

Germany and the Jews in Jankélévitch's View

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Abstract:

The philosophy of French philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch offers a unique and complex perspective on the world that transcends traditional philosophical boundaries. By using irony as an analytical tool, Jankélévitch critiques closed and conventional philosophies, emphasizing the importance of openness to diverse human experiences. After World War II and the Holocaust, his stance on German culture, particularly his rejection of Heidegger's ideas, highlights his profound ethical commitment and refusal to condone philosophies that justify injustice or violence. His philosophy calls for a reevaluation of philosophical and ethical foundations and encourages adopting a renewed philosophical vision in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

Keywords : Jankélévitch, critiques, irony, Heidegger, ethical foudation, German culture.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The French philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch combined philosophical rigor with deep irony in his critique of various intellectual and cultural issues. After dedicating a significant part of his life to studying German philosophy, including the works of Schelling, his stance shifted dramatically following World War II and the Holocaust. For him, German culture became tainted by the atrocities of Nazism, leading him to reject it outright. Jankélévitch's position, which continues to spark debate to this day, reflects his unique ethical vision that challenges the uncritical attraction to obscure and ambiguous philosophies. Also, he approached the issue of the State of Israel in a complex and nuanced manner. For him, Israel was not merely an ordinary nation-state but rather a "mystical homeland" that should embody moral and political openness rather than being a closed entity fixated on its own identity. His stance on Israel reflects a tension between remaining in a defined space and the inclination to seek elsewhere, making it a model for critical thinking on issues of identity and belonging. Jankélévitch used irony as a philosophical tool to examine issues of existence and time, particularly in his implicit critique of Heidegger's ideas. Through his works, Jankélévitch questioned whether philosophical thinking about existence should remain relentlessly serious and profound or if it could be more consistent with the complexities of human life and its ever-changing experiences. He was not merely a critic of German culture or a thinker on specific political issues but a philosopher seeking a deeper understanding of the nature of human existence. Now, how can Jankélévitch's ideas on irony, time, and existence inspire us to address the philosophical and ethical challenges we face today?

2. Biography and Historical Background:

When browsing through the philosophical writings of Vladimir Jankélévitch, particularly his private letters (Jankélévitch, 1995, p. 35), it is striking that there is no direct reference to politics. There is a brief mention in 1926 when he was called up for military service: "My heart is now filled with loyalty, simple, sincere, and tricolor," (Jankélévitch, 1995, p. 122) like any ordinary French citizen loyal to his country. In fact, his parents were Russian-born Jews, but he was born in France and acquired French citizenship when he was one year old. He felt fully integrated (Jankélévitch, 1995, p. 122) as a Frenchman. This feeling was evident in his desire to have his last name pronounced in a French manner rather than the Russian way. Until August 5, 1939, when he was called up for service as an infantry officer as war approached, Jankélévitch lived a life fully committed to two great passions: studying philosophy and music. He showed no interest in politics in the strict sense, except for the "leftist" environment in which he was born (Jankélévitch, 2015, p. 260) and continued to move throughout his life, supported by a deep sense of belonging to the French state. Therefore, the shock he felt can be understood when he learned, while receiving treatment at the Marmande Hospital for an injury on June 20, 1940, that he had not only been dismissed from teaching due to "special laws concerning the children of foreigners" who did not have French nationality "by origin," but also, in December of the same year, he was removed from all public positions because of his "Jewish status." At that moment, for the first time, Jankélévitch suddenly discovered his "Jewish difference," something he had never denied but had never felt before. His life had unfolded under complete secularism, far from any form of Jewish affiliation (Jankélévitch, 1978, p. 135) or ritual practice, in a rather "anti-clerical" atmosphere of free and open inquiry. His comment a few days after this sudden experience (Jankélévitch, 2015, p. 241) was tinged with bitter irony: "They discovered that I had two

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impure grandparents because I am half Jewish on my mother's side; but that fact would not have been enough if I weren't also an immigrant on my father's side. That was too much impurity for one man. " From that moment, the philosopher's life underwent a radical and definitive change: "The war split my life in half," (Jankélévitch, 1995, p. 265)as he would later say.

