The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SIMON WIESENTHAL

Simon Wiesenthal was born in 1908 in Buchach, Galicia, a town that was then part of Austria-Hungary and is located in modern day Ukraine. His father died in combat in World War I, and his younger brother died at a young age. Wiesenthal attended the Czech Technical University in Prague to study architecture, graduating in 1932. He married his wife Cyla in 1936 when he returned to Lwów, Galicia (Wiesenthal uses the German name of Lemberg). Lemberg was annexed by the Soviets in September 1939 with the partition of Poland. By November 1941, the Lemberg Ghetto had been set up using the forced labor of Jews, and Simon and his wife were forced out of their homes and into the Ghetto. During the war, Simon was separated from his wife and was processed through five different concentration camps, ending up in Mauthausen. Mauthausen was liberated by the Americans on May 5, 1945, and Simon and his wife were reunited in late 1945. Wiesenthal then began to work to gather information for future war crimes trials, founding the Jewish Documentation Center in Linz in 1947 for this purpose. Wiesenthal's work led to the capture and trial of many Nazi officials, though most of the people whose names he gathered were never tried. He spent most of the latter part of his life doing this work, until his death in September 2005.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Sunflower details an episode that occurred during the Holocaust—the Nazi's plot to exterminate the Jews of Europe, largely by annexing Jews all over Europe to ghettos and then sending them to concentration camps. At these camps, millions of people were worked to death, starved, or murdered. By the end of World War II, Adolf Hitler had systematically murdered six million Jews and millions of gypsies, Communists, homosexuals, and other people the Nazis considered undesirable. In Poland in particular, prior to World War II, there were about 3.5 million Jews living in the country. Following the German annexation of Poland, Jews were forced into ghettos, stripped of their property and possessions, and forced to do slave labor for the war efforts. Eventually, they were deported to concentration camps. It is estimated that about 90% of Jews in Poland were murdered, leaving only about 350,000 survivors.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Simon wrote a few other autobiographies chronicling his time during the Holocaust and afterward, including *The Murderers Among Us* and *I Hunted Eichmann*. Other prominent accounts of the Holocaust include Elie Wiesel's *Night*, Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, and Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man* (Levi also writes one of the responses in *The Sunflower*).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness
- **When Written:** 1967-1969
- **Where Written:** Austria
- **When Published:** Originally published in 1969; expanded edition published 1998
- **Literary Period:** Modern and contemporary nonfiction
- **Genre:** Nonfiction
- **Setting:** Europe during World War II
- **Climax:** World War II ends; Simon visits Karl's mother
- **Antagonist:** Nazism
- **Point of View:** First person from Simon's perspective; the portion of the text called "The Symposium" is composed of fifty-three entries by different authors

EXTRA CREDIT

Peaceful rivals. Wiesel was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985, but the prize that year was given to a fellow author and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel.

A legacy of remembrance. The Simon Wiesenthal Center, located in Los Angeles, aims to confront antisemitism, hate, and terrorism, promote human rights and dignity, and teach the lessons of the Holocaust for future generations.

PLOT SUMMARY

The book opens in a Nazi concentration camp where Simon is working along with his friends Arthur, Josek, and Adam. The conditions are extremely difficult: they have little food and are forced to do hard labor for the Nazis. The SS officers brutalize them, and if they refuse to work or cannot work, they are shot. Simon feels that he is no longer treated like a human being.

Arthur and Josek often have disagreements, because Josek remains steadfast in his faith in God, while Arthur and Simon question what kind of God could allow the atrocities occurring around them. Simon finds truth in one woman's bitter joke that God is on leave.

That morning, Simon is separated from his friends and selected

to work in a makeshift hospital which has been set up in the Technical School where Simon studied architecture. As they travel, Simon notices a military cemetery, where a **sunflower** lies on each grave. Simon envies the dead soldiers, because he thinks he will be buried without this distinction of humanity and remembrance.

When Simon arrives at the school, he remembers how even before the war, anti-Semitism had been rampant. The students had devised a "day without Jews" during exams, in which Jewish students were brutalized and the police could do nothing because the school was outside their jurisdiction.

Just before Simon is assigned duties at the hospital, a nurse asks him if he is a Jew. She brings him to the bedside of a dying Nazi soldier named Karl, who is bandaged from head to toe. Karl tells him that he must confess a terrible crime he has committed, and begins to explain his life story: he was born in Stuttgart and joined the Hitler Youth over his parents' objections. He then volunteered for the SS. As Karl tells his story, Simon picks up a letter that had fallen, holds Karl's hand, and shoos a fly away from Karl.

Karl then admits his crime: about three hundred Jews had been forced into a house that was then set on fire. When a mother, father, and small boy tried to jump from the burning house, Karl and other Nazis shot them. He is haunted by their image and begins to weep.

Simon is disgusted by his story, and at several points he tries to leave, but Karl objects. At the detail about the young boy, Simon remembers a young child from the Lemberg Ghetto named Eli. Eli had miraculously survived many of the raids on young children, including an incident in which a fake kindergarten was set up in order to lure parents to send their children to it. When they did, the children were promptly taken to the gas chambers. Eli had stayed home that day. He is the last Jewish child that Simon had seen.

Karl continues his story: he fought in Crimea, until one day, climbing out of the trenches, he was stopped in his tracks by the memory of the Jewish family, and just then a shell exploded near him. Karl's face and body had been torn to ribbons, and the pain was unbearable. Karl then asks Simon to forgive him for the crimes he has committed so that he can die in peace. Simon does not say anything, and then walks out of the room.

Simon rejoins his friends in the camp, and explains what happened with Karl. Arthur and Adam are happy to hear there is one less Nazi in the world, and Josek is glad that Simon did not forgive Karl, saying that Simon could not forgive crimes on behalf of other people. That night, Simon is haunted by the image of Eli in a bloody heap. Simon wakes up screaming.

The next day, Simon returns to the hospital. The nurse tells him that Karl died in the night and left Simon his possessions, along with a name and address for his mother. Simon refuses to take the bundle. He tells his friends, who have become disinterested in the story.

The next two years are filled with death and hunger. All three of Simon's friends die in the camps. One night, the memory of Karl haunts Simon, and he explains his situation again to a fellow prisoner named Bolek, who is Catholic. Bolek argues that Simon should have forgiven Karl because Karl had no one else to ask.

Simon is liberated from the Mauthausen camp in 1945, and one afternoon is reminded of Karl by a sunflower. He remembers Karl's mother's name and address, and goes to visit her. She tells him about Karl, confirming Karl's own story about his childhood. Simon does not reveal the truth about his experience with Karl. By remaining silent, he does not rob Karl's mother of her positive memory of her son.

Simon then asks the readers what they would have done in his place. The second section of the book, entitled "The Symposium," consists of fifty-three responses to his question. They include responses from a cardinal, several rabbis, the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, and Albert Speer to name a few.

The respondents draw mostly on their religious upbringing to answer Simon's question, and some patterns emerge in the responses. Those who argue against forgiving (most of whom are Jewish) reason that Simon cannot forgive crimes in the name of others, and that murder is unforgiveable for this reason. Some believe that repentance alone does not justify forgiveness, and that Karl demonstrated his anti-Semitism by asking a random Jew for forgiveness, as if all Jews are an undifferentiated mass rather than a diverse group composed of individuals.

Those who argue in favor of forgiving (most of whom are Christian) argue that there is no limit to forgiveness. They argue that if Karl was sincerely repentant, as Simon states that he was, he should be forgiven for his crimes because this would not preclude judgment by God, or they argue that Simon should forgive because forgiveness is divine. Others argue a different angle: that forgiveness would free Simon from his own inner turmoil.

Yet, most of the respondents agree on two ideas: first, that even if these crimes are forgiven, they should never be forgotten; and second, that even if Simon did not explicitly forgive Karl, he acted with an immense amount of compassion given his circumstances.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Simon – Simon is the protagonist and author of *The Sunflower*. Simon's story focuses primarily on one encounter he had with a dying Nazi soldier, Karl. Simon provides little to no background information about himself, apart from fact that he had studied

to be an architect. Simon's actions and thoughts show him to be both kind and logical. Where he had once been more optimistic, his experiences in concentration camps have diminished both his faith in humanity and his faith in God. When he is brought to Karl's bedside and Karl asks for his forgiveness for the crimes he has committed, Simon walks out of the room in silence, and Karl dies the following night. When Simon tells the story to his friends Arthur, Josek, and Adam, they approve of his decision, but Simon is less sure, prompting him to discuss it later with a Catholic man he meets in the camp, and to visit Karl's mother after the war. Though he learns more of Karl's backstory, he is still uncertain whether he did the right thing and asks readers what they might have done in his place. Thus, even though Simon did not forgive Karl, he is concerned by the idea that there is no one correct answer, particularly because his faith in religion and God have been tested so greatly. Many of the respondents in the "Symposium" note that even if Simon did not forgive Karl, he still acted with an immense amount of compassion in hearing him out, and retained his humanity by debating the question of forgiveness at all.

Karl – The other principal character in *The Sunflower* and a Nazi soldier. When Simon meets Karl, he is bandaged from head to toe and dying in a makeshift hospital due to injuries he sustained when a shell exploded next to him. He had asked a nurse to fetch a Jew to whom he could confess his crimes, and begins to explain his life story to Simon. Karl was raised Catholic, but abandoned his faith to join the Hitler Youth and then volunteered for the SS over the objections of his mother and father. He goes on to recount his time during the war. His story centers around an episode in which he and other Nazis packed 300 Jews into a building which they then set on fire. When a family of three tried to jump from the second story, he shot at them. He is haunted by his actions, and Simon describes him as truly repentant. He asks Simon for forgiveness for his crimes, which Simon does not grant. Many of the respondents in the book point out that while Karl's intentions are good, he does not seem to have let go of the anti-Semitism that served as the basis for his crimes, and shows little to no compassion for Simon during his confession.

