all ‘good-naturedness’ all ‘fairness’, all ‘good will’, all ‘objectivity’ on earth. Justice on this elementary level is the good will among parties of approximately equal power to come to terms with one another, to reach an ‘understanding’ by means of a settlement –and to *compel* parties of lesser power to reach a settlement among themselves.<sup>27</sup>

If Nietzsche locates the origin of morality in the sphere of indebtedness, it is not because he reduces the morality of human interaction to economic transactions. The point is not to presuppose the existence of an economic perspective of commensurable values upon which justice is grounded, but rather, to show that the concept of exchange and relative valuation is the outcome of the interaction of a multiplicity of powers. The dictum ‘everything has its price; *all* things can be paid for’ does not speak of an abstract and universal system of valuation, but is a concrete assertion of each one’s comparable power. To submit oneself to punishment is to assert one’s nobility in being able to pay one’s debts. It is also a recognition of the nobility of one’s victim, who now exercises his right to demand compensation for his pain through the pleasure of inflicting pain upon one.

Punishment is seen as a discharging of a debt. What has been punished can now be forgotten. From the creditor’s perspective, punishing his enemy allows him to forget the offense. Likewise, having been punished, the offender is freed from his obligation, he is now free to forget. Through the exercise of his power in punishing the offender, the offended party is able to discharge the burden of suffering as well as the burden of hatred. On the other hand, to remember another’s offense binds oneself to the weight of past injury as well as to the offender. To remember an offense one has suffered is to maintain one’s claim to the other’s suffering – even if it were only the suffering of humbling oneself in apologizing to another whom one has offended. Likewise, an offender who recognizes his debt but has not atoned for it continues to be enslaved by his obligation. From the perspectives of both debtor and creditor, punishment can therefore be seen as a discharging of the burden of memory.

*And what of forgiveness?* Punishment and retaliation are not the only means by which the discharge of suffering and indebtedness may be effected. In GM II, 10, Nietzsche speaks of mercy (*Gnade*) as the self-overcoming of justice (*Gerechtigkeit*).

This transition from justice (that discharges the offense by exacting payment for it through punishment) to *mercy* (that grants pardon to the offender) is mediated by a growth in the power of the community, towards which the individual recognizes a relation of indebtedness:

Still retaining the criteria of prehistory (this prehistory is

in any case present in all ages or may always appear): the community, too, stands to its members in that same vital basic relation, that of the creditor to his debtors. One lives in a community, one enjoys the advantages of a communality (oh what advantages! we sometimes underrate them today), one dwells protected, cared for, in peace and trustfulness, without fear of certain injuries and hostile acts to which the man *outside*, the ‘man without peace’, is exposed [...] since one has bound and pledged oneself to the community precisely with a view to injuries and hostile acts.<sup>28</sup>

With the growth in society’s power, the harm that the individual can do is no longer as threatening or as destructive as it once was. The transgressions of the individual can now be more easily isolated and contained, and so punishments of these transgressions become less violent, less harsh. Society now regulates the violence of punishments inflicted upon the offender. In so doing, society is able to prevent the escalation of violence that an unending cycle of retaliation would bring about:

As its power increases, a community ceases to take the individual’s transgressions so seriously, because they can no longer be considered as dangerous and destructive to the whole as they were formerly: the malefactor is no longer ‘set beyond the pale of peace’ and thrust out; universal anger may not be vented upon him as unrestrainedly as before—on the contrary, the whole from now on carefully defends the malefactor against this anger, especially that of those he has directly harmed, and takes him under its protection. A compromise with the anger of those directly injured by the criminal; an effort to localize the affair and to prevent it from causing any further, let alone a general disturbance; attempts to discover equivalents and to settle the whole matter (*compositio*); above all, the increasingly definite will to treat every crime as in some sense *dischargeable*, and thus at least to a certain extent to *isolate* the criminal and his deed from one another — these traits become more and more clearly visible as the penal law evolves. As the power and self-

confidence of a community increase, the penal law always becomes more moderate; every weakening or imperiling of the former brings with it a restoration of the harsher forms of the latter. **The ‘creditor’ always becomes more humane to the extent that he has grown richer; finally, how much injury he can endure without suffering from it becomes the actual measure of his wealth. It is not unthinkable that a society might attain such a consciousness of power that it could allow itself the noblest luxury possible to it—letting those who harm it go unpunished.** ‘What are my parasites to me?’ it might say. ‘May they live and prosper: I am strong enough for that!’