A few months after taking refuge with his entire family in the free zone of Toulouse, Jankélévitch joined the Resistance, fighting for liberation and unconditionally rejecting French defeat (Jankélévitch, 2015, pp. 64-65-96). At this time, alongside his "secret" life, he developed an awareness of being "Jewish," an awareness that intertwined with political reflections and stances that the philosopher felt an urgent need to take, also driven by the horror gradually seeping in from information about the extermination of Jews in concentration camps. Consequently, between 1943 and 1983, writings that can be described as "political" by Jankélévitch began to appear, starting with analyses related to Nazi persecution and continuing after the conflict with various interventions, such as commemorative occasions, debates on the erasure of Nazi crimes, or participation in complex and controversial issues surrounding the founding of the State of Israel.

Thus, Jankélévitch's interest in politics is directly and inseparably linked to the "Jewish question," which becomes the core of the burning questions he raises and renews over forty years. Hence the tone of fierce, if not excessive, criticism and the harsh reflections often filled with biting irony, whether towards the Germans or the French bourgeoisie, even the intellectual ones, who, during the war, continued their lives as if nothing was happening around them and quickly forgot the events that took place during those five terrible years.

Nevertheless, this historical background and biography might seem to pertain only to the personal side of Jankélévitch the man, were it not

for the fact that the philosopher's "political writings" serve as a source of reflection, as they directly reflect Jankélévitch's philosophy and illuminate, in reverse light, the key points of his major works: his integration of life into "thought in action," meaning effective action on reality (turning his back definitively on any philosophy understood as pure abstraction or mere words thrown at reality), thus giving them moral significance—and indirectly political significance—based on a precise metaphysical vision.

Moreover, and on this basis, in these writings, as well as through the Jewish question, Jankélévitch interrogates philosophy itself, (Lisciani-petrini, 2013, p. 58) approaching it not only from a historical, social, or anthropological perspective but philosophically as well, challenging certain traditional philosophy and presenting instead a more direct philosophy.

3. Ethics and Politics:

Jankélévitch joined the Resistance in 1940, marking his first opportunity to put Bergsonian lessons to the test. He had been drawn to Bergson's ideas from an early age, as Bergson was considered one of the greatest living philosophers at the time. Jankélévitch never wavered in this interest, even as his perspective evolved with maturity, where death began to play a prominent role, and feelings of "lack," "ambiguity," and "absolute otherness" emerged in his confrontation with reality, characteristics that became a hallmark of the "second" Jankélévitch as a philosopher.

Nevertheless, the Bergsonian lesson echoed in the background of his thinking, like an irreplaceable "continuous bass," not only in his view of reality as "continuous becoming," "unfolding without essence (Jankélévitch, 1995, p. 63)," and "living grace," (Jankélévitch, 2012, p. 65) but also in his moral stance. Jankélévitch believed that philosophy is not merely a rhetorical practice performed from an academic

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podium, nor is it a silent contemplation reserved for a personal study. Instead, it is a vital and binding companion "until death," (Jankélévitch, 2015, p. 80) especially in the face of severe crises.

"Engagement" became an essential part of Jankélévitch's philosophy, where he argued that the philosopher, as a thinking human being (Jankélévitch, 2015, p. 92), must immerse himself in the historical and living fabric, playing his role in "refusing" and "resisting" evil. This is the true commitment that Jankélévitch reiterated, criticizing philosophers who knew commitment only as talk (Jankélévitch, 2015, p. 65). For the resistant heroes, every day amidst the dangers was filled with action and struggle, without the need for speeches.

From these considerations and experiences, the figure of the "philosopher warrior" emerges, bowing in respect to the character of Jean Cavaillès (the philosopher and mathematician who died while serving in the Resistance). Alongside the reclusive Jankélévitch, who appears somber and shy, delving into ancient and new texts such as those of Fénelon, Pascal, and St. John of the Cross, and contemplating older and less common topics like "innocence," "grace," and "chance," a more evolved Jankélévitch emerges over the years as a fierce defender of the memory of Holocaust victims, an active participant in the student movements of 1968, and a tireless advocate for oppressed minorities such as the Kurds, Biafrans, Bengalis, and Haitians.

