

**A Review of the Psychological Process of Forgiveness within
Simon Wiesenthal's 'The Sunflower'**

YOAV VAN DER HEYDEN

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Supervisor: Mr Christopher Petty

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Statement

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work, and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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Date



ABSTRACT

This paper examines the notion of forgiveness by highlighting the personal psychological experience that may be discarded in the moral and political debate. Faced with his dilemma of whether or not to forgive the heinous crimes of a dying man, Simon Wiesenthal's invites readers of his personal story in *The Sunflower* to ask themselves what they would have done in his place. Most respondents have considered this a moral, theological or political issue. This paper chooses to view his question from a psychological perspective. By analysing his autobiographical account in *The Sunflower* and process model of forgiveness developed by Enright and the Human Development Study Group (1991, 1994), Wiesenthal's psychological responses have been investigated on behavioural, cognitive and emotional levels.

Through the analysis, it has emerged that Wiesenthal's personal account shows evidence of numerous elements of a process of forgiveness. The uncovering, decision-making, and work phases are each illustrated by examples drawn from the text. Wiesenthal's process of forgiving seems to culminate in his choice to protect the offender's mother from the pain of her son's confession, and in so doing ending the cycle of pain. Although the deepening process of forgiveness could not be illustrated from Wiesenthal's account within the story, his life's work suggests that his deathbed encounter with the offender and his reaction to it had a significant impact on the life that he lived after the holocaust.

The paper concludes that the value of Wiesenthal's question to readers in *The Sunflower* may be underestimated if the issue is merely debated on moral, theological and political levels. In addition, it is suggested that significance of the psychological experience of forgiveness is central to an understanding of the concept as a whole.

OPSOMMING

In die navorsingstuk word die idee van vergifnis wat in die morele of politieke debat nagelaat mag word, ondersoek. Terwyl Simon Wiesenthal daarmee gekonfronteer word om die veragtelike misdade van 'n sterwende man te vergewe of nie, nooi hy die lesers van sy persoonlike storie in *The Sunflower* uit om hulself af te vra wat hulle in sy situasie sou doen. Meeste respondente het dit 'n morele, teologiese of politieke kwessie geag. Die navorsing kies daarvoor om sy vraag van 'n psigologiese perspektief te beskou. Deur sy autobiografiese weergawe in *The Sunflower* te analiseer en ook die prosesmodel van vergifnis wat deur Enright en die Human Development Study Group (1991, 1994) ontwikkel is, is Wiesenthal se psigologiese response ondersoek op gedrags-, kognitiewe-, en emosionele vlak.

Dit het deur die analise te voorskyn gekom dat Wiesenthal se persoonlike weergawe bewys toon van verskeie elemente van die proses van vergifnis. Die ontblotings-, besluitnemeings- en werksfases word elk deur voorbeelde uit die teks ten toon gestel. Wiesenthal se proses van vergifnis blyk om te kulmineer in sy keuse om die misdadiger se ma van haar seun se skuldbelydnis te beskerm, en so die siklus van pyn te beeindig. Alhoewel die verdiepende proses van vergifnis nie in Wiesenthal se weergawe in die storie aangedui kon word nie, suggereer sy lewenswerk dat sy sterfbedbelewenis met die misdadiger en sy reaksie daarop, 'n beduidende impak op sy lewe na die Holocaust gehad het.

Die navorsingsstuk kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat Wiesenthal se vraag aan lesers in *The Sunflower* onderskat kan word as die kwessie bloot op morele, teologiese en politieke vlak gedebateer word. Hierbenewens word daar voorgestel dat die betekenis van die psigologiese belewenis van vergifnis aan die kern staan daarvan om die konsep in geheel te vertoon.

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1 Introduction

I have chosen to structure this paper in a question and answer format in order to direct the reader along my own personal process of exploring the concept of forgiveness. This format is also significant since it honours Wiesenthal's original desire of eliciting thought by posing relevant questions.

1.1 Why have I chosen to write this paper?

My great grandparents were killed in Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War. Although I did not know them, the circumstances of their death, as well as the effects of their absence on the lives of my grandparents and my parents have had significant effects on my own life. In this regard, I have an experience of being somehow wronged, and yet it is not clear how, and by whom. I am thus left with a feeling of irresolution, and thus search to find some way of finding peace within myself. I am looking to forgive someone for a wrong that I feel, and yet I am not sure where to turn.

I am also a white South African. I grew up and was educated within a racist and oppressive system. And this time I was on the side of the oppressor. I was, and am in some way complicit in the racist oppression of millions of people. I benefited within the system, and yet I did not actively choose or participate in the oppression. Within me resides an unclear sense of desiring some form of resolution, yet I do not know what form this will take.

These two aspects of my life have resided within me as unresolved dilemmas. I had never sought to engage consciously with either, but have seemingly been drawn to seek a deeper understanding within myself. Over the past few years I have been gradually drawn to explore these areas of my life through a number of emotionally captivating personal accounts. "Man's search for meaning" by Victor Frankl, "If this is a man" and "Chance" by Primo Levi, and "The Sunflower" by Simon Wiesenthal have each provided evocative accounts of personal experiences of the Nazi Holocaust. In each story I began to experience an emotional connection with the invisible pain handed down by my great

grandparents to the pain of my grandmother, and through her to my mother, and to myself. It seems that this inherited pain was the source of my feelings of anger at the suffering of Jews that I witnessed in these.

During this same time, I was moved by the South African stories, “Country of my skull” by Antjie Krog, and “A human being died that night” by Pumla Gobodo-Madikezela. Both of these speak of the hidden horrors of the Apartheid system and peoples’ struggles to come to terms with them. As much as the holocaust stories located the pain of ancestral suffering, so the Apartheid stories hooked into my feelings of guilt, of sorrow and shame. And as I experienced these emotions I began to seek a resolution, an escape from my inherited conflict.

Each one of these previously mentioned books explore the question of how people can come to terms with atrocities that seem inhuman. How can human beings integrate realities so strange in their brutality, into lives that begin to re-experience the delicate nature of life? In his or her own way, each author asks whether forgiveness is an option that can, or should be considered. Among them, Simon Wiesenthal asks this question most clearly in “The Sunflower” when he asks the reader to consider, “What would I have done?” (Wiesenthal, 1998, p. 98)

This question is at once political and social and yet it is simultaneously extremely personal. Each author presents the question of forgiveness as a moral, social, and sometimes political one, yet each individual author also explores their own personal experience. For me, the question of forgiveness was aroused by the texts and yet it was only later and with a more personal experience that I was drawn into considering forgiveness as a journey of exploration, and ultimately the need to write this paper.

I had been living in an apartment on my own, within the city centre of Cape Town. Late one night I decided to walk to a nearby shop. On my way home two young boys approached me. They had the appearance of homeless children, and although I was weary of their approach, I did not want to overreact. Once they were close they suddenly ran

towards me, one held me from behind, while the other held a knife to my stomach. They emptied my pockets and quickly ran away down the road. After a brief shock, I became increasingly angry at the violation and my own helplessness in this situation. Through my anger I was inspired to go on a late night search for my attackers. This reaction was in itself so uncharacteristic, as I would normally have been more resigned to my fate, instead of seeking some sort of external resolution.

As luck, or chance would have it, with the aid of a nearby security guard I was able to find the boys, and even to corner one of them. Being confronted with this boy however, I was conflicted over whether I sought some sort of vengeance. His appearance seemed to inspire mercy, and yet his denial of his actions inspired a desire to punish him. Some people that had gathered around the boy and I began to intimidate him. I had called the police but others were beginning to take matters into their own hands. The boy continued to deny having robbed me.

Suddenly, I was faced with the realization that no action would ultimately restore what I felt I had lost in being robbed. I pushed through the onlookers, took the boy by the arm, and asked him to return to me just my wallet and the cards that were contained within it as these would be difficult and time consuming to replace. He agreed to find them for me.

Together we walked away from the onlookers to search for my wallet. As we walked he talked to me of his own losses as a child. The death of his parents in a fire, his hardships on the streets. He began to cry. Soon we found my wallet, shared the coins that were left inside it, and we parted company. Something within me had changed. I no longer felt anger, but sadness at his pain, and mostly I felt warmth within me, that some sense of the hatred between us had been dissipated. I knew him, and so I could forgive him. I went home, and wrote down my story, which I spontaneously titled, "the gift is for giving". It was at this point that the seed of seeking to understand forgiveness was planted within me.

What had begun as a vague personal sense that I needed to explore the notion of forgiveness, developed into a real experience of the personal value that forgiving could have in my own life. The vague sense of whether forgiveness was morally acceptable or not became an experience of emotional release and growth. It was this experience that brought me to question the value of discussing forgiveness as a moral concept. Whatever my moral response would be to Wiesenthal's question, would morality be the deciding factor in forgiving, or, was there something to my emotional response that would transcend my moral opinion?