“The justice which began with, ‘everything is dischargeable, everything must be discharged’, ends by winking and letting those incapable of discharging their debt go free: it ends, as every good thing on earth, by *overcoming itself*. This self-overcoming of justice: one knows the beautiful name it has given itself—*mercy*; it goes without saying that mercy remains the privilege of the most powerful man, or better yet, his—beyond the law.<sup>29</sup>

Is it possible to apply this to the individual? Is it only the community that is able to consolidate its power and become strong enough to mediate through its laws and institutions the settling of offenses in a way that moderates – and even, in some cases – do away with the violence of punishment? Can there only be forgiveness in the juridical sense of granting pardon and suspending punishment? What of personal forgiveness which strictly speaking can be granted not by the state but only by the victim of the crime – i.e., the one whom the transgressor “has directly harmed”?

Without denying the difference between juridical pardon and personal forgiveness, one can nevertheless find similarities between Nietzsche’s account of mercy in GM II and his depiction of Zarathustra’s attitude towards his enemies in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in which no reference is made to societal and institutional mediation:

One day Zarathustra had fallen asleep under a fig tree, for it was hot, and had put his arms over his face. And an

adder came and bit him in the neck, so that Zarathustra cried out in pain. When he had taken his arm from his face, he looked at the snake, and it recognized the eyes of Zarathustra, writhed awkwardly, and wanted to get away. “Oh no”, said Zarathustra, “as yet you have not accepted my thanks. You waked me in time, my way is still long”. “Your way is short”, the adder said sadly; “my poison kills”. Zarathustra smiled. “When has a dragon ever died of the poison of a snake?” he said. “But take back your poison. You are not rich enough to give it to me”. Then the adder fell around his neck a second time and licked his wound.<sup>30</sup>

*Mercy as an Overcoming of Justice: Beyond an Economic Conception of Forgiveness*

Zarathustra’s gesture of thanking his enemy and the advice he subsequently gives to his followers to “prove that he [your enemy] did you some good”,<sup>31</sup> which echoes this passage in GM II 10 – “What are my parasites to me? ... May they live-and prosper: I am strong enough for that!”<sup>32</sup> – might strike us as rather uncaring and might seem contrary to the spirit of forgiveness. But one could give another interpretation to this Nietzschean indifference, this combative sort of generosity towards one’s enemy: Could we not say that in this sublime indifference, or perhaps more precisely, this paradoxical gratitude towards one’s enemy, one is releasing the other from indebtedness to oneself so radically that one does not wish the other to be indebted (once more) to his forgiver for having been forgiven? Is it perhaps in order to prevent his forgiveness from becoming a snare that would put the adder in Zarathustra’s debt, that Zarathustra thanks the adder for its bite?

This encounter between Zarathustra and the adder does not merely suspend retaliation but turns the very notion of a fair exchange of pain for pain on its head. That mercy – if we are to give this name to Zarathustra’s attitude towards the adder – is the *self-overcoming of justice* implies that mercy consists in *more than* the suspension of retaliation, but rather is of a higher kind of power than the power to punish.

We come short of understanding what it means for mercy to overcome justice so long as we see pardon and punishment as purely equivalent alternatives. Nowhere is the asymmetry between punishment and

pardon more evident than in cases when, having avenged oneself upon one's enemy or knowing that the transgression one had suffered has been punished, the victim is nevertheless unable to find satisfaction in having been avenged.