The lesson is clear. Politics is not a "strategy based on power relations," practiced by "professional workers" in politics; rather, it is a political practice, an application of thought—active and concrete—by every resident of the city, in the society we live in.

4. Jankélévitch and the Jewish Question :

The central focus of Jankélévitch's public activities after the war is the Jewish question. On one hand, Jankélévitch feels obligated, alongside others, to the "active role of the witness" and to bear a great

responsibility in defending the memory of the Holocaust "with unwavering loyalty"; on the other hand, he feels a duty to understand how it was "metaphysically" possible to produce such terrible violence against the Jews. These are two sides of the same coin.

Shortly after the war ended, the first major issue Jankélévitch had to take a stand on was the fight against the statute of limitations on Nazi crimes. He was deeply involved in this struggle as a philosopher and made a gesture that caused much commotion (Jankélévitch, 2015, pp. 58-60): his refusal to forgive the German people. To many, this act seemed like the result of an incomprehensible insistence, yet it had more than one reason behind it. The first was an expression of intolerance from the "warrior philosopher," someone who fought and saw with his own eyes how "many sufferings [...] and giant contractions gave birth after the war to a meager state (Jankélévitch, 1978, p. 61)" and a series of practices seeking to "rehabilitate criminals," even to the point of demanding "the statute of limitations on war crimes." Faced with this "sickly complacency" toward the Germans and the indifference of many—"more dangerous than forgetting"—and these unexpected demands, he wrote an emotional and harsh letter to *Le Monde* in 1965 (published on January 3-4) (Jankélévitch, 2015, pp. 181-184). Jankélévitch mocked the publication of this letter in the "Free Opinions" section, as if "the insurmountable horror" caused by the "death camps" could be considered an "opinion," let alone a "free opinion"! From this letter, the following year emerged the provocative article "The Unforgivable," which would set the decisive tone that the philosopher maintained until the end of his life. This article blocked the path to forgiveness for those who saw it as a "free gift" and must, above all, be granted to the "unjustifiable." Challenging self-contradiction, which he acknowledged honestly, Jankélévitch said: "Love is stronger than evil, and evil is stronger than love, they are stronger than each

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other, [...] these extreme and nearly torn tensions are the very nature of forgiveness." (Jankélévitch, 1967, p. 213)

Here lies the issue. The intense battle "against war crimes" and the refusal to forgive are not explained solely by reasons—however well-justified—moral and personal. They are better understood when referred to the philosophical level, which forms their foundation. Jankélévitch's understanding stems from the epistemological-philosophical struggle that makes him realize that he must bear responsibility, not just against a people (the Germans), but against a worldview that subtly filters, through hidden distortions, the Nazi event. As if there were "two moral substances," (Jankélévitch, 1978, pp. 135-146) in Hegelian terms, or two forms of the world, or "absolutes"—irreconcilable and unbridgeable, capable of transcending an individual's desire for forgiveness—facing each other over the abyss of the Jewish tragedy.

In addressing this question, Jankélévitch does not overlook revisiting the most primitive and corrupt clichés that have been made against Jews in general, which over the centuries have served as an excuse for "anti-Semitism" and thus all forms of persecution. Jews are considered "God-killers," cursed forever and ever; this "unforgettable past," this "mysterious and ancestral blemish," reflects in all their actions, making them "suspicious and impure": from greed to negotiation, not to mention the conspiracy that Jews are always accused of plotting against Christians. However, behind this absurd yet cunning ideology, Jankélévitch quickly identifies the critical and correct point with a "metaphysical dimension" (Jankélévitch, 1978, p. 136): the "Nazi extermination project" carries an "unprecedented character," not because Jews "profess a different religion or ideology, but for intangible metaphysical reasons." (Jankélévitch, 2015, p. 221) Beyond any racial difference, which forms the basis of ordinary racism, Jews are "the closest in resemblance": not actually different but