In the symposium section of *The Sunflower*, various thinkers address this issue in response to Wiesenthal's question. For example Jean Amery suggests that there are in fact two aspects to Wiesenthal's question, a psychological one, and a political one. Amery distances himself from the psychological question as he claims that since he himself was not asked to forgive, the psychological component is not his concern. He thus suggests that the psychological component of forgiveness is one that transcends the political, and is solely the prerogative of the individual that considers forgiveness. Amery concludes that the sole question that he can engage with in response to Wiesenthal, is a political, or moral one, since the psychological aspect does not affect him (Wiesenthal, 1998).

Flannery's response to Wiesenthal takes the distinction between the psychological and moral components of forgiveness even further. He suggests that the psychological components of forgiveness should be taken into account when considering Wiesenthal's question, however, where there is conflict with ethical or religious principles, the latter should take precedence (Wiesenthal, 1998).

Both Flannery and Fox suggest that a moral, ethical or political position on forgiveness should take precedence over the psychological experiences of an individual. They are thus crediting Wiesenthal's story for its value in eliciting a moral debate. However, in so doing they seem to be overlooking a vital element of the nature of forgiveness, the personal experience of the individual, Simon Wiesenthal (Wiesenthal, 1998).

This thesis is drawn from my own personal experience of bringing the notion of forgiveness from a vague theoretical concept into an experienced reality. In light of my personal discovery, I have attempted to redirect the attention placed on the moral question elicited by the story of *The Sunflower* back towards the personal psychological experience of its author and focal character, Simon Wiesenthal.

1.2 Why is Forgiveness contextually relevant at present?

The field of forgiveness has only recently begun to receive attention in both academic and popular literature (Enright and the Human Development Study Group (HDSG), 1994). With the dissolution of the South African 'Apartheid' government in the earlier 1990's, numerous human rights abuses have been revealed and spotlighted. The majority of these abuses were committed by 'agents' of the racially oppressive government. Many of these agents have subsequently revealed themselves, and their actions in order to seek amnesty within the para-judicial Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Among the applicants there have also been numerous individuals and groups that applied for amnesty for human rights abuses committed in the process of 'liberation' from the oppression imposed by the former government and its agents. The commission functioned therefore not as a trial of the Apartheid system, but as a forum for uncovering the 'truth' behind the often covert oppression of people as well as the struggle with liberation agents.

Although forgiveness may have been expected to emerge within the TRC's hearings, the real impact of its emotional power emerged in the personal contacts between perpetrators and the victims and families of victims. One such interaction was the meeting between Eugene de Kock, known as 'prime evil', a covert government agent notorious for his cruelty, and Pearl Faku and Doreen Mgoduka, the wives of two of his victims. The two women had acceded to de Kock's request, to meet with him. Both women said, after the meeting, that de Kock had communicated a deeply felt emotion, and that he had acknowledged their pain. Mrs Faku said, "I couldn't control my tears. I could hear him, but I was overwhelmed by emotion, and I was just nodding, as a way of saying yes, I forgive you. I hope that when he sees our tears, he knows that they are not only tears for our husbands, but tears for him as well...I would like to hold him by the hand, and show

him that there is a future, and that he can still change.” (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, p. 14-15)

The emotional power that is evoked as these two women cry for the man who murdered their husbands bears witness to the power of forgiveness. This is perhaps a factor that has contributed to the appeal of books such as Gobodo-Madikizela’s “A Human Being Died That Night”, and Antjie Krog’s “Country of my Skull”, both of which tell of the South African experience of forgiveness in the face of what Gartner (1992) calls, ‘catastrophic abuse’. It is precisely such a story that has been selected as a case study for this investigation of the process and dynamics of forgiveness. The story in *The Sunflower* relates the true-life experience of Simon Wiesenthal, the man who, following his experiences in 12 concentration camps during World War II became known as the ‘conscience of the holocaust’ (Weinstein, 2005).

The Sunflower relates the autobiographical story of his Wiesenthal’s own confrontation and struggle with the notion of forgiveness. His account is full of insights and conversations that formed part of his personal exploration. His concluding question, “what would you have done?” challenges the readers to contemplate their own morality. At the same time however, he asks a psychological question. Any person would have to submerge themselves into all aspects of Wiesenthal’s life at the time, and essentially become him in order to give an answer. He seems in this way to be asking us to empathize with his own personal process. Thus, we, as readers are challenged to engage in an objectified moral debate to explore the morality of his actions, as well as a subjective psychological journey through his struggle with the process of forgiveness.

The purpose of this paper is to step beyond the moral question that Wiesenthal poses us. It seems understood by Wiesenthal himself, as well as through responses to his story, that his central question relates to whether he was morally justified in walking away from a dying Nazi soldier who pleads for forgiveness. This is essentially a moral question which one is challenged to analyse. However, what this paper hopes to illustrate is that the question of forgiveness has been more deeply explored through Wiesenthal’s personal

experience than through the moral challenge. To ask whether Wiesenthal was right or wrong, or even to ask what we ourselves would have done, seems to miss the essence of what forgiveness involves, that is, a personal process or journey. This paper will therefore attempt to highlight the journey that the subject, Simon Wiesenthal, undergoes as a person confronted with the dilemma of forgiveness.

Within this illustration, the central features of the forgiveness process will be attended to in the light of current theoretical literature. Beyond this illustration, the paper will attempt to show the reader that although responses to *the Sunflower* suggest that Wiesenthal never did forgive the dying soldier, his process, as shown through his thoughts, feelings and actions in the story tend to indicate that he did in fact go through the process of forgiveness. He may just not have been ready during his confrontation with the dying soldier to verbally acknowledge this.

In order to provide a structure for analysing the personal process that Wiesenthal presents in the story, a process model of forgiveness will be used. The model that will be used is one conceptualised by Enright and the HDSG (1991) which, through a systematic analysis of current literature, has established a progression through the process of forgiving. The value of using this particular model as a framework lies in that its representation of an amalgamation of cognitive, affective and behavioural elements of the process drawn from a wide array of literature (Enright & HDSG, 1994; see Enright & HDSG, 1991 and Enright, Freedman & Rique, 1998 for a more comprehensive review).

To establish a basis for understanding forgiveness, the following section will explore some of the central psychological and philosophical constructs that will be examined in this paper.

WHAT IS FORGIVENESS AND HOW IS IT UNDERSTOOD?

The study of forgiveness within the field of psychology has only begun to emerge relatively recently. (Enright, Santos & Al-Mabuk, 1989; Enright and the HDSG, 1994) Fitzgibbons (1986) suggests that this may be due to its having been viewed primarily

within the domain of theology. Within the rapidly increasing body of psychological literature in the field of forgiveness studies, focal areas include: the psychotherapeutic setting (Benson, 1992; Ferch, 1998; Holmgren, 2002), couple therapy (Boon, 1997; Brown, 2001; Walrond-Skinner, 1998), adolescents (Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989; Lin, 1998; Middleton, 1997), cross-cultural studies (Park & Enright, 2000; Huang, 1990), moral development (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991; 1994), and various religious and spiritual psychotherapeutic approaches (Rabinowitz, 2004; Rayburn, 2000)

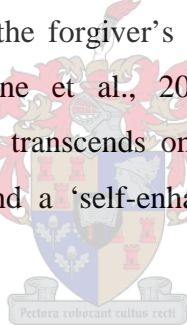
A central feature of inquiry within the field of forgiveness studies is that of defining forgiveness (Enright, Freedman & Rique, 1998). The Collins Paperback English Dictionary (1986, p.332) defines the verb 'forgive' as, "to cease to blame". The Oxford Reference Dictionary (1986, p.315) extends this definition to, "to cease to feel angry or resentful towards or about." Based on North (1987), Enright and various collaborators define forgiving as, "... a willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgement, and indifferent behaviour towards one who unjustly injured us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her" (Enright, Freedman & Rique, 1998, p. 46-47; see also Enright and the HDSG, 1991, 1994; Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, McLernon, Niens & Noor, 2004).

This basic definition thus entails the release from some form of 'negative emotion' and their replacement with a form of 'positive emotion'. This notion of replacing the 'negative' with the 'positive' already suggests how forgiveness is purported to occur. According to Govier's (2002) definition, the release from 'negative emotion' is the central feature of forgiveness and is seen as the differentiation between act and agent.