Arendt's conviction that we can only forgive what we can punish, and that likewise, we can only punish what is in principle forgivable seems to imply a complete reversibility between the two. But is it not possible that something remains after punishment, something that punishment is unable to do away with, and that this – as Derrida argues – is what in fact, strictly speaking, calls for forgiveness?

So what does it mean for mercy to overcome justice? Let us begin with the obvious point that in forgiving one's enemy, the one who pardons foregoes his right to the other's suffering as compensation for one's own. But what is it that gives one the right to punish the other? Is it merely the fact of having suffered? It has to be grounded in something positive – in the nobility of the person, that stands over and above his suffering, because to ground punishment in suffering alone would make the desire for punishment a purely reactive sentiment, and one which Nietzsche rightly compares to the hermit's deep well from which there is no getting out.<sup>33</sup> It is of punishment as a purely reactive pathos that Nietzsche says:

*The spirit of revenge, my friends, has so far been the subject of man's best reflection; and where there was suffering, one always wanted punishment too.*

For "punishment" is what revenge calls itself; with a hypocritical lie it creates a good conscience for itself.<sup>34</sup>

Punishment that is grounded purely on suffering leaves no room for self-overcoming. If there is to be an overcoming of vengeance in mercy, it will have to be in the name of something that surpasses the victim's suffering and humiliation. For Nietzsche, mercy is an act of self-overcoming and, as such, an act of the sovereign individual. It is accompanied by the self-awareness of one's sublime freedom.

Nietzsche speaks of this sovereignty not in terms of an abstract freedom that abolishes all conditions set upon it, but concretely, in terms of strength and the exercise of power upon oneself. In the overcoming of justice by mercy, Nietzsche does not speak of releasing the other from the bonds of guilt (for remorse is understood by Nietzsche to be an ac-

count that one has to settle with oneself), but rather, of releasing the other from an obligation. Pardoning, the act of mercy, is for Nietzsche the victim's attestation to the fact that he no longer feels the need to make the other suffer. One's joy or peace of mind no longer rests on making the enemy suffer. And mercy here, the freedom of mercy (and the mercy that frees), is possible only as an overflowing, an abundance of strength. One simply cannot give the adder back his poison unless one were strong enough not to have succumbed to it.

Because Nietzsche's genealogy of guilt traces it back upon the paradigm of exchange and indebtedness, it is easy to miss the point that Nietzsche's ironic depiction of forgiveness in fact throws a critical eye upon a certain economic conception of forgiveness that masks a hidden cruelty.

*To offend and be offended.* It is much more agreeable to offend and later ask forgiveness than to be offended and grant forgiveness. The one who does the former demonstrates his power and then his goodness. The other, if he does not want to be thought inhuman, must forgive; because of this coercion, pleasure in the other's humiliation is slight.<sup>35</sup>

Casting his laughing and knowing eye upon our moral valuations, Nietzsche, in this aphorism from *Human, All Too Human*, speaks of the pleasure of forgiveness in the abasement of the one who asks for forgiveness. What we like to think of as an unselfish act, even a sublime one, is shown to produce a yield of petty pleasure. And should we wish to excuse this pleasure for being merely a slight one, Nietzsche reminds us that this fact is due not to the "nobility" of the forgiver's intentions, but is an effect of the fact that he feels coerced to forgive – he must forgive "if he does not want to be thought inhuman". One can almost feel the stirring of *ressentiment* in this human being who, having been offended, is unable to exercise his power in retaliation, but is forced to forgive the other who was cunning enough to demonstrate *first* his power *before* his humanity (i.e., his "goodness"). If we are to find something approaching forgiveness that is freely given rather than one granted merely in resentful obedience to societal expectations, it is not in this passage – where the word 'forgiveness' is explicitly mentioned – but to *Zarathustra* that we have to turn.