Karl's Mother – A devout Catholic, Karl's mother objected to Karl joining the Hitler Youth and the SS, but she retained her love for him even when he went to war, unlike Karl's father, who refused to speak to him. Simon goes to visit Karl's mother after the war in order to get a fuller picture of Karl. Karl's mother lives alone following the deaths of her son and husband (who was killed in a factory bombing). She still retains the belief that her son was a good person, and Simon, by remaining silent about his experience with Karl, allows her to continue believing this. Simon understands that she was not guilty of the Nazi's crimes but still believes that she is culpable as a citizen of a guilty nation.

Arthur – Simon's old friend who lives with him in the concentration camp. Arthur is cynical and bitter towards the Germans, and like Simon, his faith in God has been damaged. For this reason, he sometimes becomes angry with Josek, whose faith remains strong even in the face of such widespread atrocity. However, Arthur hopes that someday the Germans will answer for their crimes, even if the Jews have all perished. When Simon recounts his experience with Karl to Arthur, Arthur agrees that he did the correct thing in not forgiving Karl. Simon writes that Arthur died in the camps from an epidemic of typhus.

Josek – Another of Simon's friends in the camp. He is a businessman but Simon jokingly calls him "rabbi" because of his strong faith, which sometimes upsets Arthur. Like the others, Josek believes that Simon could not have forgiven Karl because Simon cannot forgive crimes that have been committed against others. Josek was also murdered in the concentration camps: one day he fell ill, and when he was unable to stand up to work, he was shot.

Bolek – A young Polish man who had been studying to be a Catholic priest before his imprisonment. Simon meets Bolek at his final concentration camp, Mauthausen, over two years after his encounter with Karl. Simon learns of Bolek's vocation because he still prays—a rarity in the camps. Simon recounts his story to Bolek and asks what he might have done in such a situation. Unlike Simon's friends, Bolek argues that Simon should have forgiven Karl because he was truly repentant.

Eli – A six-year-old boy with whom Simon had become acquainted in the Lemberg ghetto before Simon was moved to the camps. Eli has a keen sense of survival, picking up crumbs from windowsills that had been left for the birds. He stays home on the day other children are taken to "kindergarten," where in fact they are sent to the gas chambers. After Karl tells Simon the story of the burning family, Simon dreams of Eli and is haunted by the thought of him as a bloody heap.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Adam – Another of Simon's friends in the camps. Like Arthur, Adam is cynical and is glad to hear of Karl's death. Simon reveals that Adam also died in the camps. He had sprained his ankle, and when a guard noticed him limping, he was shot.

The nurse – A woman who works at the makeshift hospital. When Karl asks her to find a Jew who will listen to his confession, she finds Simon. The next day, after Karl's death, she tries to give Simon Karl's possessions, though Simon refuses to take them.

Karl's father – A Social Democrat who ardently opposed Hitler and his son Karl's involvement in the Nazi party. He refused to speak to Karl up until his death in a factory bombing.

TERMS

SS – The Schutzstaffel (SS) was a major paramilitary organization under Hitler and the Nazi Party. Membership was originally open only to people of German origin, a rule that was later relaxed. Members of the SS, like **Karl**, were involved in numerous atrocities and mass murders of Jews and others.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

FORGIVENESS AND COMPASSION

At the beginning of *The Sunflower*, Simon (the author and protagonist) recounts the experience that led him to write the book: while Simon was still in the camps, a nurse brought him to the bedside of a dying Nazi soldier named Karl, who asked Simon forgiveness for his crimes. Simon did not forgive Karl, but instead listened compassionately to his confession. Afterwards, Simon is plagued by not knowing whether his decision not to forgive a dying man was the right one, and this leads him to ask his friends what they might have done in his place. At the end of the story, Simon turns the question to his readers. The second half of the book is composed of responses to Simon's question, written by thinkers and public figures from different religions and parts of the world. While not everyone agrees with Simon's decision not to forgive Karl, nearly all agree that Simon acted with deep compassion. Simon's actions reveal that when forgiveness is not an option, compassion can take its place as a means of providing comfort and hope.

Even though Karl is clearly repentant for his crimes, Simon feels that it would be irresponsible for him to forgive Karl, since he sees forgiveness as something that he cannot issue on behalf of the people Karl has wronged. Karl confesses to truly horrendous crimes, particularly an episode in which he helped light a house packed full of Jewish civilians on fire and then shot at them when they attempted to leap from the burning building. After Simon leaves Karl's hospital room, he asks friends in the camp if he did the right thing, and they affirm his choice not to forgive Karl. Since Karl's crimes were against other Jews (rather than against Simon specifically), they do not believe that it is Simon's place to offer forgiveness on behalf of others, particularly strangers who are no longer alive.

Even though he feels he cannot grant Karl's request for forgiveness, Simon still makes an effort to treat this man with compassion. For example, Simon holds Karl's hand as he confesses, which is a clear recognition of Karl's humanity and an attempt to give him comfort despite not being able to forgive him. Simon also waves away a fly that is bothering Karl and realizes with some surprise that he was trying to "lighten the lot of an equally defenseless superhuman, without thinking, simply as a matter of course." Perhaps Simon's kindest gesture lies in listening to this man's confession at all, since the act of listening threatens both Simon's physical and emotional health. Despite the distress it causes Simon to hear how Karl took part in the torture and murder of so many people like Simon, he remains to listen to Karl's confession. On top of this, staying by Karl's bedside is a threat to Simon's safety, since he would have been punished if he had been discovered away from his work in the labor camp.

After the war, Simon travels to Germany to seek out Karl's mother. When he visits her home, he doubles down on his decision not to forgive Karl or Germans in general, but still treats this woman with kindness and respect. When Karl's mother tells Simon that they had always lived with the Jews peacefully and that they were not responsible for their fate, Simon reproaches her, saying "no German can shrug off the responsibility. Even if he has no personal guilt, he must share the shame of it." In this way, Simon refuses to grant forgiveness to anyone, even those who were silently complicit. Yet Simon also sees that her grief is no different from the grief of so many others after the war, having lost her only son. Remaining silent for much of their brief visit, he refrains from telling her how he met her son or confirming her belief that Karl was a good person, but he also does not contradict this belief. In this way, Simon again provides compassion in the place of forgiveness.

At the end of his narrative, Simon puts the reader in his own shoes and asks others what they might have done. Many of the people who respond to Simon's question affirm his actions, and many of those that do not agree with him still acknowledge that Simon acted as empathetically as he could, given the fact that he was still being tortured and was likely to die at the hands of the Nazis. One of the respondents who says he would have done as Simon did, Moshe Bejski, states that Simon's kindness "goes beyond what a human being could be expected to do." His words are echoed by many others. For those who believe Simon should have forgiven Karl, like Cardinal Franz König, their beliefs often stem from the idea that there is no limit to God's mercy, and that therefore any repentant human being deserves forgiveness. Yet even the Cardinal acknowledges that Simon did Karl a great service just by listening to him. He points to the fact that Karl left Simon his belongings after his death as evidence that Karl felt accepted by him.

While many people after the war urged Jews to forgive and forget the atrocities of the Holocaust in order to move forward as a society, Simon's experiences suggest that forgiveness is neither a simple solution nor straightforwardly ethical. In the absence of forgiveness, however, compassion provides an

alternative way forward—one which does not require the individual to speak on behalf of others. Simon's compassion instead offers the possibility of reconciliation simply by rejecting the hatred from which Karl's crimes sprung in the first place. The question of whether Karl deserved forgiveness is answered by many different voices, but by presenting so many perspectives, the book suggests that there is no definitive answer. In the face of such an unanswerable question, compassion is offered as the best possible response.

RELIGION AND MORAL TRUTH

Simon worries about whether his decision to leave Karl unforgiven was the right thing to do, and at the end of his narrative, he asks what others might have done in his place. A variety of politicians, philosophers, and religious leaders respond, but they come to no clear consensus as to what Simon should have done. While many religions make a claim to absolute moral truth, the range of religious responses to Simon's dilemma suggests that no person or religion can claim a monopoly on moral truth. Instead, by presenting so many conflicting perspectives and leaving it to readers to attempt to reconcile them, the book seems to suggest that morality springs from a person's individual experiences and values, and particularly from their religious background. In the process, moral truth is shown to be deeply relative and personal rather than absolute or universal.

Almost all respondents who are Jewish argue in favor of not forgiving Karl, and many of them base this argument in religious teachings and Jewish tradition. Many of them cite the idea of *teshuvah*—the Hebrew word for repentance. Teshuvah, as Deborah E. Lipstadt explains in her response, demands that one must first ask forgiveness of the victims before asking forgiveness from God. In the case of Karl, then, he cannot be forgiven by Simon because he did not commit any crimes against Simon personally. Additionally, in Judaism, repentance alone does not does not warrant forgiveness: one must do *kaparah* (atonement), as well. *Kaparah* can involve different actions, but the word generally denotes the need to "pay" for one's sins (whether symbolically or literally) to merit forgiveness, which Karl has not done. Therefore, many of the Jewish respondents argue, he is not worthy of forgiveness.