distinguished, due to a paradoxical difference in similarity, for an "unnoticeable difference," akin to "infinitesimals in differential calculus," which are impossible to pinpoint and "unanalyzable," "something that is not nothing." (Jankélévitch, 1978, p. 140) For this very reason, they evade ordinary classifications—to the extent that they must be recognized and marked by something obvious, like the infamous yellow star. Here lies the heart of the problem. In their "closest resemblance," excluded from any definition, Jews are a living negation, a clear refutation of the traditional philosophical thesis—since Plato and Aristotle—that involves categorizing beings, defining them, and clearly determining their pure essence in a way that is unmistakable and irrefutable, confining them with "identifiable and non-contradictory distinctive marks," (Jankélévitch, 1978, p. 139) thus making them "be." In contrast, Jews evade this rational structure. Therefore, they become not a principle of truth or clear and certain rectitude, but a source of anxiety, grotesque deviation, and ambiguity. Therein lies "the most thorny area. (Jankélévitch, 1978, p. 138)" "The Jew is Jewish and not Jewish" (Jankélévitch, 2015, p. 138): he is a person with an irreplaceable tradition, but at the same time, it is impossible to distinguish him from the "Aryan" with whom he often shares tastes, interests, and color, making him a "false Aryan." Thus, this "duality," instead of being seen as a fertile contradiction, is considered "deception," "a kind of fraud, an unforgivable forgery," (Jankélévitch, 2015, p. 138) reaffirming the old "mark of shame." For this reason, due to these constant and inherent oscillations between being and non-being, between existence and non-existence (nothingness), Jews must be exterminated: they must be eradicated precisely because they are capable of challenging the very root of "being" in traditional metaphysics and the "purity project" that arises from it. According to Jankélévitch, this explains the "brutal administrative and industrial planning that oversaw the extermination," (Jankélévitch, 1978, p. 141) something unprecedented

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on earth, in a deadly combination where "our modernity" of quantitative technological calculation intersects with the xenophobia of those who are "different" and foreigners. It becomes clear why this monstrous crime carries "something metaphysical" (Jankélévitch, 2015, p. 68): it reveals the opposition between two metaphysical visions, irreconcilable and unreducible. Here lies the battle—philosophical, moral, political, and in some ways religious—for Jankélévitch, upon which Judaism is somewhat included in his horizon of thought, as an additional anchor to his basic vision, or as an aspect he interacts with (Jankélévitch, 1956-1957, p. 102).

As mentioned, from his philosophical beginnings, Jankélévitch positioned himself within a Bergsonian context, on a theoretical front entirely different from traditional ontology of purely Greek origin. This ontology began with the conviction that the existence of reality can be reduced to a perfect one separated from concrete multiplicity, or even to an essence considered the embodiment of a set of forms given from eternity, and principally visible (the most radiant: "to ekphanestaton") to the solar eye of the human mind (Platon); which can, therefore, know it and express it in its own words, which are always "true" and "certain." This one, due to its hegemonic presence (Jankélévitch, 1959, pp. 268-269), marginalizes multiplicity and becoming as a lower perfection, incoherent existence.

Jankélévitch's stance is entirely different. Like Bergson, he opposes this "sub specie aeternitatis" vision that has become a "common guide" with a "sub specie durationis" vision that fundamentally eliminates any essential foundation. Such an organization "clearly anchors us in the homogeneity of becoming," replacing the Greek obsession with eternity with a "vision" (Lisciani-Petrini, 2015) of real existence as something transient and without essence, constantly changing or differing, "all else"—thus, in reality, "nothingness," unknowable by human words, and therefore inexpressible. Within this

exploratory horizon, the philosopher, since the 1950s, began introducing, even if problematically, the tradition of transcendent creation of Jewish origin into the continuous organization of Bergsonian and Plotinian embodied dimensions. He did this by connecting the impenetrable existence at the heart of reality, at the center of his reflections, with the "mystical nothingness of Kabbalah [...] which is wealth and fullness, an unlimited infinity (Ein Sof)." (Jankélévitch, 1959, p. 335)

This addition emphasizes the essential—not secondary or minor—importance of time and becoming: the nature of reality "under the perspective of duration." For this nothingness, this absence of foundation, this one as the origin of all things, is what gives their existence a changing movement without essence, constantly changing in itself, and thus unknowable. So that—Jankélévitch concludes—one can "understand the living God of the Psalms, of Isaiah, and the Exodus," or "the God who is life, the supreme positivity, the vitality of yes" in the sense of time according to Bergson, who sees "duration as a continuous spring" and "an unlimited opening. (Jankélévitch, 1959, p. 355)" Within this framework also enters the image of the Messiah. The latter, who is still coming as much as he is not present at any given moment, or even in a real future time, makes his anticipation in Judaism something that can happen at any moment, always "present," capable of transforming and unsettling "today" into "before" and "keeping people in a vital movement." (Jankélévitch, 1984, p. 46.81)