From an Object relations theoretical position, Gartner (1992) proposes that authentic forgiveness is not the replacement of negative affect with positive loving feelings, as Enright et al. (1991, 1994) suggest. Rather, mature forgiveness requires an integrated perception of both the positive and negative aspects of self and others. This cognitive awareness of the simultaneous duality within oneself as well as within others is deemed

essential. Gartner (1992) explains that, in mature forgiveness, where one can keep both the good and the bad aspects of the offender in view, the full terror of the offence can be absorbed, without losing sight of the humanity of the perpetrator.

North (1987) suggests that forgiveness has been particularly difficult to define and that the forgiving response is, “paradoxical, or even impossible” (p. 500). This paradox exists in the contrasting views between forgiveness as a self-benefiting function versus an altruistic, supererogatory act. As a supererogatory act, an individual who forgives gives up the rights to resentment, hatred and anger and replaces these with love and compassion. The foregoing of these rights is seen as a gift, and thus without expectation of reciprocation. McGary (1989) disputes this notion, in claiming that resentment is released for the benefit of Self, and others, with whom the forgiver interacts. Thus, the quality of a gift that is given to the offending party is not deemed an essential feature of forgiving since the essence lies in the forgiver’s psychological health benefits. In this regard, Swartz (1992, in Hewstone et al., 2004) distinguishes between a ‘self-transcendence’ value (whereby one transcends one’s own selfish interests in order to promote the interests of others) and a ‘self-enhancement’ value (the pursuit of self-interest).



Beyond Swartz’s distinction is the understanding of forgiveness as a socially beneficial act. This idea is portrayed in the notion of reciprocity proposed by Piaget (Andrews, 2000; Enright et al., 1991; 1994). Forgiveness is understood as a mechanism, which enhances social bonds. This occurs where one forgives because one would want the other party to behave in the same manner. The forgiver thus lays the moral framework for social interaction. (Enright and the HDSG, 1994)

Enright and the HDSG (1994) suggest that the underlying cognitive developmental operation that makes forgiveness possible within Piaget’s framework is the notion of mutual respect, or ‘ideal reciprocity’. Piaget characterises three forms of cognitive reversibility in the development/ progression of reciprocity. As progressive stages of the moral development in childhood, he places these three forms of reversibility in parallel to

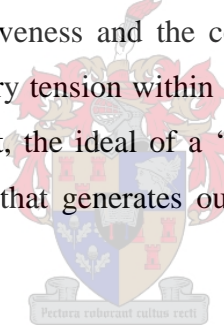
his stages of cognitive growth. The first, inversion, is seen to emerge with early concrete operations, and it is characterised by the simple understanding that when a thing is combined with its opposite, all is cancelled out. The next form of reversibility is reciprocity, by which an original operation when combined with its reciprocal operation creates equivalence. This reciprocity is concrete in nature, as in, 'an eye for an eye'. Whereas in inversion the result is a cancelling out, in reciprocity the result is equality. Also, in inversion, the child understands that something can be reversed, but does not clearly understand its reciprocal nature. The third and final form of reversibility occurs when the child develops beyond the concrete understanding of reciprocity, and is able to conceptualise it as an ideal, hence the term, ideal reciprocity. The reciprocal equivalence of action shifts towards a desired ideal of action, 'do as you would be done by'. (Enright and the HDSG, 1994, Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989)

It is precisely within a critique of this notion that Enright and the HDSG (1994) expand their understanding of forgiveness into the idea of abstract identity. The notion of abstract identity suggested by these authors purports that the human being can be viewed separately from their actions. The actions, behaviours of the individuals do not bond themselves to the inherent quality, or value of the person. Thus any action performed by the person does not affect their inherent humanity. Enright and the HDSG (1994) illustrate this using the formula, $A + 0 = A$. Here, A represents the person, and 0, since no actions can affect the value of a person, represents the action. The result is that A remains the same. In the context of forgiving a person, it is suggested that one forgives due to a realization that no wrong performed by a person affects their inherent value. Thus, through a realization that the wrongdoer is just as human as any other, the negative emotion experienced towards them can be released.

A similar concept, proposed by social psychologists, Ross and Nisbett (Govier, 2002) is known as 'lay dispositionism'. They describe the tendency to over-estimate the contribution of character, and under-estimate the contribution of situation, in explaining human actions. According to this perceptual distortion, crimes committed by people are

more readily attributed to personality of the individual. In this way the crime become the person, or the person becomes the crime.

From a philosophical perspective, a central feature of dispute regarding the essence of forgiveness, has been the understanding of forgiveness as a gift-like, or altruistic, versus it's self serving purpose. This is essentially the debate between reciprocity and the supererogatory act. Derrida (2001) states that, "Sometimes, forgiveness (given by God, or inspired by divine prescription) must be a gracious gift, without exchange and without condition..." However, he adds, "sometimes it requires, as its minimal condition, the repentance and transformation of the sinner." (p. 44) Thus, he proposes an ideal, or as he states, 'gracious' gift, but he adds that this view of forgiveness does not exist on its own, as the 'correct' version. The conditional form of forgiveness also exists, creating a tension in understanding which we should not seek to avoid. He proposes that the poles of an unconditional view of forgiveness and the conditions that arise in law, politics, psychology etc. create the necessary tension within which, decisions and responsibilities are taken. He further explains that, the ideal of a 'pure and unconditional forgiveness' provides the underlying meaning that generates our understanding, but in essence, its purity does not exist in practice.



Derrida's claims that the essence of the gift goes counter to the expectation of reciprocity. The 'true gift' must not have expectation of reciprocity attached, for this takes away its essential gift ness.

Derrida therefore confirms the conceptualisation of forgiveness as ideal gift, one without demand or expectation of reciprocity. But his confirmation is only of its essence, not its substance in practice. He suggests rather that although these two notions are "absolutely heterogeneous, and must remain irreducible to each other." (p. 44) they are also, "indissociable" (p. 45), and therefore must remain inextricably linked. The ideal he describes as inentelligible, "a madness of the impossible", yet it must be strived for within the psychosocial, the political, the juristic, within history and "existence itself". (p.44)

Whereas Derrida suggests that one attempt to integrate our understanding and practice Andrew (2000) identifies two forms of forgiveness, each based upon a different philosophical construct. Negotiated forgiveness is based upon the assumption that there is a balance of rights, or justice that exists between individuals within a society. This view holds that forgiveness occurs through dialogue between the wrongdoer and the wronged. The wrongdoer identifies him or her/ self with the wrongdoing and seeks forgiveness from the wronged for the wrongdoing.

Unilateral forgiveness does not function within the social justice system. Forgiveness is seen as being contained entirely in the individual. It does not engage with and is in no way dependant on the wrongdoer.

In a negotiated forgiveness, the wronged negotiates a solution to the wrongdoing with the wrongdoer. Within this process, both parties agree upon what is entailed by the wrong, and an agreement is reached that further obligation incurred by the wrongdoing will be removed.

In a unilateral forgiveness, the wronged decides what the wrong entails and chooses to remove further claim incurred by the wrong. There is no agreement with the wrongdoer, and no expectation, even that the wrongdoer accepts that a wrong has taken place.

It seems therefore quite clear that there is much in our understanding of forgiveness that is unclear. Any definition of the term is based on an underlying philosophical or psychological understanding of what forgiveness should mean. This is very likely the reason why Wiesenthal's story has been able to rouse such contrasting reactions in the responses published in the second part of his book, entitled, the symposium. The following section will provide a summary account of the story that is told in *The Sunflower*, as well as a discussion of the significance of choosing this story as a case study for understanding certain underlying elements inherent to forgiveness, both as concept, and as process.

1.3 What is *The Sunflower* about?

The story recounted in *The Sunflower* is an autobiographical account of Simon Wiesenthal's experience while he was at the Janowska (Lvov) concentration camp during the Holocaust (Finn; 2001). The scene is set within the traumatic context of daily life as a labourer within the camp. The main character, Simon, is one day sent with a work party to the nearby town of Lemberg, where they are to undertake manual labour at a makeshift military hospital. The hospital is located in Simon's old technical school, where he had previously graduated as an Architect. Now he returns as an emaciated Jewish prisoner, and is reminded of the anti-Semitic injustices he had already experienced before the German occupation, at the hands of his Polish countrymen. On the walk to the hospital, Simon notices sunflowers, which have been planted on the graves of German soldiers. He reflects on the distinction between himself as a Jewish prisoner and the German soldiers even after death. He foresees being buried in an unmarked mass grave, whereas each soldier is given a sunflower. He describes the beauty of the sunflower as a periscope, where "butterflies fluttered from flower to flower ... carrying messages from grave to grave ... whispering something to each flower to pass on to the soldier below ... the dead were receiving light and messages" (p. 14).