The genealogical narrative of justice overcoming itself in mercy in the Second Essay parallels the transition of the lion to the child in the allegory of the three metamorphoses in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In this passage, Nietzsche explicitly links forgetting with innocence:

But say, my brothers, what can the child do that even the lion could not do? Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred 'Yes'. For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred 'Yes' is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world.<sup>36</sup>

Nietzsche here makes the figure of the child embody innocence and forgetting. Both characterize the child insofar as the child symbolizes the creation of new values: "To create new values-that even the lion cannot do;..."<sup>37</sup> The child is the figure of the new beginning. It is the last figure in the movement of the spirit's self-overcoming, a movement, which (1) begins with an affirmation of the importance of asceticism and self-denial (exemplified by the camel, which bears what is most difficult) in self-overcoming, (2) progresses towards the overthrowing of received imperatives (symbolized by the lion preying upon established values), and (3) culminates in the child's sacred Yes to "the game of creation".

While it is true that in the third moment, "the spirit now wills his own will", it is important to note the paradoxical nature of this willing. This *willing one's own will* is not to be understood as the will of absolute self-possession, because forgetting – which is a form of dispossession – is at the heart of the child's creative affirmation.

Forgetting and innocence are a Janus-faced pair, each passing onto the other. The backward-facing forgetting makes the future-oriented innocence possible. Indeed, we could even say that forgetting is itself the innocence, which blesses and says its sacred yes to the past, which it thus liberates. In being paired with forgetting, innocence is shown to be a temporal concept, signifying the creative will's reconciliation with time. The temporal structure of innocence is a paradoxical one: the child who, through his "sacred 'Yes'", "wills his own will" is able to do so by willing backwards – that is to say, in accepting what has happened; in so doing, he is able to liberate himself from the melancholy

which imprisons him in the past. According to the following passage from “On Redemption”, the will to punish is still expressive of the “imprisoned will” who, unable to undo a past suffered, seeks to unleash his no, his nihilating will upon the future:

Willing liberates; what means does the will devise for himself to get rid of his melancholy and to mock his dungeon? Alas, every prisoner becomes a fool; and the imprisoned will redeems himself foolishly. That time does not run backwards, that is his wrath; ‘that which was’ is the name of the stone he cannot move. And so he moves stones out of wrath and displeasure, and he wreaks revenge on whatever does not feel wrath and displeasure as he does. Thus the will, the liberator, took to hurting; and on all who can suffer he wreaks *revenge* for his inability to go backwards. This, indeed this alone, is what revenge is: the will’s ill will against time and its ‘it was’.<sup>38</sup>

Both innocence and mercy overcome the will to punish. Supposing that in mercy, in the granting of pardon, one indeed overcomes the spirit of revenge – that is to say, supposing that mercy is genuine and not merely a curtailment of aggression out of *ressentiment* – could we not say then that mercy is the external face of innocence? Innocence, the figure of self-overcoming as it relates to oneself and to time, when turned outwards to the other upon whom one had wanted to avenge oneself, becomes mercy.

Nietzsche does not use the word ‘forgiveness’ here, and yet, it is not insignificant that he speaks of reconciliation, even if this reconciliation is still a hoped for future:

I led you away from these fables when I taught you, ‘The will is a creator’. All ‘it was is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful accident-until the creative will says to it, ‘But thus I willed it’. Until the creative will says to it, ‘But thus I will it; thus shall I will it’.

‘But has the will yet spoken thus? And when will that happen? Has the will yet become his own redeemer and joy-bringer? Has he unlearned the spirit of revenge and all gnashing of teeth? And who taught him reconcilia-

tion with time and something higher than any reconciliation? For that will which is the will to power must will something higher than any reconciliation; but how shall this be brought about? Who could teach him also to will backwards?<sup>39</sup>

While it is true that Nietzsche is not speaking here of reconciliation with one's enemy or between persons who have wronged each other, this reconciliation with the past – for which Nietzsche has given the name “innocence and forgetting” – is at the very least not incompatible with the idea of reconciliation with the other. Moreover, insofar as the overcoming of resentment is a necessary condition of forgiveness, one can make a stronger claim that this reconciliation with time is a necessary subjective element of intersubjective forgiveness.