So, returning to the critical point of the matter, it is clear, even from this brief summary, that there is a clash between two fundamentally different metaphysical perspectives. From these two "worldviews," different anthropologies and ethics emerge; for Jankélévitch, their irreconcilable nature is, among other things, the basis of antisemitism. In fact, one of these perspectives shapes a mold for human identity,

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placing it within a singular foundational framework, one never contaminated by plurality (which is considered only as a fall, and therefore as a flaw or "impurity") and functioning as an unshakable home, characterized by moral and even biological "purity" (colette, 1957) that is self-referential. This is the domain in which the familiar myth of "Blut und Boden" (blood and soil), so celebrated by the Nazis, is rooted. The anthropology that emerges from the other perspective, which Jankélévitch adopts, is entirely different and contradictory. If reality is a plurality that never ceases to differentiate itself within and from itself, where everything is change, a continuous slipping of identity into the other, becoming something else in relation to itself, then the human being knows that they live in a world that is never unified but, by necessity, always "ambiguous." Here lies the original challenge of Jankélévitch's ethics. For this ambiguity is not understood in its negative sense but, on the contrary, as an essential quality of reality and humanity, as a source of transformation and "fertile anxiety"; in this sense, it serves as protection against the closure of self-unification. From here emerges authentic ethics, according to the philosopher (Jankélévitch, 1968, p. 737). It does not concern itself with adhering to monolithic purity; for such commitments are markers of the worst behaviors – and Nazism, like all "purity," is proof of this. Instead, one must face the ambiguity of reality and humanity without hesitation: one must know how to navigate the plurality and, ultimately, define the "appropriate" behavior for the diversity of reality that cannot be unified.

Thus, the person who embraces this ethics never settles in a final home – simply because they know, at their roots, there is no home, but they will live in the world as a space of movement. This is why, as the Stoics believed, cosmopolitanism is "what protects every person from the locality of the closed city" (Jankélévitch, 1984, p. 46); here lies the political dimension of this metaphysics. From these last lines emerge the distinctive traits of the Jewish people, indeed of humanity, of the

"human existence" that the Jews embody: the cosmopolitan person, the "nomad" in the world, open to continuous transformation and, therefore, to the perpetual revolution of things. (This is why, in Jankélévitch's view, being Jewish and being on the left are two sides of the same coin (Jankélévitch, 2015, p. 260)). From this metaphysical perspective, Jews always oscillate between existence and non-existence, identity and alterity. It is this open, "forward-moving," "adventurous" position, "always on the road," in a state of "creative curiosity" towards reality, if not – beneficially – "full of humor," as Jankélévitch often described it in his ethical writings (Jankélévitch, 1978, pp. 153-161).

But if it is true that "every person is not themselves, and if they are only truly human because of their ability to be outside themselves and beyond themselves [...] continually other," (Jankélévitch, 1984, p. 46) then Jews, being always "other" and "elsewhere," "foreign" and "alien" by nature, embody this condition, even repeatedly, (since they are as other to themselves as all other human beings are, and also "imperceptibly invisible" to others who live with them), and they represent (Jankélévitch, 2015, p. 140) to the highest degree the "problem of alterity," the fundamental "contradiction" of all humanity. Thus, they become a principle of anxiety, disturbance, and "vital movement," (Jankélévitch, 1984, p. 16) while at the same time, a source of painful contradiction and inescapable "alienation." Therefore, they are an extremely uncomfortable image for those who wish to live in absolute identity, closing themselves off in the shell of a comfortable "identity," feeling protected by a certain definition, settled in an unshakable classification, in short, dwelling in a "safe home." For this reason, the "anarchic people, who dissolve everywhere," cause unbearable disturbance (Jankélévitch, 2015, pp. 56-57), and they "pay a high price for their uprootedness." The reaction that manifests in obsessive antisemitism arises from the need to hide this from sight – to finally kill it, to eradicate it – that which, in