When Simon arrives at the hospital, he is soon summoned from among his fellow workers by a nurse, who leads him through his old school to a small room. As he enters the room he is confronted by a dying man, who's head is completely covered in bandages. The dying man is Karl, a German soldier from the SS. Karl recounts his personal story, of growing up as a German boy and joining the SS. Karl explains how he had been sent off to fight at the Eastern front, and the horrors he began to be confronted with. Karl's story culminates in his confession to Simon, that he had participated in a massacre of Jews, many of them women and children. The memories of this massacre at the town of Dnepropetrovsk continue to haunt Karl. Having been severely injured in an explosion, Karl is awaiting death. But before he dies, he is urgently seeking forgiveness from a Jew. Having found a Jew to confess to, he asks for forgiveness from Simon. Simon is not clear about how to respond, but he eventually stands up and leaves without saying anything.

During Karl's confession, Simon's reflections begin to indicate that he is unclear about how he feels in the situation that he has been placed in. After his departure, the dilemma continues within him, and he opens discussion with his friends in the camp: Josek, Arthur, and Adam. Simon relates the differing opinions as well as his internal personal process.

The following day, Simon is sent back to the same hospital with his work party. He is once again summoned by the nurse and led to the room. This time however, at the door of the room, she indicates that the soldier has died. He has left certain possessions to be given to Simon. He refuses to accept them.

Following this episode, and on the advice of his friend Arthur, Simon's shelves his internal struggle until a time when he can more readily face such intense emotions. At a later camp, as Simon lies in the 'death chamber', he renews his discussion with a young man, who would have been a priest. Then, following numerous moves from camp to camp, and further horrors, Simon is released. After a time of recovery, having remembered the address of the mother of the dying soldier, he visits her in the ruins of her house. At this point, he is faced with telling this woman of the horrors that her son had committed, but he does not. He allows her her memories. And then in conclusion to his story, he asks, "You, who have just read this sad and tragic episode in my life, can mentally change places with me and ask yourself the crucial question, "What would I have done?"" (p. 98)

1.4 Why is *The Sunflower* a suitable case study for Forgiveness?

In reference to Simon Wiesenthal's question at the conclusion of *The Sunflower*, "what would you have done?" Govier (2002) suggests that Wiesenthal is not asking whether it would have been psychologically possible for him to forgive, but whether it would have been morally desirable for him to do so. This does not however discount that his personal account draws on a psychological process as well as posing many philosophical questions.

Wiesenthal bravely opens himself to evaluation both psychologically and morally and in order to continue the debate, he leaves us with ambiguity about his actions. He may not have overtly forgiven as a moral act, but his contemplations and his actions, indicate that he was involved in a process of review, of re-assessment.

Finn (2001) suggests that Wiesenthal's silence is a different kind of answer, it is at once ambiguous, and yet, it may be an answer, albeit a complex one, in the, "mere absence of sound". (p. 310) As Finn suggests, the silence of Simon's response may be interpreted as a clear absence of forgiveness, and yet, it holds within it the possibility that his response was more complex than this. In the context of the entire story, his silence towards the Nazi officer was perhaps the only silence. The text that explores this encounter is rich with the emotional, cognitive and spiritual processes that present Simon Wiesenthal, the only man that could truly provide the subjective experience of this often-debated moral dilemma.

The story is told within the context of concentration camps, as well as outside, allowing differing contextual and temporal perspectives. It gives voice to diverse perspectives, himself, his friends, the priest, the German officer and his mother, and then, in the form of respondents, as well as academic investigations such as the present one. The advantage of hindsight and the value of the responses to his question from differing perspectives have created out of this moving story an almost classic case study.

Certain central debates have emerged in the responses, or symposium of *The Sunflower*. One such debate has emerged from the fact that in the original responses, the majority of those that came out in favour of forgiveness were Christians, whereas the majority of Jews concurred with what they interpreted as Wiesenthal's abstention from forgiving (Finn, 2001). This contrast in views has been explained by differing religious teachings on forgiveness, as the Christian teachings tend to favour a forgiving attitude. An alternative explanation suggests that the Jewish respondents tended to oppose forgiveness since they were almost all indirectly more personally affected by the holocaust (Govier,

2002). This debate emerges as an important element in understanding the factors involved in both moral education and the universality of forgiveness as a human experience.

What the story of *The Sunflower* therefore presents is very rich. It is firstly a text rich in insights, in emotional expression, in differing opinions, and in contextual movement. It is secondly, an open text, which, in asking to be explored and evaluated has aroused debate, and has extended itself. And finally, on a personal note, this is the story of a man, whose name has become synonymous with the hunting and capturing of many suspected of Nazi war atrocities. His role in the capture of Adolph Eichmann brought him international recognition. Yet, Eichmann's trial and subsequent execution was also indirectly attributed to Wiesenthal's actions. He was known as 'the conscience of the Holocaust', but was he therefore the avenger, or, a voice of remembrance? Simon Wiesenthal died on the 20th of September 2005, more than 60 years later than he would have guessed as he left the dying man in his room. And his story continues to challenge those who know it.

Before beginning the exploration of the process of forgiveness that is presented within the story, it is necessary to address the notion of the relationship between the victim and the offender when examining this case.

1.5 Why is the relationship between Karl and Simon complex?

Govier and Verwoerd (2001) claim that it is the victim's prerogative to forgive an offence. In the story that Simon Wiesenthal recounts, there is a complex relationship between the injurer and the injured. Karl is viewed as the offending party because he is an SS officer. As such he has supported the discrimination against, and oppression of Jews. Even though he may not have actively sought to kill the Jews, he actively supported and is therefore complicit in this crime. He also admits to his role in the killings of the Jews at Dnepropetrovsk.

Simon is a prisoner of the Janowska (Lvov) concentration camp because he is Jew. He has suffered physically and emotionally in the camp, and he is aware that much of his

family has been killed because they were Jews. But Karl has not directly injured Simon in any way. Before their contact they had no awareness of each other. Therefore Karl's injury to Simon is through complicity, and through the killing of fellow Jews at Dnepropetrovsk. It is for his latter offence that Karl specifically seeks forgiveness.

Simon's process of forgiveness is a personal one. He is not a representative Jew, but an individual, Simon. He can thus only offer his own personal forgiveness of Karl's action. Yet perhaps in Karl's experience, forgiveness by one Jew would have been enough. This view has been regarded as superficial, and possibly derogatory, since it can be interpreted as implying that Jews were easily substitutable (Govier, 2002).

As Karl describes the story of his offence at Dnepropetrovsk, Simon begins to make the connection between himself and the murdered Jews. Through this process, he connects Karl's actions with his own oppression. There are two links that Simon makes between himself and Karl's victims. Firstly, as Karl is describing the scene, Simon says that he is well able to imagine the scene because, "It was all too familiar. I could have been among those who were forced into that house with the petrol cans." (p. 41) Through this association between himself as both Jew and survivor of numerous abuses, Simon can clearly imagine the scene and both feel and hear the anguish of those that are described. In this way, Simon begins to identify himself as one of these victims, thus personalizing Karl's offence to himself.

The second link that Simon makes is between the image of a child's terror that Karl describes, and a Jewish child that Simon had known from his time in the ghetto. The child, Eli, or Elijah becomes Simon's representation of the terrorized child of Karl's account. Eli had been the last Jewish child that Simon had seen alive. Eli had managed to escape numerous attempts by the SS to capture the last remaining children in the ghetto. By associating the child that Karl describes with Eli, Simon imagines that Karl symbolically had become Eli's murderer.

Perhaps even more significantly is Karl's symbolic position as the murderer of the last Jewish child. As the last Jewish child, Eli represents the future of all Jews. By association, Karl thus becomes representative of the destruction of the Jewish people. Through the destruction of the Jews, Karl is also more directly responsible for destroying Simon's own future through the destruction of his people.

The significance of the boy Eli is further illustrated in the symbolism evoked by his name within the Jewish tradition. 'Elijah', or 'Eliyahu Hanavi', is the prophet for whom, at the Passover dinner, a special place is reserved. The prophet was offered this place, and a cup of wine in gratitude for the protection he offered, and, Simon says, "We children looked on Eliyahu as our protector." (p. 44) Thus, Simon links the image of the suffering child in Karl's account with a child he knew, the last Jewish child he had seen, and symbolically the protector of the Jewish people. Karl therefore becomes directly responsible for Simon's oppression, as well as his family, and all Jews. This seems to link Karl as the injurer more directly with Simon as the injured party.