Many of the Christian respondents, however, see forgiveness as a moral imperative. One such respondent, Christopher Hollis, argues that Jesus should serve as a model for Simon because he exemplifies "absolute moral law." Christ prayed at His crucifixion for the forgiveness of His own murderers; therefore, Simon should forgive those who have committed crimes against him and his fellow Jews. Forgiveness, as Cardinal Franz König states, is an "act of almost superhuman goodness." For Christians, then, the goal is to be godlike, and therefore to be merciful. In other words, Theodore M. Hesburgh states, "I would forgive because God would forgive."

Many writers outside of the Judeo-Christian religions also argue for forgiveness, but come at it from a slightly different angle, arguing that forgiveness is important because it liberates the victim, not the perpetrator. Matthieu Ricard, a Buddhist, argues that sinful actions are those that produce suffering while virtuous acts bring about more happiness in the world. For Buddhists, forgiveness is always an option, regardless of what someone has done—an idea that the Dalai Lama confirms in his own response. Ricard also argues for forgiveness because he believes that Karl is destined to undergo a lot of suffering in his future lives. José Hobday, who provides a Native American perspective, argues that Simon should have forgiven Karl for his own peace of mind. She recalls how her mother taught her that the act of forgiving brings peace and harmony.

While all religions have their own ideas of absolute moral truth, the variety of responses to Simon's dilemma underscores that moral truth is always subjective because each religion has different models of a moral life. This is what drives Simon to speak to his friends in the concentration camp about his encounter with Karl and to write the book: he is unsure of his own moral beliefs relating to forgiveness, and he questions whether he did the right thing. In a sense, then, Simon's quest to learn from a variety of people and then see which responses make the most sense to him demonstrates his understanding of the complex nature of morality. This suggests that Simon's own ambivalence over whether he did the right thing is, in itself, a moral position, as it acknowledges that he can never determine definitively whether he was right or wrong.

REMEMBRANCE

Though the book presents a variety of different perspectives regarding whether Simon should or should not forgive Karl, almost everyone agrees about one thing: there is a moral imperative not to forget the crimes of the Holocaust, in order to make sure they never happen again.

Many of those who argue against forgiveness do so with the argument that forgiveness will lead to forgetting and possibly repeating the atrocities that have occurred. Sven Alkalaj argues that forgetting the crimes is worse than forgiving the criminal because it devalue the humanity of the people who perished. Moshe Bejski and Manès Sperber have similar arguments: forgiveness cannot actually occur without, in some way, forgetting the atrocities, which is why they refuse to acknowledge forgiveness as an option. Bejski, in particular, also brings up the idea that there should be no statute of limitations on crimes such as these, because the passage of time could never atone for such terrible crimes. Robert McAfee Brown similarly believes that the necessity of remembrance is "the clearest lesson of the Holocaust," arguing that if the world forgets what happened, even worse atrocities could be committed in the future. He believes that the concept of never

forgiving stems from this idea, because to forgive is a signal to future perpetrators that they can act without fear of punishment. Mark Goulden adds that those who have been most intent on promoting the "forget it" campaign have been the Germans themselves, in order to absolve the nation of responsibility for what happened.

Yet even those who do argue for forgiveness also make remembering a priority. The Dalai Lama, who argues that Simon should have forgiven Karl, still makes clear that forgiving does not mean forgetting: that one should still remember these experiences so that the atrocities cannot be repeated. Matthew Fox also sees forgiveness as being separate from remembrance. He views forgiveness as granting the victim the ability to move on and be free from the burden of what they have endured, but never to forget what has occurred. Dith Pran, who endured persecution at the hands of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, agrees with Fox, since he personally would forgive, but he knows that he could never forget the crimes that have been committed against him.

Simon himself also sees that remembering the atrocities that have occurred is vital to the process of reconciliation. At the end of his section of the book, Simon laments how the world urges him to "forgive and forget." In wondering whether someone can do one and not the other, Simon worries that forgiveness would mean the world would begin to forget what had befallen the Jews. Simon says that "forgetting is something that time alone takes care of." In choosing to write this book, however, Simon also attempts to make sure that the events of the Holocaust are not forgotten. Robert Coles sees this as the author's true intent: not to forget, and to give to future readers an "introspective moral legacy" born out of the suffering that the Jews have endured.

As many of the writers note, forgiving and forgetting often go hand in hand. But for Simon and many others, keeping what has happened alive in the public consciousness is a far greater imperative than the question of easing one man's—or even an entire country's—guilty conscience. In many ways, this is affirmed by the fact that Simon spent most of his life after the war as a Nazi hunter, making sure that not only were the crimes not forgotten, but also that the perpetrators of those crimes could not slip away undetected. Simon could not forgive the criminals until they had answered for their crimes; he felt that he could not simply allow those crimes to be expunged from their memory and from history.

ANTI-SEMITISM AND DEHUMANIZATION

The Sunflower explores the Anti-Semitism of pre-war and post-war Europe, emphasizing that the Nazis exploited and stoked widespread prejudice against Jews to get away with acts of unspeakable violence. Simon brings up examples of physical violence (such as hangings, harsh physical labor, and starvation) and psychological violence (such as Karl's refusal to recognize Simon's humanity, even while he asks for forgiveness) to show how prejudice led people to treat their Jewish victims as subhuman. However, despite this attempted dehumanization, Simon (and the other survivors of genocide with whom he speaks) have clearly retained their humanity. The book itself—a complex moral reckoning with compassion and forgiveness—demonstrates that despite the Nazis' efforts to dehumanize him, Simon remains much more humane than any of his tormentors.

Of all the anti-Semitic dehumanization that Simon describes in *The Sunflower*, the concentration camps are perhaps the most significant, since they combine physical and psychological violence to make Jewish prisoners seem less than human in the eyes of both themselves and their captors. The psychological violence of the camps comes from the pervasive treatment of prisoners as if they weren't human. When the prisoners leave the camps to go to work, for instance, the people of Lemberg barely look at them. Simon describes them as looking at "a herd of cattle being driven to the slaughterhouse." The prisoners are also subjected to physical violence, such as beatings, hangings, or being shot to death for getting sick. In this environment, Simon ceases to fear sickness, suffering, or death. This shows Simon's dehumanization, as to fear death is one of the most basic instincts of all living beings. Recalling the camps, Simon describes "a world that has ceased to regard man as man, which repeatedly 'proves' that one is no longer a man." This description suggests that the camps set in place a self-fulfilling prophecy: Simon's captors believed that he was less than human, so they treated him as less than human, which made Simon himself feel that he wasn't fully human. Perhaps this is why the image of **the sunflower** itself—which adorns the graves of Nazi soldiers, but not Jewish prisoners, most of whom died without proper burial—plagues Simon so much. It represents the unjust idea that the innocent Jews are less human than the criminal Nazis.

Even though, at the end of his life, Karl comes to recognize that dehumanization is wrong, his confession shows that he retained until his death the dehumanizing prejudice that led to this violence in the first place. When Karl asks the nurse to get Simon, for instance, he asks simply for "a Jew," and thus sees Simon not as an individual, but rather as a category of person. Furthermore, even as Karl asks for forgiveness, he does not seem to have any empathy for Simon's own personal suffering. Simon notes that Karl has warm undertones in his voice when he speaks about the Jews, but this did not prevent him from committing the atrocity of lighting a house full of people on fire and watching as other soldiers shot people who tried to jump from the building. This shows how deeply rooted Karl's anti-Semitism is; even as he sincerely asks forgiveness for the atrocities he has committed, he dehumanizes Simon in a way

that parallels his dehumanization of other Jews during the war.

Yet for all of these attempts to dehumanize the Jews, the book is a testament to Simon's ability to retain his own humanity in a time of crisis. Simon's compassion for Karl makes this clear; even as Karl disrespects him and confesses to horrible crimes, Simon listens and holds Karl's hand. Clearly, Simon is the more humane of the two men. Furthermore, after Simon's encounter with Karl, Simon and others in the camp have a thought-provoking discussion about whether Simon should have forgiven Karl. This further attests to their humanity: they do not immediately dismiss this dying soldier or revel in his death the way many of the Nazi soldiers reveled in the deaths of people like them. Lastly, Simon treats and portrays Karl with empathy and he genuinely tries to do right by him in asking the reader to weigh in on whether Karl should have been forgiven. Therefore, despite the Nazis' attempts to dehumanize the Jews, *The Sunflower* shows that this effort was in many cases unsuccessful, as Simon and other Holocaust survivors emerged from the camps with a greater and deeper sense of humanity than their violent, anti-Semitic captors.

SILENCE, GUILT, AND RESISTANCE

As Simon states in *The Sunflower*, there are many kinds of silence. There is the silence of those who stood by during the Holocaust, the silence of its victims, and the silence Simon refuses to break when Karl asks for forgiveness. Importantly, this latter type of silence does not mean that Simon is voiceless or uncertain: Simon's silence communicates his refusal to forgive, as well as his sympathy for a dying man. Simon's exploration of different types of silence shows that the silence of complicity, born out of willful ignorance, can be deeply harmful, but it also shows that silence can be positive. In Simon's case, his silence is often compassionate and powerfully symbolic.