#### *Forgiveness in Nietzsche? An Agonistic Conception of Forgiveness*

Is there a concept of forgiveness in Nietzsche? It is difficult to answer the question unequivocally (and I shall not attempt to do so here) given the fact that, first, Nietzsche is critical of *remorse*, which is usually taken to be a precondition for the seeking of (and hence, to some extent, the granting of) forgiveness. I shall only point out here that Nietzsche's critique of remorse in *The Will to Power*<sup>40</sup> has to be read alongside the critique of the bad conscience. Nietzsche rejects remorse, literally the bite of conscience, for the nihilism betrayed by therapeutic practices of continually dwelling upon – even relishing – painful remembering, practices which do not in fact bring peace or well-being, but merely cultivate remorse. Nietzsche's point is not that one should not feel sorry for one's fault, but that remorse is not only a useless but an ignoble passion. It is dishonest because while rejecting one's deed – rather than standing by it – one nevertheless continues to identify oneself with this deed and justifies one's moral worth in one's act of self-loathing. If one is sorry for one's deed, rather than wallowing in remorse, one should apologize to the person one had harmed, make amends, offer restitution, present oneself to one's victim for his judgment or mercy. Let us recall that for Nietzsche it is ignoble not to pay one's debt.<sup>41</sup>

If Nietzsche hardly ever speaks of forgiveness, it is perhaps because for Nietzsche, the word seems to be entangled with the Christian notion of ‘turning the other cheek’. When he does speak of forgiveness in *Human, All Too Human*,<sup>42</sup> it is to unmask the supposed altruism of the

one who forgives. In the following passage from *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche counters such a notion of pardoning one's enemy with an agonistic conception of kindness towards one's enemy:

But if you have an enemy, do not requite him evil with good, for that would put him to shame. Rather prove that he did you some good.

And rather be angry than put to shame. And if you are cursed, I do not like it that you want to bless. Rather join a little in the cursing.

And if have been done a great wrong, then quickly add five little ones: a gruesome sight is a person single-mindedly obsessed by a wrong.

Did you already know this? A wrong shared is half right. And he who is able to bear it should take all the wrong upon himself.

*A little revenge is more human than no revenge. And if punishment is not also a right and an honor for the transgressor, then I do not like your punishment either.*<sup>43</sup>

~

In this idea that it is more noble to share a little in the guilt - that is to say, to retaliate a bit – Nietzsche is offering us an agonistic alternative to the usual notion of forgiveness. “A little revenge” rather than none at all is a form of kindness to the other because it is an acknowledgement of the sovereignty of the other. To resist the other, to assert one's power (in giving back the other his poison) – rather than clinging to one's grievance and being “single-mindedly obsessed by a wrong” – is to recognize and accept the other as an equal and as a worthy opponent.

This does not mean that in Nietzsche, there is room only for agon and none for forgiveness. However, Nietzsche would insist that only a person strong enough for a little revenge – only one who does not find himself steeped in the adder's poison – can lay down his arms. This is why Nietzsche ends “On the Adder's Bite” with Zarathustra cautioning his followers against offending a hermit – for only he who can repay can forget:

Finally, my brothers, beware of doing wrong to any hermit. How could a hermit forget? How could he repay?

Like a deep well is a hermit. It is easy to throw in a stone; but if the stone sank to the bottom, tell me, who would get it out again? Beware of insulting the hermit. But if you have done so – well, then kill him too. Thus spoke Zarathustra.<sup>44</sup>

Nietzsche tells us is that forgiveness can only be granted from a position of strength. If forgiveness is not to be something merely forced upon a person – “obliged” by good manners to forgive – it has to be an expression of one’s power. This becomes clear if we recall that forgiveness overcomes the reactive pathos of *ressentiment*. The point here is not to pass judgment on not forgiving. A person who is unable to forgive or refuses to forgive another is not necessarily motivated by *ressentiment*. The point is not to say that a person who finds himself in this position ought to overcome his resentment and forgive the other. (The question of whether a particular act or person is deserving of forgiveness is not being addressed here.) On the contrary, forgiveness being beyond justice, beyond the demands of duty, there *cannot* be a categorical imperative to forgive.