1.6 What psychological variables involved in the process of forgiveness?

The process model of forgiveness is a framework that is used to integrate the cognitive, affective and behavioural strategies involved in forgiving. It is described by Enright, Freedman and Rique (1998), as the, "best estimate of the general pathway many people follow when they forgive". Enright and the HDSG (1991) developed the basis of their process framework through the analysis of available literature. The original model describes a progression of seven components: *Experiencing and awareness of negative psychological consequences*; *Need for resolution*; *Deciding among strategies*; *Forgiveness motive*; *Decision to forgive*; *Execution of internal forgiveness strategies*; and *Need for action*. In Enright, Freedman and Rique's (1998) extension of the model, 20 variables, or units are described along the process which continues through 4 phases: *The Uncovering phase*; *Decision phase*; *Work phase*; and the *Deepening phase*. The model is not conceptualised as a rigid sequence, but rather as a flexible set of processes with feedback and feed-forward loops.

The *Uncovering phase* comprises units 1-8, where the person becomes aware of the pain associated with the unjust injury. Unit 1 involves an examination of the psychological defences, such as denial, projection and repression that the individual has established in order to distance themselves from the pain. At first these defences may provide functional protection from the trauma of the experience, but if they persist they hamper the progression of the healing process. As the defences break down, the person experiences the negative emotions of anger and/ or hatred towards the injurer (Unit 2). There is often an associated experience of shame or guilt regarding the circumstances of the offence (Unit 3). As the individual attempts to find solutions to their experience of pain, there is often an excessive emotional response, which contributes to depletion of energy resources (Unit 4). The cognitive elements of this emotional response may be experienced as: a continuous replaying of the event in one's mind (Unit 5); comparing one's own fortune to that of the relatively comfortable condition of the injurer (Unit 6); and the perception that one may be permanently negatively affected by the event (Unit 7). These perceptions may lead to a change in worldview, in which a 'just world' becomes seen as unfair (Unit 8). (Enright, Freedman & Rique, 1998; Enright & HDSG, 1994)

The *Decision phase* comprises units 9-11, in which, the individual begins to realize that their preoccupation with negative experiences of the event are unhealthy (unit 9). The notion of forgiveness as a potential then becomes an option to be considered (unit 10) and then a decision is made to forgive the person who has caused the injury (unit 11). (Enright, Freedman & Rique, 1998)

The *Work phase* comprises units 12-15. The individual tries to gain insight into the background, history, or context of the offender in a process of "reframing" (unit 12). The context assists the individual to understand the actions of the offender, not to condone them. This insight in turn leads to the experience of empathy (unit 13) and compassion (unit 14) for the offender's experience. This then leads to the central experience in forgiveness, the absorption of the pain, and thus the choice to end the cycle of pain by refusing to pass it on (unit 15). (Enright, Freedman & Rique, 1998)

The *Deepening phase* comprises units 16-20 and highlights the benefits that the individual begins to experience through the process of forgiveness. The individual may find meaning within the suffering and within the process of forgiveness (unit 16). There is a realization that they may have also needed forgiveness from others in their own past, because they too are imperfect (unit 17). The process also leads to a deeper awareness of interpersonal support networks that are available (unit 18). The meaning associated with forgiving and the insight that occurs may lead to a deeper sense of purpose and direction in life (unit 19). Finally, having come through the process, the individual may become aware of an improvement in their psychological health (unit 20) (Enright, Freedman & Rique, 1998).

Having described the process model of forgiveness as a framework for understanding the forgiveness process, the following section will locate Simon Wiesenthal's experiences, as he relates them within the story of *The Sunflower*. For the sake of clarity, the following discussion will be divided into the phases of forgiveness, described above. However, as suggested by Enright, Freedman and Rique's (1998), the phases are not rigid, and therefore there is likely to be some overlap between the phases.



2 Discussion

2.1 Uncovering phase

The uncovering phase of forgiveness is dominated by the victim's negative experiences and reactions resulting from an offence. In this section, Wiesenthal's cognitive, emotional and behavioural reactions to his injury will be illustrated from his account within *The Sunflower*. The section has been divided into themes that each illustrates a different element of his experience.

The relationship within *The Sunflower* between the victim and the offence is a complex one. It is clear in many instances that Simon, the identified victim, suffers from his negative experiences at the hands of the Nazi oppression. Yet he was not the primary victim of Karl, the identified perpetrator's offence. Karl, who is at most complicit to it, does not directly cause Simon's suffering. Karl does however represent the Nazi oppression for Simon. It is therefore difficult to distinguish between Simon's reaction to Karl as the individual that confesses his crime, and Karl as representative of the holocaust. Where it is possible, an attempt has been made to clarify this distinction.

2.1.1 Psychological defences

Govier and Verwoerd (2002) place the timing of the wrongdoing in the context of forgiving in the past. One must be able to recognize that the offence is past, that it no longer continues. This is a significant feature of the forgiveness process because it allows the forgiver to differentiate the person from the offence. If the offence is still continuing, then it can still be clearly associated with the offender. In the story however, this element of past offence becomes complex at times. Simon is clearly still oppressed within the system. He therefore cannot forgive all the Nazis for their actions, since their actions continue. In addition, the oppression that Simon still faces requires emotional defences. As his friend Arthur suggests, "Fine feelings nowadays are a luxury we can't afford." (p. 69)

The psychological defences of denial, repression, projection and reaction formation serve the purpose of distancing one from the pain associated with the personal injury. They are

perceived as a positive development initially, but if they persist they may hamper active resolution of the pain. In Simon's situation however, the threat to his life still continues, and until there is a distance from the emotional pain, it is not likely that any person will relinquish their defences. (Enright & HDSG, 1991)

Within the story, Simon recognizes the importance of the defences that the prisoners used to protect themselves against the reality of the oppression they continued to face: "What in this Nazi world was reasonable and logical? You lost yourself in fantasy merely in order to escape from the appalling truth. And in such circumstances reason would have been a barrier. We escaped into dreams and we didn't want to awake from these dreams." (p. 37). His, and his fellow prisoners' psychic escapism served the purpose of distancing them from engaging with a reality that was so different from the one they had known.

In relation to his experience with Karl, Simon seems to drop some of his defences. This is illustrated on the night of Simon's experience with Karl when Arthur wakes him from his sleep. He had been shouting in his sleep and Arthur was afraid that his cries would summon the guards. Simon had had a nightmare involving the child Eli, within the scene of the burning house that Karl had described in his confession. Simon was afraid to be forced to return to the hospital the following day, and once again confront the dying man. Arthur's response to him in this regard was stern, "Are you suddenly frightened to look death in the eye, just because you have seen an SS man dying? How many Jews have you seen killed; did that make you shout in the night?" (p. 69).

Here Arthur suggests that Simon's anguish that permeates his sleep is brought on by having been exposed to the death of a man, a man who by his past deeds was not as deserving of Simon's anguish as others that Simon has seen die. Yet, this response does not accurately address Simon's true distress. His fear is brought about by his dilemma. He is faced with identification with those that had been murdered, and also with the pleas for forgiveness by the man, Karl, who had confessed to his complicity in these murders. His anguish thus stems from the conflict within himself, and is indicative of his conflicting emotional reactions to this situation. His emotional reaction to death is clearly

illustrates a protective defence mechanism resulting from all of the atrocities that he has witnessed. Yet the conflict between his allegiance to those who were murdered, and his feeling of sympathy, or empathy towards the suffering murderer, has not been blocked from his consciousness.

2.1.2 Anger and desire for punishment

Anger develops as a natural response when others fail to meet one's need for love, praise, acceptance and justice (Fitzgibbons, 1998). One of the strongest expressions of anger is that which is linked with the desire for punishment, or retribution. This desire for punishment is significant because it is essentially the antithesis of forgiveness. This desire for punishment is also an expression of the deeply experienced anger that Simon experiences. Simon says: "I still clung to the belief that the world one day would revenge itself on these brutes – in spite of their victories, their jubilation at the battles they had won, and their boundless arrogance. The day would surely come when the Nazis would hang their heads as the Jews did now..." (p. 35). Simon's reaction to the holocaust is clearly indicated in his desire for punishment. He hopes for a punishment for the Nazis that was at least equal to that which the Jews were experiencing. He also holds the hope that the world, as an entity of justice, would be the avenger, the balancing force. It seems that he is relying on a system in which the crimes of the Nazis are both recognised and punished, and that the punishment is equivalent to the suffering that he has witnessed.

This feeling of hatred and desire for retribution is also expressed by Arthur, whom Simon says, "...was convinced that in the last resort the Germans would not escape unpunished. They would perhaps succeed in killing us and millions of other innocent people, but they themselves would thereby be destroyed." (p.8-9) Anger, as an emotional response is evident throughout the story. It could be said that there is a sense of anger that permeates much of the story, and therefore, the theme of anger will receive more attention in the discussion to follow. As suggested above, it is difficult to distinguish the anger that is directed at the individual Karl from the more general anger at the entire oppressive system. However, within this discussion, both can be seen as intertwined, because, at least in part, Karl symbolizes the Nazi system.