Simon's silence in facing both Karl and Karl's mother is simultaneously compassionate and a symbolic gesture of resistance. It enables reconciliation while withholding forgiveness. When Karl asks for Simon's forgiveness, Simon's silence is a tacit acknowledgement that he cannot forgive him on behalf of those he ahs wronged, and also that he feels Karl's crimes are too great to be forgiven. Yet Simon's willingness to listen to Karl, to have sympathy in the face of his suffering, and to not attempt to avenge those who have died or suffered at Karl's hands demonstrates Simon's immense capacity for compassion. Similarly, when Simon visits Karl's mother, he listens to her story and provides her with comfort, bringing her "greetings" from her son. However, his decision to remain silent about Karl's sordid past is a gesture of compassion, as he deliberately chooses not to ruin her belief that her son is "good." This is a silence that refuses to lie (Simon does not affirm that Karl was a good person) and continues to refuse to grant forgiveness, but also one that works toward reconciliation. Simon again demonstrates his compassion in treating Karl's mother with kindness and respect, thereby helping to ease both of their pain.

Simon contrasts these examples of compassionate silence with the silence of Germans and other bystanders during the war. Their silence in the face of injustice, he feels, makes them complicit in the crimes of the Nazi regime. These silences spring from deliberate ignorance, or a desire to unburden oneself at the expense of others who are suffering. When Simon and other Jews are taken outside the camp, he describes how many people saw them and wrote them off as doomed in order to justify their inaction and silence. He recalls feeling that the world had conspired against the Jews, and that their "fate was accepted without a protest, without a trace of sympathy." He also remembers how so many people—particularly Poles and ethnic Germans—had gone along with this extermination because they feared that if the Jews were not subjugated, they themselves would have been instead. Many of those who responded to Simon's question pick up on these silences. Matthew Fox, in particular, speaks to the idea that "This story—the entire Nazi story—lays bare the *sins of complicity and the sins of omission and denial* that render our participation in evil so profound." The silence of so many in the face of atrocity, therefore, can make an entire society responsible for enabling this kind of evil.

While Simon does show that silence can be powerful and compassionate, his discussion of complicit silence suggests that, often, silence is the wrong choice. After the war, many Jews were "advised to keep silent" about the hell that they had endured, a request that, once again, springs from a desire for willful ignorance and a perpetuation of oppression. Yet the book itself represents Simon's own resistance to being silent in the face of injustice, as he aims to tell his story even when he and others are encouraged not to speak.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

SUNFLOWER

Per the book's title, the sunflower becomes a major preoccupation for Simon. He first notices the sunflower when he is traveling to the makeshift hospital. He passes a military cemetery, where on each grave a sunflower has been placed. He is struck by the fact that the Nazis gain this small distinction, while he would likely soon be buried in a mass, unmarked grave, making them superior to him even in death. When Karl confesses his crimes, Simon thinks that he too will get a sunflower. The sunflower thus serves as a symbolic representation of both anti-Semitism and

remembrance. The sunflower is a distinction that Nazis have, while the innocent Jews receive no such gesture. The Germans are also remembered by someone, whereas the names and identities of many Jewish individuals would quickly be forgotten in the face of mass extermination. In a way, then, by naming his book *The Sunflower*, Simon works to counteract this unfairness. The book serves as a way of both fighting anti-Semitism and providing a means of honoring and remembering the six million Jews who were murdered.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Schocken Books edition of *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness* published in 1969.

Book 1: The Sunflower Quotes

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.

Related Characters: Simon (speaker), Karl, Arthur

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears very early in the book, when Simon describes his friend Arthur's firm belief that the Germans will be punished for their actions, while Simon is focused more on present concerns like hunger, exhaustion, and anxiety for his loved ones. Simon describes just how difficult it is to hold onto one's faith and one's convictions in a place like a concentration camp. Simon's sentiments highlight the vicious self-fulfilling prophesy of the concentration camps: because the Nazis believe that the Jews are subhuman, they are placed in the camps where the brutal conditions dehumanize them. Because of his terrible treatment under the Nazi regime, Simon has difficulty holding onto his religious and moral beliefs. This difficulty is one of the reasons that Simon questions his eventual treatment of Karl, because he feels he has lost some sense of morality entirely. Yet the book repeatedly proves that these efforts to dehumanize the Jews fail entirely, as Simon's humanity towards Karl and his concern with acting decently serve as the book's main focus.

One really begins to think that God is on leave. Otherwise the present state of things wouldn't be possible [...] What the old woman had said in no way shocked me, she had simply stated what I had long felt to be true.

Related Characters: Simon (speaker), Josek, Arthur

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

When Simon asks Arthur if there has been any news, Arthur tells him that an old woman told Josek that she thought God was on leave. Simon, half-asleep, asks Arthur to tell him when God gets back. Later, Simon contemplates the ild woman's statement more deeply, understanding that God's absence may be the only explanation for the atrocities of the Holocaust. This confirms Simon's own crisis of faith and provides a key into why he feels so conflicted over his treatment of Karl later in the book. When Simon asks readers what they would have done, many respondents take a stance based on their own religious principles. Without the certainty of a moral stance such as religious faith affords, however, Simon feels uncertain whether he acted appropriately. Furthermore, the fact that Simon was still asking this question many years after World War II's end implies that he never fully regained certainty in his faith, and still struggles with the question of where God was during this inhumane era.

For me there would be no sunflower. I would be buried in a mass grave, where corpses would be piled on top of me. No sunflower would ever bring light into my darkness, and no butterflies would dance above my dreadful tomb.

Related Characters: Simon (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 14-15

Explanation and Analysis

When Simon marches to the Technical School to labor at a makeshift hospital, he passes a military cemetery for the German soldiers. On each grave lies a sunflower. As the title symbol, the sunflower has a great deal of importance. The sunflower represents two ideas, each of which upset Simon:

first, the anti-Semitism and dehumanization of the Jews. Simon laments the fact that Nazi criminals would receive individual graves, each with a small, beautiful distinction, while the innocent Jews that had been killed would receive no such gesture. Just as in life, when they are treated as an undifferentiated mass of people bringing ruin to European society, in death they are also treated as an undifferentiated mass of people. This is a key tactic by the Germans, as it is easier to hate a group of people than it is to hate every human individual within the group.

The second idea evoked by the sunflower is remembrance: the Nazi soldiers are remembered with at least enough care to have someone place this flower, whereas the names and identities of many Jewish individuals would quickly be forgotten because of the mass murder of their people that wipes out entire generations of families. By naming his book *The Sunflower*, Simon works to counteract the injustice of the fact that sunflowers that were *not* placed on Jewish graves (of which there were few, for those killed during the war). The book serves as a way of both fighting anti-Semitism and providing a means of honoring and remembering the six million Jews who were murdered.

> Although the Radicals formed a mere 20 percent of the students, this minority reigned because of the cowardice and laziness of the majority.

Related Characters: Simon (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

When Simon and the other prisoners march to the Technical School, which has been refashioned as a reserve hospital, he is flooded by memories of his time studying there. Particularly resonant are the memories of the "day without Jews," in which Radical students would use violent means to prevent Jewish students from taking their exams. The phenomenon that Simon describes here is an early example of the dynamic that gave the Nazis the ability to rise to power. Banking on the indifference or fear of the majority, the radical students were able to enact their "day without Jews" without any consequences. The silence of the majority, and particularly those in power, made them complicit in the unjust system.

> "Look," he said, "those Jews died quickly, they did not suffer as I do—though they were not as guilty as I am."

Related Characters: Karl (speaker), Simon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

After Karl has finished telling the story of the family in the burning house and the story of his injury, Simon is shocked by the fact that Karl seems to expect pity from Simon. The excuse he gives causes both Simon and some of the respondents, particularly Joseph Telushkin, to reject Karl entirely. By referring to the Jews as "not as guilty as I am," Karl implies that they have some amount of blame in the matter. Many respondents take this as clear evidence that he still retains an anti-Semitic prejudice, and that he continues to be indoctrinated by Nazi ideology that blames the Jews for things like war, unemployment, poverty, and hunger. Because he has not fully rejected this hateful ideology, many respondents argue, he does not deserve forgiveness.

> I asked myself if it was only the Nazis who had persecuted us. Was it not just as wicked for people to look on quietly and without protest at human beings enduring such shocking humiliation? But in their eyes were we human beings at all?

Related Characters: Simon (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

As the prisoners march to the reserve hospital, Simon notes that the people they pass look at them as if they are animals going to the slaughter. By questioning whether the Germans are complicit in the Nazi crimes—even those who committed no acts of violence but merely protected their own—Simon invites the reader to see how ruinous the silence of a people can be. Yet Simon acknowledges that they cannot bear the brunt of the blame, particularly because the Nazis worked so diligently to convince the rest of the world that the Jews were subhuman. Playing on general feelings of anti-Semitism, they were able to convince the German public that the Jews were not human at all, and this dehumanization allowed for a general

indifference to seep into the minds and hearts of the German public.

"Why," I asked, "is there no general law of guilt and expiation? Has every religion its own ethics, its own answers?"

"Probably, yes."

Related Characters: Arthur, Simon (speaker), Josek, Karl

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

When Simon explains to Arthur and Josek the exchange that has passed between Karl and himself, Simon looks to his friends for guidance. Both Josek and Arthur support Simon's actions, but Simon is less sure that he did the right thing in not forgiving Karl. When Arthur and Josek base their reasoning primarily on their religious beliefs, Simon questions whether there are general moral laws by which humans can judge others. Arthur's answer to this question, and the answer supported by the second half of the book, is a resounding "no." Each of the authors responds according to the beliefs of their own religion. Very few make arguments that do not draw on a religious tradition. Considering Simon's earlier crisis of faith, it makes sense that he is unsure of the right thing to do. He cannot act according to a belief that he no longer has, or in the name of a God of which he is no longer sure.