The point being made here is that *if one does forgive another*, it was – at least, in part – because one was *able* to do so. One has become (and has to have become) strong enough, powerful enough, rich enough not to have been stuck in the deep well of the hermit, who is unable to do anything but take in insults without being able to either shrug it off or retaliate. To be able to forgive, one has to be strong enough to overcome being immobilized by the sheer passivity of the reactive pathos of resentment. When memory threatens to trap one in the obsessive remembrance of past suffering and in the oppressive weight of resentment, one needs forgetfulness to overcome oneself; one has to be powerful enough for an active forgetting that blesses the past that it lets go.

### *Forgiveness and forgetting*

So is there forgiveness in Nietzsche? There is respect, an agonistic kind of reverence; there is justice; there is mercy; there is innocence and forgetting. Whether or not one would agree that these constitute forgiveness, there is, in any case, a surpassing of the contractual relationship demanding the equivalence of pain for pain in the self-overcoming of vengeance in pardon, in the self-overcoming of justice in mercy.

If we say that forgiveness surpasses the logic of exchange, it does

so in the name of something in us that is incommensurable, something that attests to each person's sovereignty and irreducible value.<sup>45</sup> Suppose that having done something devastating to another person, I feel regret for having done so; when I ask for forgiveness, what is it I am asking for? A Nietzschean answer would go beyond the concern for the lifting of the burden of guilt. In asking to be forgiven, in placing myself at my victim's mercy, I would be (1) recognizing my victim's sovereignty, and in so doing would be restoring to my victim what in my transgression I had unjustly taken from him; and in the same stroke, I would be (2) asking to be restored to myself in my sovereignty as one who pays one's debt, as one who acts justly.

When I ask for the other's forgiveness, I am appealing to my victim as my sovereign. I am appealing to something in my victim that I have not destroyed, something that has survived the humiliation I had caused him to suffer. If forgiveness is at all possible, it is by virtue of something that has escaped violation. And if at the extreme limits of crime, of what we might call radical evil, forgiveness is at all still possible – beyond the forgivable, as Derrida would say – wouldn't it have to be by virtue of something absolutely inviolable? (Perhaps then, beyond merely human powers of forgiving and forgetting – and beyond a Nietzschean approach – the appeal for forgiveness would have to be addressed to one to whom the Psalmist says, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow".<sup>46</sup>)

Sovereignty is understood in Nietzschean fashion in terms of a superabundance of power. And this superabundance expresses itself in the power to forget. In a sense, this echoes Hegel's conception of the monarch's power to pardon criminals:

The sovereignty of the monarch is the source of the *right to pardon criminals*, for only the sovereign is entitled to actualize the power of the spirit to undo what has been done and to nullify crime by forgiving and forgetting.<sup>47</sup>

But Nietzsche is not Hegel, and if we recall that for Nietzsche, the human struggle to be a sovereign individual requires the harnessing both of the power of active memory as well as active forgetting, then we would have to say that the Nietzschean conception of sovereignty is one that, paradoxically, *rests on* the power to forget. The proud awareness of one's freedom that Nietzsche calls sovereignty is not grounded on abso-

lute self-possession, but on a feeling of health and well-being, which partly rests on the power to forget.

Forgetting, in turn, stands halfway between action and passion. In Nietzsche's dynamic understanding of forgetting, it requires an expenditure of energy to repress, to push impressions and impulses aside in order to make room for the *tabula rasa* of the now, of present happiness and future hope. Let us recall that this act of repression is not an expression of conscious agency; it is rather that which creates a clearing for consciousness. Forgetting understood dynamically means the coincidence of power and sheer passivity. It is an activity that covers itself in oblivion – forgetting forgets itself. Nothing shows this more clearly than the impossibility of consciously commanding oneself to forget something.