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its very being, puts the conservative in a state of deep confusion, embarrassing disturbance, and unsettling doubt about themselves and the established realities. It is certainly no coincidence that, for the first time in history, "people are hunted down not for what they do but for what they are, paying the price for their 'being' (Jankélévitch, 2015, p. 128) rather than 'what they possess.'" Jankélévitch did not miss the psychoanalytic duality of this persecution, which he closely observed, revealing the hidden, perverse attraction to this "other" who seems profoundly appealing, towards the "disturbing modernity carried by the foreigner," and towards the deviation from suffocating purity that secretly fascinates the "Spartan-like" (Jankélévitch, 2015, pp. 123-130) Nazi.

Therefore, the philosopher is entirely right when he says that in the case of antisemitism, it concerns the "humanity" of the Jews, their way of being human, the existence of Jews, and even "humanity" in general, "the human in every human. (Jankélévitch, 2015, p. 22)" This way of being – anxious, homeless, open, and changeable, yet at the same time capable of preserving an ancient tradition – incites fear in those who, on the contrary, wish to live within an "existence" supported by fixed certainty, by pure, upright, clear, and self-referential identity patterns. In this opposition, two metaphysically opposing camps, two worldviews, two irreducible "moral substances" face each other "to the death."

5. The Mystical Homeland :

At the heart of Jankélévitch's theory lies his complex stance on the State of Israel—a position that brought him much criticism and even estrangement (Jankélévitch, 2015, pp. 258-263), yet is rich with lessons. He focuses on the fundamental contradiction inherent in Jewish existence, which should make it—both morally and politically—a model of openness and movement.

Since 1957, Jankélévitch visited Israel and returned from there with a fluctuating state of mind that never left him. On one hand, he does not downplay the importance and necessity of establishing the State of Israel: "On the surface, a state like any other, with borders, a government, and police. (Jankélévitch, 1984, p. 49)" Moreover, by expanding the vision to the symbolic meaning of the birth of this state, he sees in Israel "... the conscience of today's world (Jankélévitch, 2015, p. 245). And above all, its guilty conscience." Israel is a living testament to the indelible remorse and the ongoing "debt" resulting from an irreparable wrongdoing that weighs heavily on humanity in our time (Jankélévitch, 2015, p. 247). From this perspective, the philosopher's loyalty to the establishment of Israel as a "national homeland"—as a "historical and political reality" (Jankélévitch, 2015, p. 248)—is absolute and unshakeable. But on the other hand—as all intellectuals who grasp the extreme complexity of the situation—he is convinced of the necessity of "mutual recognition between Israelis and Palestinians" by each concerned party. From this perspective, the issue should be "addressed in new ways": through what he knows as a "free act" that defines "a true beginning in all its surprising aspects." (Jankélévitch, 2015, p. 256)

In these words, which carry a "mystical-visionary" tone, Jankélévitch's persistent view of Jews and the Jewish question emerges once again. Jews are the model—which shocks traditional and closed-minded perspectives—of a "philanthropic," (Jankélévitch, 1984, pp. 55-56) universal, transnational humanity that is inherently "anarchic" and open "towards the future." This gives Jankélévitch's political discourse a very original tone. According to this view, it would be a profound, irreparable loss if the State of Israel were to merely represent the need to "return" to stability, making it "like other states": closed in on itself and its narrow identity. This would mean losing sight of the contradiction and anxiety embedded in the heart of the Jewish people within its global reality: on the one hand, the desire

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to remain in a defined space, to "settle"; and on the other, the inclination to "apologize," to always be somewhere else, in "exile."

And this is what makes Israel remain a kind of "mystical homeland," (Jankélévitch, 1978, p. 28) yet nonetheless occupied, a "promised land always under threat"—so as not to attack the "principle of dispersion," the "immense and irreducible differentiation... (Jankélévitch, 1984, pp. 47-50) [which] is a call to always search elsewhere, always further." According to this principle, Jews should be—for other peoples as well—the model of "creative tension" that breaks national barriers and demands the opening of "open" borders, "ambiguous" boundaries.