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?"

Related Characters: Simon (speaker), Arthur, Karl

Related Themes:

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of Simon's section of the book, he asks the reader if they would have forgiven Karl if they had been in his place. By opening up the question to others, Simon accomplishes several things: first, he fulfills Arthur's hope that someday after the war, people will be able to debate this question of forgiveness, proving that the world has regained enough of its humanity to have a genuine dialogue about it. Second, the way in which Simon curates the second section of the book is such that it includes different perspectives from people from a variety of religions and backgrounds. The book shows that different religions have starkly different perspectives on morality, and the beliefs of each religion inform how its practitioners would act. For example, many of the Jewish respondents agree with Simon, but many of the Christian respondents say they would have forgiven Karl. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, *The Sunflower* ensures that the memory of the atrocities committed during the war will never be forgotten.

Sven Alkalaj Quotes

Forgetting the crimes would be worse than forgiving the criminal who seeks forgiveness, because forgetting the crimes devalues the humanity that perished in these atrocities.

Related Characters: Karl, Simon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

Alkalaj's response focuses on the idea of remembrance, particularly because he is a Bosnian Jew who survived the Bosnian genocide. While many had thought that the atrocities perpetrated in the Holocaust could not be repeated, Alkalaj is proof that at least some of these crimes against humanity recurred less than fifty years after the war. Thus, for him, remembering the crimes is crucial so that they will not be repeated. As many argue throughout the second section of the book, forgetting makes the question of forgiveness irrelevant, and so Alkalaj places more importance on remembrance than forgiveness. It is also worth noting another of Alkalaj's arguments against forgetting here: that it would devalue the lives of the people who were murdered.

Smail Balić Quotes

Those who might appear uninvolved in the actual crimes, but who tolerate acts of torture, humiliation, and murder, are certainly also guilty.

Related Characters: Karl's father, Karl's Mother, Simon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

The end of Balić's response touches on many of *The Sunflower's* themes, including an argument that Simon himself makes implicitly again and again about complicity and collective guilt. Simon has given multiple examples of the harm that bystanders do, such as those who simply watch the prisoners as they walk down the street, thinking that they are already doomed, or Karl's mother and father, who enjoyed the benefits of their son having been in the SS even though they did not approve of that choice. Balić also condemns the people who sit and watch idly as Jews are tortured, killed, and treated like animals. Even if they are not directly performing these crimes themselves, the citizens' indifference and fear enables the Nazis to rise and remain in power. Balić brings up this point in order to argue that silence might be comfortable, but it can ultimately be disastrous.

Moshe Bejski Quotes

Even if Wiesenthal believed that he was empowered to grant a pardon in the name of the murdered masses, such an act of mercy would have been a kind of betrayal and repudiation of the memory of millions of innocent victims who were unjustly murdered, among them, the members of his family.

Related Characters: Karl, Simon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

Bejski's argument ties into the arguments of many others as he writes that forgiving inevitably leads to forgetting. Some believe that Simon does not have the right to forgive Karl for crimes against other Jews, but if even if he did have that right, he should not grant Karl forgiveness because, as Bejski points out, doing so is a betrayal of the memory of these Jews. It is also essentially a betrayal of himself, since he was most likely to have experienced a similar fate at the Jews that Karl murdered (although, by chance, he did not). Karl should not be treated with more consideration than the Jews he has murdered simply because they are no longer alive, or because Simon is meeting him as an individual.

Robert Coles Quotes

Let us [...] take to heart what may be, finally, the author's real intent for us: that we never, ever forget what happened to him and millions of others...

Related Characters: Simon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

Coles states that, like Simon, he would not have forgiven; instead he might have turned away from Karl and then prayed for him. At the end of his response, he makes an additional important point: that Simon's intention for the book is not only to spark debate, but also to ensure through that debate that the crimes against the Jews are never forgotten. This can be seen in his decision to call the book *The Sunflower*, which served in the book as a symbol of remembrance for the German soldiers. Thus, perhaps this book serves as the Jews' own sunflower, returning a speck of humanity to them and allowing others to remember both their losses under and their triumphs over the Nazis.

Matthew Fox Quotes

By holding his hand Simon was being present and being human. Though holding his hand repulsed him after more of the horror story was revealed, still he stayed in the room and listened. Listening was his gift; listening was his act of compassion.

Related Characters: Karl, Simon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

Fox's argument focuses on the different instances of silence in the book. First, Fox argues that Simon's silence as he listens to Karl's request serves as its own form of compassion and kindness. Karl's guilt was clearly overwhelming, to the point where he asks someone who almost certainly will bear some hatred towards him for forgiveness. But instead, Simon comforts him by holding his

hand and eases his guilt at least somewhat by hearing his confession. This act of recognizing Karl's humanity is perhaps even more valuable than it would have been to fulfil Karl's original request of forgiveness. Simon's acts also demonstrate that in a world bent on dehumanizing him, he is able to retain his humanity and treat Karl with dignity as he lay injured and dying.

❝ Willful ignorance is a sin. In this case, a catastrophic sin that made the Holocaust possible.

Related Characters: Karl's Mother, Karl, Simon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

In contrast with Fox's earlier quote that argued that Simon's gift to Karl was his silence (and his related argument that Simon was kind in letting Karl's mother retain a positive image of her son), Fox argues in this quote that the silence enacted by the German people during the Holocaust is a sinful silence, because it neither acknowledges nor tries to stop the crimes committed against the Jews. The distinction between these two silences is that one supports justice while the other suppresses it. Fox goes on to broaden his discussion of the sin of complicit silence to demonstrate how it remains relevant today, as society makes itself ignorant of its pollution of the planet and the damage done by its mass incarceration system.

Hans Habe Quotes

❝ Forgiveness is the imitation of God. Punishment too is an imitation of God. God punishes and forgives, in that order. But God never hates. That is the moral value worth striving for, but perhaps unattainable.

Related Characters: Karl, Simon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 162

Explanation and Analysis

In the arguments presented by many of the other respondents, Christian and Buddhist respondents tend to advocate forgiveness, while the Jewish respondents push for atonement. However, Habe notes that many people seem uncomfortable with this either/or solution. Habe argues that both answers to Simon's question play their part in the process of Karl's reconciliation with God. Perhaps the aspect of Simon's story that makes the two concepts mutually exclusive is the time sensitivity of Karl's request: in that moment, there is only time for either atonement or forgiveness.

Yet while Habe argues that both forgiveness and punishment are godlike, one sentiment emerges as the thesis of Habe's essay, and that is the importance of Simon not hating Karl. This, indeed, appears to be the thesis of the entire symposium: that regardless of Simon's verdict on forgiving Karl, the compassion he reserves for Karl is what all humans should aspire to have toward others.

Theodore M. Hesburgh Quotes

❝ Can we aspire to be as forgiving of each other as God is of us?

Of course, the sin here is monumental. It is still finite and God's mercy is infinite.

If asked to forgive, by anyone for anything, I would forgive because God would forgive.

Related Characters: Karl, Simon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 162

Explanation and Analysis

In Hesburgh's short essay, he explains that he would forgive Karl because God would grant Karl mercy. Hesburgh, a Catholic priest, becomes a good example of how the differences in the beliefs of various religions lead to differences in practice and behavior. This pattern can also be seen in the responses of Christopher Hollis, Cardinal Franz König, Desmond Tutu, and Dorothy Soelle. Their arguments, like Hesburgh's, boil down to the idea that God's mercy is infinite and humans should aspire to be like God, and that therefore Simon should forgive Karl for his crimes.

Abraham Joshua Heschel Quotes

❝ No one can forgive crimes committed against other people […] According to Jewish tradition, even God Himself can only forgive sins committed against Himself, not against man.

Related Characters: Karl, Simon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 171

Explanation and Analysis

Heschel's essay takes the form of a parable: a man offends a rabbi before he knows who the rabbi is. When he asks the rabbi for forgiveness, the rabbi states that he needs to ask a common man for forgiveness, because that is who he offended. Heschel's argument here is typical of the arguments of most of the Jewish respondents. Unlike the Christian respondents, many of whom argue that God's capacity for forgiveness is infinite (and therefore humans' capacity for forgiveness should be as well), Judaism holds that people can only forgive crimes committed against themselves. God's forgiveness is limited, He cannot forgive crimes committed against people. Thus, many of the Jewish respondents argue that Simon cannot forgive Karl.

José Hobday Quotes

I would have forgiven, as much for my own peace as for Karl's […] No one, no memory, should have the power to hold us down, to deny us peace. Forgiving is the real power.

Related Characters: Karl, Simon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

Hobday, who is Native American and whose beliefs fall outside the Judeo-Christian religions, argues that forgiveness is necessary for Simon's peace of mind, not Karl's peace of mind. Hobday is also the exception to the rule in terms of remembrance. Unlike most of the respondents and Simon himself, Hobday argues that forgetting is necessary for forgiving, and that one should not be weighed down by one's memory. On an individual basis, Hobday makes a good point that letting go of harmful memories can be freeing—certainly in Simon's case, forgetting the memory of Karl might be helpful because he seems so ill at ease with his decision. Yet collectively, forgetting is akin to a harmful silence. Acting as though the Holocaust did not occur may quickly lead to its repetition.

Roger Kamanetz Quotes

I cannot encounter another person's humanity as a category, but only when I meet him or her as a particular individual.