Forgetting is the self-relation at the heart of forgiveness.<sup>48</sup> Although forgiveness is related to the other, it presupposes a relationship with the self. The struggle against resentment, the struggle to forgive is a question posed by the other, but is posed to the sovereign self – or the possibility of this sovereignty. If I ask for your forgiveness, I must await your answer, wait upon the possibility of your being able and ready to forgive me. And this readiness to forgive, this subjective precondition of forgiveness, is what I mean by the active forgetting that is constitutive of forgiveness.

While it may be true that the act of forgiving has a therapeutic power, it is also true that forgiving itself presupposes that some healing, some recovery of power has already occurred in the victim. One comes to be able to forgive once – and only because – one has become strong enough to forget.<sup>49</sup> When the pain no longer touches one and so one can, like Zarathustra, look at the adder and *give him back his poison*, and can even be grateful, when one can say, 'I would not have chosen to suffer in your hands, but now that I have gone through it, this injustice has become part of my life, and I can accept it – it has not killed me – and I can, despite your ill-will, despite your crime – love my life', then one can say: 'I can forgive you. I am strong enough to forgive you'.

Since forgiveness is essentially a relation to another, forgetting, which merely speaks of one's self-relation with regard to one's suffering is not yet forgiveness. What I have sought to do in this essay is not to collapse the distinction between forgiveness and forgetting, but to think about forgetting as a necessary component of forgiveness. That Nietzsche seems to have more to say about forgetting than forgiving does not mean that it is not possible to construct a Nietzschean account of forgiveness.

What it does imply is that (1) a Nietzschean account of forgiveness would be one that emphasizes forgetting – understood as an expression of the will to power – as the subjective aspect of forgiveness. This reading also suggests that (2) there is an other side to the Nietzschean will to power, namely, that the will to power is not to be confused with the notion of the autonomous will. Forgetting and forgiving – if we are willing to grant Nietzsche a conception of this – attest to a willing that is beyond the will.

Forgetting is a condition that both affirms the possibility of forgiveness and sets its concrete limitation. In emphasizing the fact that forgetting and memory are not fully governed by the will, we come face to face with the limits of forgiveness. That forgetting is at the heart of forgiveness means that although forgiveness is an act of the will, that it is something that one freely grants the other from the depths of one's being, nevertheless, because at its depths, one does not entirely *possess* the core of oneself, forgiveness is in another sense not something that one *does*, but is something that *comes* to one, like grace.

Forgiveness happens not only to the one who is forgiven but also to the one who forgives. We might even say that it is something we suffer. One can only forgive another once one's worth is felt to have survived and even strengthened by the humiliation and injury one had suffered. Genuine forgiveness cannot be separated from the blessing of one's life. In Zarathustra's third metamorphosis beyond the lion to the child, the *Yes to life* as reconciliation with the past invites us to affirm that we are as much *in our forgetting* as we are in our memories.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Sarah Kofman, "*Shoah* (or Dis-grace), trans. Georgia Albert, in *Selected Writings*, eds. Thomas Albrecht with Georgia Albert and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 245-46.

<sup>2</sup>For an illuminating discussion of Derrida's insistence upon the aporetic conception of forgiveness, see Richard J. Bernstein, "Derrida: The Aporia of Forgiveness?" *Constellations* 13 (2006): 394-406, and Agnes Heller, "Preliminary Adieu for Jacques Derrida", *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 26(2005): 191, quoted in Bernstein, 399.

<sup>3</sup>Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 32.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 31-32, boldface mine.

<sup>5</sup>For a discussion of forgiveness from the perspective of trauma, see Jerome A. Miller, “The trauma of evil and the traumatological conception of forgiveness”, *Continental Philosophy Review* 42(2009): 401-419.

<sup>6</sup>Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, eds. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 185, emphasis mine.