This is the intense moral and political message that Jankélévitch once again addresses to us—a message that continues to challenge us even today.

6. Jankélévitch Against Heidegger :

At first glance, the idea of opposing Jankélévitch to Heidegger might seem illogical. It is well known that Jankélévitch, after dedicating a significant part of his pre-World War II philosophical work to German thought, particularly to Schelling, clearly distanced himself from this philosophy and, in general, from German culture due to the atrocity of the Holocaust. It was as if German culture, in its entirety, had now been tainted by the tragedy perpetrated by the Nazis, a tragedy beyond comprehension. Jankélévitch's stance on this issue continues to spark debate even today: Is it a result of internal withdrawal, and thus a loss, or, on the contrary, a response to the contamination of German culture due to the Holocaust? Jankélévitch's position in this regard was unique and radically different from the fascination, if not acquiescence, that much of post-war French philosophy showed towards German thought, particularly towards Heidegger. As if nothing had happened, as if one could continue with normal activities,

including philosophical ones, after the Holocaust, as if nothing had changed.

However, my intention here is not to take a stand in this ongoing debate, especially regarding the issue of blame and forgiveness (Zarka, 2014). Rather, I wish to show that, alongside his sincere desire to distance himself from all things German, Jankélévitch may also have had another stance rooted in his concept of irony. It is known that Jankélévitch wrote a book titled *Irony*, where irony is considered a prominent philosophical stance, embodied by the figure of Socrates. If Socrates uses irony in his dialogues with interlocutors to reveal their errors or weaknesses with a humorous spirit, bringing them back to the path of truth, then irony can also manifest through writing—a style that aims less at correcting the subject of irony and more at making the reader, at least the one who can read between the lines, aware of the flaws or even scandals in philosophical thought. This is the second form of irony, I believe, in Jankélévitch's work—irony in his style, in his way of writing, as it carries an ethical goal: to dispel the fascination with a philosophy that becomes more seductive the more obscure and enigmatic it is.

What is irony? It is saying one thing while simultaneously meaning something else entirely, revealing the truth behind a discourse, stance, or something else through irony. In this sense, the ironic style does not attack its subject directly (such as a philosophical discourse, for instance) but indirectly exposes its implications to enlighten the reader. Irony can thus take the form of a writing art that envelops the reader with care, attention, and sympathy—at least for the reader capable of reading between the lines.

I believe Jankélévitch's irony can be particularly discerned in the three parts of his work (Jankélévitch, 1980, p. 45). This title already reflects Jankélévitch's philosophical style, his way of focusing on all that is unstable, elusive, and ungraspable, yet constitutes the very

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fabric of our existence, which eludes those who attempt to understand it through grand ontological structures. *I Know Not What* and *Almost Nothing* may be a way of expressing what constitutes reality while also serving as a satirical critique of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. A strange idea, of course. Heidegger is not explicitly mentioned, and there is no clear reference to any of his texts. This complete absence is not surprising, given Jankélévitch's stance towards German culture, for which Heidegger was the most obvious icon, one he rejected with disgust and horror. Yet, it is very likely that Jankélévitch had read or was aware of the theses of *Being and Time* before or after the war. Was not French philosophy steeped in it?

This is where the irony lies: one of the central references in *I Know Not What* and *Almost Nothing* is Baltasar Gracián, the 17th-century Spanish Jesuit whose philosophical relevance was being revived. With Gracián, we are at the opposite end of German thought, which is characterized by depth and joyless seriousness. In contrast, Gracián is a thinker of appearance, even exaggeration, the complement, the mode of existence, or the second existence granted by the Creator to being: "For being, in addition to pure existence, also possesses a multi-colored brilliance, a pretense, and a gleam." Thus, "being without appearance would only be what it is, i.e., naked existence, matter, and reality inaccessible to knowledge. Appearance gives being its luster, but it does not create being; appearance does not make justice just, nor reason reasonable, nor truth true, but only makes them appear and be known as such. (Jankélévitch, 1980, p. 14)" Of course, it is not just the relationship between being and appearance that signals that the reference to Gracián, beyond its own meaning, carries an ironic reference to Heidegger.