Related Characters: Karl, Simon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

Kamenetz's essay is very short, and centers on the idea that Karl asked for a Jew—any Jew—to ask for forgiveness. Thus, Kamenetz argues, while Simon treated Karl like an individual human being by listening to his confession, swatting away a fly, and holding his hand, Karl continued to treat Simon as a symbol rather than an individual human being. He did not seem interested in Simon's own personal story or suffering, or the fact that Simon was likely going to die at the hands of Karl's comrades. All of this indicates that Karl still retains his prejudice, or is so narcissistic as to not care. Thus, the discussion about whether Karl could be forgiven cannot even start until Karl reaches the same point of compassion that Simon has achieved.

Cardinal Franz König Quotes

Nevertheless, you had an opportunity to put forward an act of almost superhuman goodness in the midst of a subhuman and bestial world of atrocities.

Related Characters: Karl, Simon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 183

Explanation and Analysis

The Cardinal acknowledges that Simon did Karl a service in listening to his story and giving him an opportunity to express his regret despite Simon's internal reluctance. Yet, like Theodore M. Hesburgh, the Cardinal believes that if Simon could have forgiven Karl, it would have been an exceptionally good deed. This is based on the Christian idea that forgiveness is divine, and that there are no limits to God's forgiveness, and therefore there should be no limits to human forgiveness.

The Cardinal also recognizes an important idea: that while Karl has clearly lost his humanity in this "subhuman and bestial world," the Cardinal clearly understands that

somehow Simon has clearly retained his. This is an implicit acknowledgement that in reality it is the Nazis who have become dehumanized, while Simon and many of the other Jews in the camp maintain their compassion for others regardless of their crimes.

Hubert G. Locke Quotes

By our silence, perhaps we acknowledge as much; we own up to our humanness. We concede that we are not gods and that we lack, as much as we might be loath to admit it, the capacity to provide understanding and assurance for every inexplicable moment in life.

Related Characters: Simon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 202

Explanation and Analysis

Locke's response focuses on silence, which he believes is also the ability to listen. Simon remained silent and listened with both Karl and his mother. Locke then argues that being silent and listening allows for the receiving of knowledge. Perhaps this is one of the differences between Simon's silence and the silence of the bystanders; one involved listening, learning, and knowledge, while the other involved the rejection of those things. Locke's response in a way stands in direct opposition to the Christian respondents who argue that Simon should forgive because forgiveness is godlike. Here, Locke counters that argument through the understanding that humans are flawed, and that silence is an acknowledgement of our faults and our uncertainty. Rather than definitively speaking one way or the other, Simon's silence allowed for an openness, whereby he felt he was doing right by the victims of Karl's crimes, while Karl still felt a sense of compassion from Simon and even left Simon his possessions.

Matthieu Ricard Quotes

To grant forgiveness to someone who has truly changed is not a way of condoning or forgetting his or her past crimes, but of acknowledging whom he or she has become.

Related Characters: Karl, Simon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 236

Explanation and Analysis

Ricard's response represents a Buddhist perspective, and he argues that Simon should forgive because, in his religion, the moral value of an action is only based on whether it increases or lessens suffering. Simon's forgiveness would have diminished Karl's suffering, and therefore Simon should have forgiven him. Yet Ricard's essay also takes other aspects of Buddhism into account. Ricard argues here that forgiveness does not meaning condoning or forgetting crimes, which many other respondents fear is inevitable when one forgives crimes of this magnitude. Ricard acknowledges in his response that Karl will undergo much suffering in his future reincarnations, and therefore punishing him in this life becomes less of a concern. Thus, again, readers can see how the tenets of a faith change the actions of individuals and societies.

Albert Speer Quotes

You helped me a great deal—as you helped the SS man when you did not withdraw your hand or reproach him. Every human being has his burden to bear.

Related Characters: Karl, Simon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 246

Explanation and Analysis

Albert Speer's response is one of the more intriguing responses in the book. Speer was a Nazi leader who acknowledged responsibility for his crimes at the Nuremberg Trial. After twenty years in prison, Speer and Simon sat facing each other for three hours at Simon's Documentation Center, and Speer explained how he had been touched by Simon's lack of hatred. He assumes here that Simon's compassion also helped Karl, and his quote demonstrates the value of compassion even in the absence of forgiveness (which Speer acknowledges he is beyond). Simon's gestures of holding Karl's hand and listening to his story gave Karl comfort, so much so that he left his only remaining possessions to Simon. In both cases, Simon rejects the hatred that characterized the Nazi regime.

André Stein Quotes

❝ We must not forget that millions were murdered by a nation of good sons. Every woman who doggedly holds on to a pristine moral image of her son is a collaborator in his crime.

Related Characters: Karl, Karl's Mother, Simon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 255

Explanation and Analysis

Stein agrees with Simon's actions in every case except one: unlike many of the other respondents, Stein believes that it was wrong of Simon to allow Karl's mother to retain a good image of her son. Stein views Simon's silence in this instance as a way of allowing Karl to go unpunished in the memory of his family and of forcing Karl's mother to remain ignorant of her son's actions. Though Simon believes that this woman would be destroyed if she learned of her son's true actions and therefore sees his action as one of compassion, it is also possible that she might be even more hurt to know that she had had a false image of him, and that Simon made the decision on her behalf to keep her in the dark. Thus, while most of the essays equate Simon's silence with Karl and Simon's silence with Karl's mother, Stein instead equates this silence with the silence of collaborators and bystanders, making Karl's mother complicit in his crime.

Tzvetan Todorov Quotes

❝ We are not contemplating an action in the present, but the place of a past action in our memory. What can we do with evil in the past, how can we put it to use in the service of our moral education?

Related Characters: Simon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 266

Explanation and Analysis

Todorov concludes his essay by pointing out that it is difficult to debate these questions of morality concerning the Nazis fifty years after they have occurred. When Todorov wonders what use Simon and Karl's actions might have for the education of future generations, the answer can be found in the book itself. Simon uses his encounter with Karl to create a work of literature that investigates morality, philosophy, and religion. The book recognizes the victims of the crimes through Simon's stories of Eli, his mother, and his friends, and works to make sure that the readers feel connected to even the anonymous Jews that Karl murders. But at the same time, the book (like Simon) still manages to treat Karl with compassion, portraying him fairly and even sympathetically at times. Thus, *The Sunflower* emerges as an instrument for remembrance and an effort to restore some faith in humanity.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

BOOK 1: THE SUNFLOWER

Simon stands exhausted on the parade ground of the concentration camp, where prisoners are lining up after breakfast. He had not gotten coffee because he had not wanted to push his way through the crowd, and because SS officers often used the space in front of the kitchen as a "hunting-ground" to injure prisoners. He tries to remember something his friend Arthur told him the night before. During the previous day, two of the men from their hut had been given permission to enter the Ghetto and had brought news "from outside, war news." Simon had only half-listened, as the news was seldom good, and if it was, they never believed it. He and 150 other men are sleeping in crowded bunks in what was once a stable.

From the first page, this parable about humanity immediately places the reader inside the most inhumane of places: a Nazi concentration camp. Yet for all the Nazi's arguments that the Jews are subhuman, it is clear from Simon's descriptions that the Nazis, too, have lost their humanity—just in a radically different way. Such extreme violence dehumanizes both the victim and the oppressor.

Simon explains that men from all walks of life have found themselves confined to this stable inside a concentration camp, and "inevitably they splintered into small groups, close communities of men who in other circumstances would never be found together." Simon describes his group, which consists of his old friend Arthur and a Jew named Josek, whom he describes as sensitive and deeply religious. Simon is amazed at Josek's faith, even referring to him sometimes as "Rabbi" even though he is a businessman. Josek seemed to have "an answer for everything," while Simon and others "vainly groped for explanations and fell victim to despair."

Simon's friends demonstrate two sides to a conflict he experiences: Josek's faith remains steadfast, while Arthur becomes cynical about God. Simon is conflicted about God's role in the world and the war, because he is unsure how a moral god could allow the circumstances of the Holocaust.

In fact, Josek was so steadfast in his faith that he often seemed entirely unaware of the bleak reality of life in the camp. On one occasion, Simon, Arthur, and Josek nearly got into an argument over this. They had been listening to the news when Josek sat up suddenly and began to speak about the Creation of man. Josek explained that, at the Creation of man, four angels (Mercy, Truth, Peace, and Justice), quarreled over whether man should be created. The angel of Truth in particular opposed man. God then banished the angel to earth. The other angels begged God to pardon the angel, and He summoned the angel to Heaven. The angel brought back a clod of earth soaked in the tears he had shed, and God created man from this earth.

Josek's story represents one of the most important functions of religion: to help people explain or understand the physical and moral state of the world. His own religion explains man as a unique being, but one whose life is synonymous with the sadness of a divine being. Josek uses the story to explain that the story of mankind was tragic from the outset.

Arthur interrupted Josek, saying that the Jews may have been made out of this earth, but the camp commandant could not have been made out of the same material. Josek tells Arthur the he is "forgetting Cain," but Arthur rebuts that Josek is forgetting where he is. Arthur goes on to say that Cain never tortured Abel, and furthermore the two had known each other—they were brothers—whereas the Germans were strangers to the people they tortured and murdered. Simon intervenes to break up the quarrel, reminding Arthur that "thousands of years of evolution" have taken place since the story of Cain and Abel. Simon reflects, and wonders whether Arthur wasn't right to object to Josek's story. He asks why, if all human beings were truly made the same, some were murderers and some were victims.

