

"sunflower" by simon wiesenthal essay sample

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“ Sunflower” by Simon Wiesenthal Essay Sample

In his book “ Sunflower”, Simon Wiesenthal poses a very difficult philosophical question. With a SS man, Karl, on his deathbed, he asks you for forgiveness on all the atrocities and specifically one horrible one he has committed throughout his service as an SS man. What do you do in his place? The most difficult part in answering his question is that you really can't know until you were in such a position yourself. Yet we can project our feelings on this dilemma. So forgiveness becomes the focal point in this query. What is forgiveness and who deserves it and why? These are the questions posed. In my answer to his main question of what I would have done I seem to relate more to the approach of Stein and Heschel rather than that of the Dalai Lama or Dith Pran. I tend to side with them for one reason. I believe that Karl decided to confess just so he could feel better about himself instead and his fear of death rather than coming to a realization of his wrongs. I believe this for several reasons.

The first reason I believe that Karl was confessing was because he feared death and knew he was dying. He knew he was dying and what he decided to do was tell his horrible story to a Jew. My main concern with Karl's last confession is that with his newfound realization of what was radically horrible he didn't try to inform, persuade or even alert anyone who could possibly help the situation. By telling a Jew he could accomplish only self-assurance that he maybe isn't such a bad person. But if his actions really affected him he could tell a comrade or a doctor who could defect and possibly save Jews lives. This would be repentance in a way. Stein's views are very similar to

this, " He participated in murder. He ended up with a guilty conscience but took no action displaying genuine remorse or repentance. Thus, his deathbed confession sounds somewhat hollow."(252) And it is hollow because it changes nothing and it helps no one but himself. That is why his confession, in my eyes, is not worthy of anyone's forgiveness.

I also believe that asking someone for forgiveness whom you have not directly committed a wrong against is also completely out of order. I understand that he did kill those people and that he cannot ask their forgiveness because they are dead but what he would have to do is ask for their forgiveness in the afterlife or from his God. I firmly believe that you can't forgive or be forgiven by someone who wasn't in the wrong or wronged. The whole point of asking for forgiveness is asking the people themselves and only they can deliver that forgiveness. " No one can forgive crimes committed against other people."(171) This is Heschel's view on the subject and I completely agree with him. If I were in Wiesenthals place I would feel like I had no right to forgive atrocities that weren't committed against me directly. Also the fact that Karl asks Simon for forgiveness even though he did nothing against him further shows his lack of thought and responsibility in these actions. This is another reason I wouldn't forgive him it is because I have no right.

Finally the last reason I would not forgive is because what he did does not deserve forgiveness. The atrocities he committed and the things he did no one can ever take back and no one should. I believe the forgiveness entails putting the matter behind in essence forgetting but learning. I believe what

the Nazis and SS men did during this time can never be forgiven because I believe we should never forget it for even a minute. What happened during these times is lost and it is mainly because of the fact that people don't want to remember what happened. But I think we should always remember it because it should never happen again. We have seen things close to this atrocity through the years in Bosnia and Cambodia and we should never forget as to instil each generation with a sense of fear so that when it might happen again it would be shut down before it starts because everyone saw it. Indifference is almost as worse as the killing itself.

In conclusion I believe that in Simons place I don't know what would do. Yet I say that I would say nothing as to show my point. Karl deserves no response because it would be the best action because he would get nothing out of it. If he was told no and yelled at then he would feel somewhat better in a way thinking well I deserve that. And obviously if he was forgiven then it would make him feel better. I believe that he will be judged in his afterlife. And I also believe that he will atone for his crimes in the end. So we must never forgive and forget.