2.1.3 The sunflower as symbol of comparisons

“I stared at the bandaged head. I didn’t know what he wanted to confess, but I knew for sure that after his death a sunflower would grow on his grave. Already a sunflower was turning towards his window, the window through which the sun was sending its rays into his death chamber. Why was the sunflower already making its appearance? Because it would accompany him to the cemetery, stand on his grave, and sustain his connection with life. And this I envied him. I envied him also because in his last moments he was able to think of a live mother who would be grieving for him.” (p. 30 – 31)

Simon’s comparison between Karl’s world and his own shows another aspect of the uncovering phase, which involves the constant comparisons between the victims position and the relatively comfortable position of the perpetrator. He clearly illustrates the comparison with the symbol of the sunflowers that will be placed on the graves of the dying German soldiers: “But what has my youth in common with his? Were we not from different worlds/ where were the friends from my world? Still in camp or already in a nameless grave...and where are his friends? They are alive, or at least they have a sunflower on their graves and a cross with their name on it.” (p. 34)

Simon relates the superior position of the German soldiers even after death, since they will receive a sunflower, as a telescope into the world. Yet, for himself and his fellow prisoners he can only expect an unmarked grave. The central moment of Simon’s action seems based on the symbolism: “I stood up and looked in his direction, at his folded hands. Between them there seemed to rest a sunflower. At last I made up my mind and without a word I left the room.” (p. 55) This symbol then becomes the title of his story.

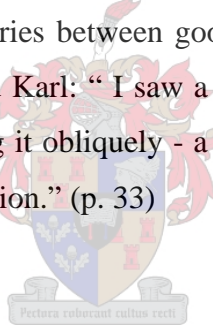
2.1.4 God is on leave

The inherent inequality that the sunflower symbolizes also suggests a change in ‘worldview’, another aspect of the uncovering phase. This is reflected in the notion that God had gone on leave, or abandoned them. As he says: “I once read some where that it is impossible to break a mans firm belief ... it is impossible to believe anything in a

world that has ceased to regard man as man, which repeatedly “proves” that one is no longer a man. So one begins to doubt, one begins to cease to believe in a world order in which God has a definite place. One really begins to think that God is on leave. Otherwise the present state of things wouldn’t be possible. God must be away. And He has no deputy.” (p.9)

Simon continues to struggle to understand, to integrate the strange, brutal world with which he is confronted: “Were we truly all made of the same stuff? If so, why were some murderers and other victims? Was there in fact any personal relationship between us, between the murderers and their victims, between our camp commandant, Wilhaus, and a tortured Jew?” (p.7)

At Karl’s bedside, he once again reflects metaphorically on the boundaries and their impermeability. Perhaps the boundaries between good and evil, between the persecutor and the victim, between himself and Karl: “ I saw a part of the sun-drenched courtyard, with the shadow of the roof crossing it obliquely - a boundary between light and dark, a defined boundary without any transition.” (p. 33)



2.2 Decision phase

“The basic fact is that all sentient beings, particularly human beings, want happiness and do not want pain and suffering. On those grounds we have every right to be happy and to use different methods or means to overcome suffering and to achieve happier lives. It is worthwhile to think seriously about the positive and negative consequences of these methods.” (His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama; 1995)

As the Dalai Lama’s quote suggests, it is at least worthwhile to consider the consequences of the methods available for overcoming suffering. The decision phase entails the contemplation of forgiveness as an alternative strategy in overcoming suffering. In *The Sunflower*, three central instances of this contemplation process have been identified. Firstly, Simon questions his own silence in responding to Karl, and in so doing considers forgiveness as an option. Secondly, Simon’s discussions with the priest

Bolek in the “death block” at Mauthausen (discussed in detail below) bring about a shift in his perception of forgiveness as an option. Finally, Simon’s decision to visit Karl’s mother at her home is an indication of his search for a new resolution to his encounter with Karl.

2.2.1 Considering forgiveness as an option

When Simon returns from his encounter with Karl at the hospital he relates the story of his episode to his friend. He is not sure whether he has acted correctly by leaving the dying man without a response. His friends Josek, Arthur and Adam, clearly assure him that he has acted correctly, they suggest that in his silence he has perhaps even been too lenient with the man by not verbally refusing his request. But Simon is not reassured by their arguments. He continues to contemplate his response, and the morality of it. Simon is weighing up forgiveness, as a possible response to his dilemma. He says, “...Perhaps I had not communicated the atmosphere and the despair at his crimes so clearly expressed in his words.” (p. 67) Even though he has through his silence rejected Karl’s plea for forgiveness, his continued contemplation suggests that his inner response is not resolved.

2.2.2 A shift in perception of forgiveness

A further indication of Simon’s contemplation of forgiveness as an option occurs later in the story, when he has been moved to the Mauthausen camp. At this point, Simon is very ill and has been placed among the condemned men in block 6. Here he meets Bolek, a young Pole who had studied to become a priest. He asks Bolek whether he should indeed have forgiven Karl. Bolek begins his response by saying, “I realize that this business sticks in your memory although we have been through so much, but I take it that your subconscious is not completely satisfied with your attitude at the time.” (p. 81) He has noticed Simon’s continued inner struggle, and suggests that it is an indication that Simon is not satisfied with his response to Karl. Bolek suggests that Simon is subconsciously contemplating an alternative response, forgiveness. Bolek has also, through his response, made Simon’s “unrest” conscious. As Simon says, “Why was this business not finished and done with? That seemed to me the most important question.” (p. 81)

2.2.3 Finding a new resolution

Following Simon's final release from captivity, on a trip with his wife and some friends, he was confronted with a field of sunflowers. His reaction to the sunflowers was so strong that Simon once again began to question whether he had indeed acted correctly in response to Karl. He says, "It was a long time since I had thought about it, yet a sunflower had come to remind me. Remind me of what? Had I anything to reproach myself for?" (p. 84)

Two weeks after his encounter with the sunflowers, Simon went to Stuttgart to visit Karl's mother: "I wanted to see the SS man's mother. If I talked with her, perhaps it would give me a clearer picture of his personality. It was not curiosity that inspired me but a vague feeling of duty...and perhaps the hope of exorcising forever one of the most unpleasant experiences of my life." (p. 84-5)

Simon's desire to meet with Karl's mother is inspired by his desire to know more about the man. It seems that this desire is fuelled by an even deeper hope, to be able to move beyond the experience that continues to plague him. Simon thus chooses to seek a deeper knowledge of the man, Karl, perhaps in his desire to integrate the Nazi murderer of children with the young dying man at the hospital. At the hospital he had not been able to separate the dying man from his heinous crime, and so, through his visit to Karl's mother, Simon seeks to give a human face to the man, so that he may release him. This choice to seek to integrate, to give a human face, is also a choice to forgive. In deciding to visit Karl's mother, Simon attempts to release himself from his emotional reaction to his encounter with Karl. He chooses to engage with forgiveness as a method of resolution.

2.3 **Work phase**

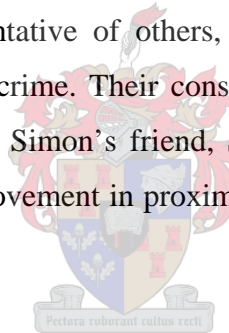
2.3.1 Simon's vacillation between Karl as human being versus murderer.

"What a contrast between the glorious sunshine outside and the shadow of this bestial age here in the death chamber! Here lay a man in bed who wished to die in peace – but he could not, because the memory of his terrible crime gave him no rest. And by him sat a man also doomed to die – but who did not want to die because he yearned to see the end of all the horror that blighted the world. Two men who had never known each other had been brought together for a few hours

by Fate. One asks the other for help. But the other was himself helpless and able to do nothing for him.” (p. 54)

For Simon, confronted with the young soldier, he is faced with the dilemma of forgiving an individual that he himself can see, and begin to know. In this personal contact, his dilemma is only partly a moral one, in which he must assess forgiveness, he is also faced with the anguish of an individual, who repents, does penance, and seeks peace through forgiveness in his final hour. Karl asks Simon to forgive him on behalf of the Jews (“I must tell you this horrible deed - tell you because...you are a Jew” (p. 30)). But also asks for personal forgiveness from Simon.