Arthur and Josek are referring to the biblical story of Cain and Abel, who were the sons of Adam and Eve. Cain killed Abel. In referring to Cain, Josek draws a parallel to the Nazis killing Jews. Arthur tries to counteract Josek's arguments by saying that their situation and the evil of the Nazis has no precedent in the Bible, and that some things cannot be explained or clarified through religion. This argument is somewhat refuted by the second section of the book, however, as nearly all of the respondents use religion as their basis for how a moral person should act.

Simon returns to the memory of the previous night. Arthur had shaken him out of his half-slumber to tell him what an old woman had said: that God was "on leave." Simon responds by telling Arthur to let him know "when He gets back," and distantly hears his friends laughing as he drifts back to sleep.

Much of the internal conflict Simon feels later in the book stems from his uncertainty as to the existence of God. The events of the Holocaust precipitated a crisis in faith for many of those who suffered.

The next morning, Simon asks Arthur what he had been saying about God the night before. Simon explains to the reader that Arthur, though an old friend and an advisor, thinks very differently from Simon. Arthur is often preoccupied with the future, believing that even if the Jews do not survive, the Germans would not escape unpunished.

Arthur's beliefs are not false; the Germans are ultimately not victorious in the war, but Arthur is also not there to see them brought to justice. In a way, this book is Simon's way of maintaining Arthur's memory and the memory of so many others who were murdered during the Holocaust.

Simon, on the other hand, is much more concerned about what will happen in the present; he is preoccupied with hunger, exhaustion, anxiety for his family, and the humiliations he endures. He feels that he is no longer treated like a human being, and questions whether God in fact has a "definite place" in this "world order"—or if, as the woman said, God is on leave.

Simon makes his internal conflict over God and religion clearer here. It is also evident that Simon's conflict comes from the fact that he is constantly being dehumanized, which supports the idea that those who have lost their humanity also have a difficult time maintaining their faith, and that humanity is inherently linked to faith in some way.


Simon describes the system of labor camps into which he and other prisoners are forced to work for the Eastern Railway works. They are also routinely "registered" by the German overseers of the camps, a word that seems simply technical but in fact refers to when the Germans determine that some prisoners are no longer capable of work and send those prisoners to the death chamber. Simon comments about how the prisoners are forced into a constant state of anxiety and mistrust, when even seemingly benign words like "registered" hide a fatal intent.

The brutality of the SS officers becomes more and more apparent. Simon's description of how the prisoners are treated likens them to animals, literally dehumanizing them, as they are either put to work or sent to the slaughter. Note also how the German's hide their morally deprave actions behind seemingly benign bureaucratic words like "registered" to refer to their sorting of which prisoner will live and which will die.


The work there is not easy, but Simon had felt free to an extent, as he did not need to return to the camp each night. The guards there, who are railway police, are much less sadistic than the SS camp patrols. The Germans look on many of the overseers and foremen at the Railway as second-class citizens because many of them, though German, are ethnically Polish or Ukrainian. These overseers and foremen, Simon recounts, worry what might happen to them when there are no Jews left.

The German anti-Semitism extends past the Nazis, as the ethnic Poles, and Ukrainians feel secure as long as there are other people who can be treated worse than they are, and thus they are silent towards the Nazi regime's violent oppression of Jews.

"Ethnic Germans" sometimes slipped the Jewish railroad workers pieces of bread and tried to see to it that they were not worked to death, which Simon sees as an attempt to demonstrate that they are "more 'German' than the average German." Others, however, had been crueler to the Jews. One elderly drunkard named Delosch beat up the prisoners simply out of boredom.

It is notable that in the confines of Nazi Germany, even these small acts of kindness are spurred largely from a sense of the Germans' superiority and self-interest. An "ethnic German" is a German with German heritage, as opposed to a German with a family lineage in another country (such as Poland).

Simon lines up with the rest of the men from the stable to report for work. He worries that he will not chosen to work outside the camp today, as the assignment from the Eastern Railway works was nearly complete. The alternative, he explains, is to remain and work in the camp, where the greater number of guards translates to more brutal treatment. He describes some of the violence the prisoners endure: each day, Jews are hanged, trampled, bitten by dogs, whipped, and humiliated for the amusement of the SS men. Many killed themselves in order to escape the brutality.

The brutality of the camps is so extreme that many who are subjected to it opt to take their own lives rather than continue to suffer without hope.

Suddenly, a corporal comes over and counts off fifty men. Simon is one of the men selected; Arthur is left behind. These men are escorted by six askaris (Russian deserters who assisted the German guards), who were often more brutal than the Germans. The askaris were very interested in singing, even forming a band. The SS lieutenant, who had been a violinist before the war, was obsessed with the band. To Simon, it appeared he only had two passions: slaughtering prisoners and leading a band. In the evening the band played Bach, Wagner, and Grieg.

This tale of the SS lieutenant who had been a violinist before the war demonstrates that it is truly the Germans who have lost their humanity. Casually equating "slaughtering prisoners" with "leading a band" illuminates how their viciousness has become normalized and accepted.

The band begins to play, and the SS men insist that the prisoners march in time to the music. They are obscene songs, and attract a lot of attention. The prisoners sometimes join in the singing. Simon explains that, as they travel through Lemberg, people stare on the street and sometimes wave, but quickly stop out of fear that they are being too friendly. The people they pass have written the prisoners off as doomed, looking at them like "a herd of cattle being driven to the slaughterhouse. He remembers that a few days before, he had run into a former fellow student, who was a Polish engineer. He had been too afraid to acknowledge Simon openly, but seemed shocked to see Simon still alive.

This is the first instance in which readers are exposed to the ways in which the people of Germany were complicit in the genocide, failing to act in any way to help the Jews in this instance as in many others. The reference to cows being led to slaughter speaks to the ways in which Jews had been thoroughly dehumanized in the eyes of so many who stood by and watched, doing nothing. As the story of the Polish engineer shows, oftentimes bystanders were just as afraid; unlike the Jews, they still had much to lose.

Simon notices a military cemetery as they pass it. He sees that on each grave, there lies a **sunflower**. Simon envies the dead soldiers, believing that soon he himself would be dead and buried in a mass grave. He would not receive a sunflower, as the German soldiers did. The Germans would be superior to him even in death.

Throughout the remainder of the novel, sunflowers will be an important symbol of the importance of recognizing the humanity in others. At various points, Simon will see the sunflower in his mind's eye when interacting with Germans, and will remember the humane treatment he himself has not been afforded him.

Simon and the others continue to walk through Lemberg. They still do not know where they are being taken. A man whispers to Simon that perhaps the Germans have set up new workshops in the Ghetto. Simon thinks to himself that it would be easy to do, because until recently Lemberg had been in the hands of the Russians, but when the Russians withdrew, the Germans took possession of all the factories (many of which had previously been owned by Jews). The Germans had seized the machines from the factories, and were now dividing them up among newly established German factories.

So much has changed since the German annexation of Poland. This passage not only underscores that Jews once held important positions of power in Poland's economy and society more generally; it also reminds readers that the whole vast empire that the Nazis hoped to establish was undergirded by an economic system of production that was entirely dependent on the forced labor of Jews.

The prisoners turn onto Janowska Street, a street down which Simon had walked many times as a student and later as an architect. He contrasts that time with his current situation as a doomed man. He describes the bustling city street, noting the soldiers and peasants who populate the city at 8 in the morning. The "column of doomed men" turns left onto Sapiehy Street, where the Technical High School stood. Simon had walked along this street several times a day when working for his diploma.

Simon's journey through the town reminds the reader that the daily lives and careers of those targeted by the Nazis have been interrupted, and they no longer have the basic human rights of freedom and self-determination.

Simon remembers that even when he had been in school, Sapiehy Street was a "street of doom." The sons of the Poles that lived there also went to the High School and many of them were "rowdies, hooligans, antisemites." They often beat Jews and left them bleeding in the street. Simon is baffled that when Hitler was poised to annex Poland, the only thing they could think of was their hatred for the Jews.

Simon's story reminds readers that anti-Semitism was not a German invention; the Nazis had merely exploited the existing bias of much of Europe in order to carry out their plans. In creating a common enemy in the Jews, the Germans were then able to annex Poland without any protest from the non-Jewish Polish population.

Two years before the war, the Radicals had invented a "day without Jews" during examination days, hoping to prevent Jewish students from taking their exams. A loss of an exam often meant the loss of a term, because many professors would not allow the students to retake it. For Jews who came from poor families, this day often put an end to their studies entirely.

Simon's story of the "day without Jews" shows the harm of silent complicity. Even though a small group of people carried out the crimes, the professors with the authority to stop it or rectify the situation passively allowed it to occur.

On the "day without Jews," ambulances would stand waiting outside the school. The police, who could not interfere in the school without permission, also stood outside. Sometimes a few of the most brutal students were arrested but they always emerged from prison as heroes and were often given special privileges by some of the professors.

Notably, throughout the book Simon refrains from describing the violence against the Jews explicitly (instead merely implying what happened through the appearance of the ambulances), perhaps in an attempt to keep the nuances and complexities of his story from being overshadowed by the horrific violence.

Simon wonders where those Polish "super-patriots" are now. He thinks that the day without Jews may not be far off—only there won't be a Poland, either.

Simon's dark prediction highlights the dangers of complicity in this system that oppresses entire nations and groups of people, which the Polish people never truly seem to acknowledge.