There is also something else: "The *I Know Not What* through which we guess that being is, this *I Know Not What* is the most indefinite and most sublimely brief, lacking only a breath to make this intuition

disappear into silence... (Jankélévitch, 1980, p. 15)" The question "What is being?" is, in fact, meaningless; it must "necessarily remain unanswered forever, while the act of being can be the subject of a simple declaration (Zarka, 2014, p. 438)." But, specifically, "that there is being," the act of being that allows us to see that something exists, is precisely the *I Know Not What*. Of course, one should delve further into Jankélévitch's text, but it becomes clear here that *I Know Not What* is a satirical critique of the necessity of the empty question about being, which is claimed to be the fundamental question of thought, and an approach to the act of being of things that remains entirely indeterminate.

Appearance is what provides the determinations of the reality of being. It is not separate from appearance or phenomenon but is entirely integrated within it: one could say that being exists in its manifestations. Thus, being is accomplished through transformation, that is, through time: "Being, without a doubt, contradicts appearance, but there is no being outside of appearance, no being outside this continuous emergence of something where an infinite capacity for realization must ultimately be called time." (Jankélévitch, 1980, p. 35)

Time allows for the transition from ontology to ontogeny: "Transformation is the dimension that carries being entirely into another ontological reality, or rather, the continuous transition from being to being." But what is time? Jankélévitch's answer: "Something almost nothing" (Jankélévitch, 1980, p. 40) in its three dimensions: past, present, and future. This *almost nothing* mocks Heidegger's time while offering another approach to time. In this way, Jankélévitch not only reveals the affective nature of human existence but also its fundamentally ethical character through the contrast between appearance and semblance. The human being is a being in waiting for the future, but "appearance that lacks the patience of waiting and does

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not accept the future is embodied in being that seems like another without being so... appearing to 'appear.'" (Jankélévitch, 1980, p. 37)

It is not about opposing existential or non-existential stances, authenticity or inauthenticity, but a moral alternative conceived in terms of rebirth: "Isn't existence about being born again from moment to moment through the miracle of every second? We now understand why appearance is mixed with emergence in a flow of unceasing transformation, rather than semblance separating from appearance due to a sudden evasion; thus, the form of transformation contrasts with the falsehood of simulation."

The question of temporal existence here is intrinsically linked to moral reflection on the relationship to oneself and others, on remorse, love, compassion, and so on. Human existence is fundamentally tied to moral choices: "The other for the imitator is an excuse for the self and *Allos Autos*, just as altruism for the imitator is a form of selfishness, just as otherness for the imitator is false otherness that hides the most coherent identity, just as simulated change is nothing but interrupted stability." Whereas, for Levinas, the discovery of the other's otherness required the destruction of ontology, Jankélévitch's ontogeny is ethical from the very beginning. (Jankélévitch, 1980, p. 39)

Thus, through *I Know Not What* and *Almost Nothing*, Jankélévitch ironically critiques Heidegger's *Being and Time* while allowing us to access the dimensions of who we are.

7. CONCLUSION :

In conclusion, this research study on Jankélévitch's thought reveals a unique and complex worldview that transcends the traditional boundaries of philosophical thinking. Through his use of irony as a philosophical and analytical tool, Jankélévitch offers a sharp critique

of closed and conventional philosophical thought, highlighting the importance of openness to the diverse and intricate experiences of human life. His stance on German culture after World War II, along with his critique of German thought embodied in Heidegger's philosophy, clearly reflects his deep ethical commitment and his refusal to align with ideas or philosophical systems that justify injustice or violence.

Jankélévitch's philosophy is not merely a set of theoretical reflections; it is a call to action for a global vision that transcends national and religious differences and emphasizes the importance of creative tension that propels humanity toward change and renewal. His focus on concepts such as the "I-don't-know-what" and the "almost nothing" reflects his interest in the unstable and elusive dimensions of human existence—dimensions that form the core of our life experience and invite us to continually rethink the nature of our existence.

Ultimately, Jankélévitch's philosophy remains a powerful and influential message, urging us to reconsider the foundations of philosophy and ethics in light of contemporary human experiences, and challenging us to adopt this philosophical vision in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

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