In contrast, Simon’s friends, Josek and Arthur are removed from the personal contact with Karl as a person. Their judgement and moral consideration centres on Simon’s right to forgive a German, as representative of others, and a murderer, as opposed to an individual who had committed a crime. Their considerations were more objective, and more generalised. (The soldier as Simon’s friend, Simon alternates between names he uses to refer to Karl, indicating movement in proximity to the person versus his group or his crime)



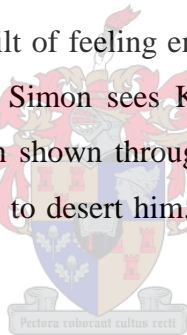
Arthur says to Simon, “...you are making too much fuss about *your* [italics added] SS man” and Simon is clearly disturbed by this association. He questions whether Arthur has done this to hurt him. Whatever Arthur’s intentions in this association, Simon’s response illustrates his conflicting position. He feels some emotional reaction to the plight of the dying man, who through his personal circumstances had come to commit a crime, but the connection that this empathic understanding creates is in some sense repulsive to him. He is struggling to understand the crime of a man, and yet there is still a part of him that rejects, and does not want to be associated with the criminal.

This inner struggle is also reflected in Simon’s alternating between the names that he uses to identify Karl with. He speaks mostly of the “Nazi soldier”, or ‘German soldier’, but then he also identifies him by his condition, as, ‘the dying Nazi’. At certain points it

seems one can understand his fluctuating feelings towards the man. He refers to the man's youth, that he is dying, and one senses that he feels an emotional engagement. Yet, he suddenly also builds up an accusatory anger as he hears of the man's actions, and here he refers to him as the murderer.

This conflict is once again illustrated where Karl tells Simon that at 21 he is too young to die. Simon's response is conflicted - on the one hand he agrees that one is too young to die at this age, but he, and other Jews are not given similar consideration by their persecutors. Simon is thus alternating between seeing Karl as a human being who has rights, and as a member of the perpetrators who have deprived his own people of these rights. Should Karl's own actions and those of the system to which he belongs affect consideration of Karl's rights as a human being? (p. 31)

Simon also seems to suffer from guilt of feeling empathy for the dying man, faced with his crime. This is evidenced when Simon sees Karl's hand as a replacement for the emotive contact that may have been shown through his eyes, "His (Karl's) grip grew tighter... as if pleading with me not to desert him. Perhaps his hand was a replacement for his eyes." (p. 33,)



2.3.2 Empathy and compassion

Simon also shows signs of experiencing empathy and compassion. He is suddenly confronted with the suffering of another human being. "All my instincts were against continuing to listen to this deathbed disavowal. I wanted to get away. The dying man must have felt this, for he dropped the letter and groped for my arm. The movement was so pathetically helpless that all of a sudden I felt sorry for him. I would stay although I wanted to go." (p. 35) He experiences an empathic understanding of this suffering and with this understanding he stays at Karl's side. He has compassion for the man, even though he is still conflicted within himself, as evidenced by his instinctual desire to leave.

As an insect flies into the room and starts to buzz around Karl's head, Simon instinctively swats the insect away, and Karl thanks him for this. Simon reflects on this, and

recognizes that he as a “defenceless subhuman, had contrived to lighten the lot of an equally defenceless superman, without thinking, simply as a matter of course.” (p. 37)

There is recognition of humanity as he is confronted by the defencelessness of the dying man and an instinctive compassionate movement to alleviate his position. Although, Simon seems at this time to be struggling with anger at Karl, he still has compassion for him.

These feelings of compassion are contrasted with feelings of repulsion. When Karl reaches for Simon’s hand, having related the full story of the murders he had participated in, Simon is repulsed, he says, “I did not want to be touched by the hand of death.” (p. 52) Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) relates a similar experience in her confrontation with Eugene de Kock. At some point she comes into contact with his hand, and this becomes a major issue for her to contemplate. She questions whether this is the same hand that has brought death upon the people he had killed. His hand is the symbol for her of his crimes, and although she is moved by his humanity, the hand continues to hold the contamination of these offences. Simon similarly shows his aversion to the touch of man who has committed these crimes.

2.3.3 Remorse/ penance – what role does it play?

As Karl relates his story to Simon, he clearly states, and expresses his own emotional turmoil and remorse for the acts that he has committed. It seems as if Karl is collaborating in establishing the personal background that can lead to empathy and compassion: “and then came the terrible thing...but first I must tell you a little more about myself.” (p. 33). Karl wants to show Simon his humanity, to establish himself as a human being before he presents his crime, and thus becomes attached to it.

Karl once again pleads with Simon with to perceive him with compassion, and to recognize his pain and anguish when he says: “I am resigned to dying soon, but before that I want to talk about an experience that is torturing me. Otherwise I can not die in peace.” (p. 27)

Simon considers Karl's appeal for pity. But asks whether this man has any right to pity. So, his struggle continues, on one side he wants to reject this man who has committed the crimes, but he continues to see the man suffering and weak. He continues to be confronted with this man's burden of conscience, which Karl clearly expresses, "The pains in my body are terrible, but worse still is my conscience." (p. 53) He is also confronted by the man's regret and penance in trying to relieve the burden that is illustrated by Karl's plea, "Believe me, I would be ready to suffer worse and longer pains if by that means I could bring back the dead" and by Simon's own reflections, "I saw that he was torturing himself. He was determined to gloss over nothing." (p. 52)

Simon recognizes Karl's suffering, and through it one sees that he experiences compassion towards him. Yet, Simon is in conflict about what he should do. He senses that Karl expects more than merely an audience for his confession: "He wants something from me, I thought, for I could not imagine that he had brought me here merely as an audience" (p. 53). Then Karl puts his request to Simon: "I cannot die without coming clean. This must be my confession. But what sort of confession is this? A letter without an answer..." (p. 53)

Simon is faced with his dilemma: "No doubt he was referring to my silence. But what could I say? Here was a dying man – a murderer who did not want to be a murderer but who had been made into a murderer by a murderous ideology. He was confessing his crime to a man who perhaps tomorrow must die at the hands of these same murderers. In his confession there was true repentance, even though he did not admit it in so many words. Nor was it necessary, for the way he spoke and the fact that he spoke to *me* [italics in original] was a proof of his repentance." (p. 53) Once again Karl appeals to him: "I know that what I am asking is almost too much for you, but without your answer I cannot die in peace." (p. 54) But Simon stands, and without speaking, he walks away.

Yet it is clear that this is not his final thought, for in his further discussions he says:

“...the fellow showed a deep and genuine repentance, he did not once try to excuse what he had done. I saw that he was really in torment...This dying man looked on me as a representative, as a symbol of the other Jews whom he could no longer reach or talk to. And moreover he showed his repentance entirely of his own accord. Obviously he was not born a murderer nor did he want to be a murderer. It was the Nazis who made him kill defenseless people...I have failed to carry out the last wish of a dying man. I gave him no answer to his final question!” (p. 66)

2.3.4 The Gift is forgiving

The central experience in forgiveness can be seen as the absorption of the pain, and thus the choice to end the cycle of pain by refusing to pass it on. It is this stage in the forgiveness process that defines its gift-like quality. The gift rather than being something extra that is given is the absence of punishment or pain. In the story, it is symbolically a physical gift that becomes the gift of forgiving.

When Simon returns for the second time to the hospital and is once again led away by the nurse, he fears he will be forced to confront the pleas of the dying man. But the nurse presents him with a bundle that Karl had left for him. Simon refuses this gift and tells the nurse to give it to the man's mother. After the war, Simon visits Karl's mother. He is faced with a frail woman, who has lost her family. He can see how she still clings to the memory of her beloved son. She admits that he had strayed, but holds on to her memory of his inherent goodness. Simon can destroy this memory, or at least tarnish it, by passing on the pain of the horror in which Karl was complicit. Yet he decides not to do so. He decides not to pass on the pain. Instead he gives a symbolic gift to Karl's mother, by sparing her emotion and absorbing the pain, and thereby not passing it on.

This step is central to the forgiveness process as it entails an acceptance or absorption of the pain and a commitment not to pass on this pain, even to the offender. It emphasizes the emotional element of the process. The pain is contained by the injured person so that it does not continue to be passed on, and accentuates the gift-like quality of forgiveness, since it provides an ending to the cycle of pain.

“One might even say that forgiveness is an unconditional response to the wrongdoer, for there is something unforgiving in the demand for guarantee.”
(North, in Enright and the HDSG, 1994, p.p. 69)

“A gift is something that you can not be thankful for. As soon as I say “thank you” for a gift, I start cancelling the gift, I start destroying the gift, by proposing an equivalence, that is, a circle which encircles the gift in a movement of reappropriation.” (Derrida, 2001, p.p. 142)

2.4 Deepening phase

The deepening phase highlights the benefits that the individual begins to experience through the process of forgiveness. In the context of the story under review, this aspect is more difficult to examine. Simon never truly recognizes that he is in fact forgiving. The story ends without insight into the benefits that he may be experiencing. The life of Simon Wiesenthal, as an international figure, as well as the author of the story under review do however offer some possible inferences about the deepening process that Simon may have experienced.