<sup>7</sup>Charles L. Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup>See this passage, for instance: “These points are offered not primarily as therapeutic but as ethical ones. [...] The ethical benefits of forgiveness have nothing in common with the benefits of the ‘closure’ about which we hear so much, at least insofar as that comes to something like forgetting, or to putting it away so that the issue is no longer felt as a live one. Closure has no necessary connection with the moral and spiritual gravity of forgiveness, and indeed is perfectly compatible with a decision not to seek (or grant) forgiveness. One could achieve closure by managing a way not to feel guilt, for example”. (Griswold, 70.) Like Derrida, Griswold rejects the reduction of forgiveness to its therapeutic effects.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>10</sup>Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 240.

<sup>11</sup>Arendt, *Human Condition*, 240, n. 80.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 241, italics mine.

<sup>13</sup>This idea of the limit of human power carries within it a further ambiguity: not only do we not know how far this human, all too human power of forgiveness can go; we also cannot tell when human power passes onto divine power to which it appeals and in which it entrusts itself.

<sup>14</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), II, 1, p. 57. Henceforth cited in the text as GM followed by section numbers and page numbers.

<sup>15</sup>Sarah Kofman’s chapter on “The Forgetting of Metaphor”, in *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, trans. Duncan Large (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993), 23-58, develops Nietzsche’s distinction between these two notions of forgetting in her elaboration of Nietzsche’s conception of metaphorical activity.

<sup>16</sup>GM II, 1, pp. 57-58, boldface mine.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>GM II,3, p. 61.

<sup>21</sup>GM II, 2, p. 60.

<sup>22</sup>However, this notion of forgetting can be found in the English psychologists’ account – rejected by Nietzsche – of the origin of good and evil in GM I, 1-3.

<sup>23</sup>GM II, 5, p. 64.

<sup>24</sup>GM II, 8, p. 70.

<sup>25</sup>GM II, 9, p. 71.

<sup>26</sup>GM II, 8, p. 70.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>28</sup>GM II, 9, p. 71.

<sup>29</sup>GM II, 10, pp. 72-73.

<sup>30</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “On the Adder's Bite”, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1966), 68. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is henceforth to be cited as Z followed by section title and page number.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>GM II, 10, p. 72.

<sup>33</sup>Z, “On the Adder's Bite”, 69.

<sup>34</sup>Z, “On Redemption”, 139-40.

<sup>35</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* ¶348, trans. Marion Faber with Stephen Lehmann (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 184.

<sup>36</sup>Z, “On the Three Metamorphoses”, 27.

<sup>38</sup>Z, “On Redemption”, 139-40.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 141.

<sup>40</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, “Against remorse”, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), 136-37.

<sup>41</sup>I offer this interpretation of Nietzsche's rejection of remorse as an alternative possibility to William Desmond's in “It Is Nothing” – Wording the Release of Forgiveness”, *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 82 (2009): 5-9.

<sup>42</sup>HH “The adder's bite”, 68, italics mine.

<sup>43</sup>Z, “The adder's bite”, 68, italics mine.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>45</sup>See Christian Lotz's reading of Derrida's account of forgiveness as being beyond the order of exchange in “The Events of Morality and Forgiveness: From Kant to Derrida”, *Research in Phenomenology* 36 (2006): 255-73.

<sup>46</sup>Psalms 51:7.

<sup>47</sup>G.W.F. Hegel, *Principles of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), ¶282, p. 325.

<sup>48</sup>I am speaking here from the perspective of the one called upon to forgive. The question of self-forgiveness is not addressed here, but I would suggest that forgiveness, being an essentially intersubjective concept, cannot be applied without qualification to self-forgiveness. At the very least, it has to be agreed that self-forgiveness cannot be the paradigmatic case of forgiveness.

Nevertheless, forgetting is an essential aspect of a healthy self-relation even from the standpoint of the one asking for forgiveness. For Nietzsche, forgiveness by the other cannot release one from the bonds of guilt as long as one is bent on tormenting oneself with the fault.

<sup>49</sup>Always remembering that we mean active forgetting: forgetting in the sense of active discharge of affect.