Simon Wiesenthal dedicated his life to, and hence became synonymous with, the pursuit of suspected Nazi war criminals. He has been identified by some as the “Nazi hunter” (Weinstein, 2005) because he brought suspected Nazi war criminals to trial. Was this motivated, as many suspect, by a desire for vengeance? Or was he motivated by some other purpose, perhaps the opportunity to bring a human face to the horror? What motivated this man to his lifelong cause, especially in light of the story under review?

2.4.1 His life’s work, how do we interpret it?

Rabbi Marvin Hier said of Simon Wiesenthal, “When the Holocaust ended in 1945 and the whole world went home to forget, he alone remained behind to remember.” (Vallely, 2005)

After Simon Wiesenthal's release from the Mauthausen death camp in 1945, he began assisting the allied forces to collect war crime evidence. In 1947, with a number of volunteers, he set up the Jewish Documentation Centre with the purpose of gathering information to assist in future trials. He finally conceded that his work was complete in 2003, at the age of 95 and said of his experience, "I found the mass murderers I was looking for, and I have outlived them all."(Times News Service, 2005)

Wiesenthal considered his self-appointed task a holy one, inspired by the continuous stories of abuse that he encountered after the Holocaust. He claimed that he was the representative of millions of victims that could not represent themselves. Rabbi Hier, his successor at the Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Vienna said of him, "He did not forget. He became the permanent representative of the victims, determined to bring the perpetrators of history's greatest crime to justice." (Valley, 2005)

Wiesenthal found meaning to his life's purpose in honouring the memory of those that had suffered in Holocaust. He honoured the memories of the millions that had perished, some of them his family and friends. He was determined that there should be some system of justice to account for those who could not speak for themselves. Yet what motivated Wiesenthal to become this bastion? Was it a desire for punishment? Was he plagued by the guilt of having survived where others did not? Or did he perhaps seek to recreate the encounter between the victim and perpetrator? Perhaps bringing perpetrators to trial, to face their crimes, and the representatives of their victims, can be seen as a re-enactment of Simon's meeting with Karl. Perhaps he sought to bring a human face to the crimes, so that the world would understand that human beings were responsible.

In his letter of response to *The Sunflower*, Mathew Fox suggests that Wiesenthal's life work may be understood as a playing out of the scene described at the hospital bed. Simon continued to hunt the Nazis in order to allow them a "deathbed conversion" because, "Without his hunting these sinners down neither they nor victims will rest in the next life." Fox further suggests that the deathbed encounter may have been seen as a

“strange exchange” in which Simon gave Karl a listening ear, and Karl gave Simon “a vocation for a lifetime”(Wiesenthal, 1998, p. 146).



3 Conclusion

My own heritage and certain experiences in my life have guided me to consider the notion of forgiveness on both a moral and personal level. Having initially sought to answer the moral question of how one should respond, my own experience drew me to consider how I did in fact react when confronted with an experience, which presented forgiveness as an option.

Simon Wiesenthal has asked readers of his personal story in *The Sunflower* to ask themselves what they would have done if they had been in his place. By walking away

without responding to the appeal for forgiveness by a dying man Wiesenthal questions whether he has acted correctly. Although many respondents have considered this to be primarily a moral issue, in this paper I have chosen to view his question from a psychological perspective. By using his autobiographical account in *The Sunflower* and process model of forgiveness developed by Enright and numerous colleagues (Enright, Freedman & Rique, 1998; Enright and the HDSG, 1991, 1994) Wiesenthal's psychological responses have been investigated on behavioural, cognitive and emotional levels.

Through the analysis, it has emerged that Wiesenthal's personal account shows evidence of numerous elements of a process of forgiveness. The uncovering process of forgiveness is illustrated through his: psychological defences; expression of anger and desire for punishment; comparisons between himself and the wrongdoer; and changes in his worldview. As part of his decision making process, there is evidence of his: consideration of forgiveness as an option; shift in perception of forgiveness; and consideration of a new kind of resolution. The work phase of forgiveness is shown through Wiesenthal's: vacillations between viewing Karl as murderer versus human being; expressions of empathy and compassion towards Karl, and eventually to Karl's mother. His process of forgiving seems to culminate in his choice to protect Karl's mother from the pain of her son's confession, and in so doing ending the cycle of pain. Although the deepening process of forgiveness could not be illustrated from Wiesenthal's account within the story, his life's work suggests that his deathbed encounter with Karl and his reaction to it, had a significant impact on the life that he lived after the holocaust.

The following quote by Simon's friend in the story, Arthur, has been selected as a final illustration because it may be seen as the central statement in *The Sunflower*, and possibly a defining moment in Simon Wiesenthal's life.

“”And you”, said Arthur, turning to me,“ Do stop talking about it. All this moaning and groaning leads to nothing. If we survive this camp – and I don't think we will – and if the world comes to its senses again, inhabited by people

who look on each other as human beings, then there will be plenty of time to discuss the question of forgiveness. There will be votes for and against, there will be people who will never forgive you for not forgiving him... But anyhow nobody who has not had our experience will be able to understand fully. When we here argue about the problem, we are indulging in a luxury which we in our position simply cannot afford.”” (p. 75)

The Sunflower as a story is essentially a reflection of Arthur’s statement. His suggestion that in the future, in a time where human beings regarded each other as such, there would be the opportunity for discussion, and opinions would surely be varied. But, no one who had not known their experience would truly have understood. The story as a whole has become Wiesenthal’s tool for eliciting the discussion regarding his actions. The discussion that Arthur had asked him to postpone has become so meaningful to him, that he has transformed it into a global debate drawing not only on a prodigious array of respondents, but, most notably, on a global audience. One may suggest that for Wiesenthal, the realization accompanying the meaning associated with his injury provided new purpose in his life.

There are also two further elements, which highlight the importance of Arthur’s statement above. First, when Arthur refers to a world that has come to its senses, where people start to see each other as human beings, he is obviously referring to a return to the status quo, to the ‘normality’ that had existed prior to the atrocities they were experiencing. This is significant, because he claims that people viewing each other as human beings is a central element of a return to ‘normality’. And, people viewing each other in terms of their humanity, beyond the crimes that they have committed is a central theme in understanding the process of forgiveness. It is essentially this element, termed, ‘abstract identity’ that Enright et al. (1994) identify as the core cognitive structure that underlies forgiveness.

Finally, Arthur’s claim that anyone who had not experienced what they had would not truly understand. This is most significant in drawing on the distinction between understanding forgiveness from a moral-philosophical position, and a psychological one.

Govier (2002) says that Wiesenthal's primary question in *The Sunflower* is not a psychological one, but a moral one. He is not asking whether it would have been psychologically possible to forgive Karl, but whether it would have been morally desirable to do so. Yet if we listen to Arthur's statement, we are told that even if we try to contemplate Simon's question, we will never truly understand his position at the time, and so we can never truly answer him. So, perhaps the true value of *The Sunflower* does not lie in the posing of a moral question? Perhaps the impact of the story comes in viewing the emotional, the cognitive, and the spiritual struggles of a man, faced with an enormous internal dilemma? Perhaps the story speaks of his courage in confronting this conflict, in questioning himself, and others? Perhaps we are witnessing his process of forgiveness?

"...somehow the sunflowers looked different now...

they trembled gently in the breeze..." (p. 59)

Simon Wiesenthal's story is a personal one. By viewing his experience as a psychological journey, I have opened myself to exploring the inner process that forgiveness presents. At the beginning of this study I stated that I had hoped that it would lead to some form of resolution to my internal questioning.

I now feel that I have a clearer understanding of the concept of forgiveness, and many of the debates that surround its definition. For myself, forgiving has become a term that describes a process that is continuous within me.

When I turn the lens of the process model of forgiveness onto myself, it becomes clear that in each one of my own experiences I feel deeply engaged with the process. Each new experience has its moments of uncovering, of decision making, and of work. The more I experience these processes personally, the clearer the value of forgiveness becomes for me. This is my own experience of deepening. I may not have forgiven all of those who have harmed me, nor have I forgiven myself for the harm I cause, but I am constantly within the process because I am now more aware of the value of forgiveness.

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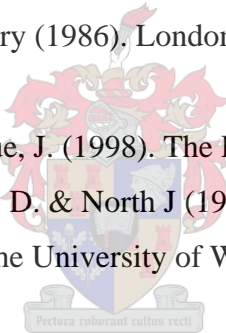
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