Simon and the other prisoners stop in front of the Technical High School, which has been rebranded as a "Reserve Hospital." They are brought to a courtyard, where large containers are arranged filled with bloodstained bandages. Wounded soldiers sit on benches around the courtyard. One soldier gets up from the bench and comes toward the prisoners, looking at them as if they are "animals in a zoo." He points to his arm, which is in a sling, and says that the Jews and the Communists have done this to him, but that they'll all be dead soon.

The wounded soldier serves as another example of the Germans' anti-Semitism. Not only does this man look at the prisoners like animals, but he also views the Jews as one large group who have committed a crime against him, despite the fact that certainly Simon and the others in the hospital had nothing to do with the man's broken arm.

Other soldiers look at the group more sympathetically, but none dare to speak. Simon stares at the soldier, thinking that the monster would one day have a **sunflower** planted on his grave. Suddenly, all Simon can see when he looks at the soldier is a sunflower. The soldier sees Simon staring and throws a stone at him, and the sunflower vanishes.

Simon's thoughts in this passage are another expression of his crisis of faith as he wonders how a criminal could be allowed to receive better treatment than an innocent victim. All Simon can see when he looks at the soldier is a sunflower, suggesting that the man's bigotry has made Simon unable to see him as an individual.

The orderly in charge of the prisoners leads them away to work. Their job is to carry cartons filled with garbage out of the building. As Simon stands off to the side to get a breath of fresh air, a nurse asks him if he is a Jew. Simon is curious why she is asking, and is surprised that she could not tell based on his clothing and features.

Many of the respondents in the second section of the book point to the nurse's question as a reason why Karl should not be forgiven; he sent the nurse to find "a Jew," in this way continuing to view them as a mass of people rather than individual human beings.

Simon thinks that perhaps the nurse is sympathetic and is trying to slip him a piece of bread. Two months earlier at the Eastern Railway, a soldier had told him that there was a piece of bread in his bag close by. When Simon asked why he did not just give him the bread, the soldier said that this way he could swear with a clear conscience that he did not give anything to a Jew.

This is one of the only times in which a soldier is truly sympathetic toward the Jews and attempts to ameliorate their situation. His act breaks the complicity of following orders, even if he can only help Simon in a roundabout way so that he can maintain plausible deniability.

The nurse leads Simon into the building. She takes him to an upper hallway. He wonders if he should try to escape, because he knows where each corridor leads. At the end of the hall lay the offices of two professors, both notorious for their hatred of Jews.

It is worth noting that even though Simon has these memories and examples of anti-Semitism at the school, when he encounters Karl just moments later he still treats Karl as an individual.

The nurse signals that Simon should wait. He leans over the balustrade and sees a soldier on a stretcher looking up at him. Another fragment of memory recurs: during the student riots of 1936, anti-Semitic students had hurled a Jewish student over the balustrade. He had looked just like this soldier, and had possibly landed on the very same spot.

Once again, Simon's memories point to his ability to see the shared humanity of all people, as demonstrated by his observation of the pain of both the Jewish student and the wounded soldier. Karl and the other Nazis, however, do not afford him the same courtesy.

Past the balustrade was the office of the Dean of Architecture, who was very quiet and polite. No one had known whether he was for or against the Jews, as he had always been aloof. Simon remarks how people had been divided into two groups: those that liked Jews and those that did not.

One could just as easily classify these two categories (those who do or do not like Jews) as those that recognize the humanity of others, and those that do not.

The nurse returns and leads Simon to the Dean's room. She pushes him through the door, where he sees a motionless figure wrapped in white on a bed. The figure asks Simon to come closer. He can see white, bloodless hands, but the figure's head is completely bandaged except for holes for his mouth, nose, and ears. Simon recognizes that he is a German.

Karl's first description makes Simon's compassion even more remarkable. Even though Simon cannot see Karl's face (which is usually the way that humans relate to one another), he still treats him not as "a Nazi" but as an individual.

Simon is bewildered by the figure, wondering whether he might be dreaming. Simon sits on the bed. The man tells him that he does not have long to live. Simon is unmoved by his words, as the camps have made him unafraid of death.

Fear of death is an inherently human instinct, and Simon's lack of this instinct provides further evidence of how he has been degraded and dehumanized.

Simon remembers an incident nearly two weeks earlier, where he saw a dying prisoner. When he found the prison doctor, the doctor simply shrugged his shoulders. He said that six prisoners were dying, and said he could do nothing for them. At the evening roll call, there were in fact six corpses.

The very presence of a "prison doctor" is ironic. The doctor cannot care for dying or sick prisoners, and even if he could, the Nazis would sooner murder the Jews than cure them of their ailments.

The bandaged man says that he wants to talk about an experience that is torturing him. He tells Simon that he had asked a nurse, who had previously brought him a letter from his mother, to bring a Jewish prisoner to him, but that no one could see her doing so—it was too risky. Simon wonders if this man could be a Jew who had camouflaged himself as a German in order to survive.

Karl's experience may be torturing him, but he seems somewhat indifferent to the suffering that Simon himself is experiencing. Karl may be racked with guilt, but he doesn't appear to attempt to work towards restitution with the Jewish prisoners.

A letter slips from the man's hand, and Simon picks it up for him. The man thanks him, saying that it is a letter from his mother. Simon thinks that he will never again receive a letter from his mother, who had been dragged out of the Ghetto in a raid. He had left her with a gold watch, the only object of value the family still possessed, so that she might bribe whichever officer would inevitably come to take her away. Later, Simon learned from neighbor that she had given the watch to a Ukrainian policeman, who had gone away only to come back later and take her "to a place from which no letters ever emerged…"

Simon picking up the letter indicates one of his first simple acts of kindness towards this man who has committed atrocities against people like Simon. Yet Simon still understands the irrevocability of the crimes that Karl and the Nazis have committed, as he thinks of his own mother's disappearance. As elsewhere in the story, Simon contrasts his experience with those of Germans, whose humanity is taken as a given, while Jews are deprived of life's simplest comforts.

The man tells Simon that his name is Karl, and that he joined the SS as a volunteer. Simon understands then that Karl could not be a Jew. Karl continues, saying that he has to confess a crime he committed a year prior. He holds Simon's hand.

Simon holding Karl's hand serves as another gesture of kindness, even as he finds out that Karl is a German Nazi. It is also worth noting that Karl's motivations for joining the SS are never truly explained, leaving many of the respondents wondering how he volunteered to be complicit in the system.

Simon begins to worry that his absence will be noticed by one of the overseers, and they will think he has escaped. He grows uneasy listening to Karl, but hears the nurse's voice outside and feels somewhat reassured. Simon thinks that whatever Karl wants to confess, there would still be a **sunflower** on his grave.

The symbol of the sunflower returns as Simon sees the injustice in the fact that, regardless of the magnitude of this soldier's crime, he would still be remembered and honored.

Karl starts to recount his early life, saying that he was not born a murderer. Karl was born in Stuttgart, and is now twenty-one—too young to die, he says. Simon thinks to himself that the Nazis did not consider Jewish children too young to die. Karl guesses what Simon is thinking, and asks whether he may not still say that he is too young, regardless of circumstances.

Throughout Karl's story, even as Simon reserves compassion for him, he does not forget the millions of others for whom Karl and the Nazis had no compassion.

Karl continues: his father had been a factory manager and a Social Democrat. His mother brought him up as a Catholic. When he joined the Hitler Youth, he stopped going to church. His parents stopped speaking to him about politics, worried that Karl would reveal their reservations about the Nazis.

Many of the Christian respondents later in the novel point to Karl's asking for forgiveness as a sign that he has returned to a moral and religious life, and therefore he should be granted forgiveness. The Christian God is a merciful and forgiving one.

Karl found friends in the Hitler Youth, while his father rarely spoke to him. When the war broke out, Karl volunteered in the SS. His father was ardently opposed. He and the other volunteers had then been sent to a training camp. Karl says that he wanted to be a part of something exciting and grand. At that point, Simon tries to release his hand, but Karl holds tighter.

Karl's explanation still leaves many psychological questions unanswered—for instance, the question of how ordinary men joined the army solely for "something exciting and grand" but lost their compassion and humanity so completely as to be able to carry out mass murder.

Karl moves on to his time in Poland, leading up to his crime. He hopes that his mother never finds out what he did; he supposes she remembers him as the happy, joke-making, high-spirited boy he once was. Simon thinks about his own childhood and the jokes he shared with friends, before questioning whether his and Karl's backgrounds truly have anything in common.

Karl eventually asks for forgiveness, but Simon's refusal to tell Karl's mother about what he has done is actually a much larger gift in that it allows her to live a peaceful, happy end of her life.

Simon wonders why a Jew must listen to the confession of a dying Nazi, and why Karl did not ask for a priest instead to help him die in peace. Simon thinks of his own death, which he assumes will be violent. Remembering the past begins to make him feel weak and he wishes to leave, but seeing how helpless Karl is makes him stay.

Simon's thoughts here anticipate the thoughts of many respondents later in the book. Perhaps Karl understood that he would be easily forgiven by a Catholic priest, but it would be much harder to earn forgiveness from Simon. Yet, in Simon's religion, he cannot grant this forgiveness.

Karl begins to describe his fighting in Russia, but trails off as he feels sorry for himself. Simon looks out the window, looking for a sign. He explains that, in the wake of God's apparent abandonment of his people, "mysticism and superstition" had become much more common among the Jews in the camps. With God on leave, the only hope for the Jews was that supernatural powers might intervene to save them. Such fantasies were the only way of escaping the terrible truth of a world that had lost all reason. At that moment, a fly buzzes around Karl's head, and Simon swats it away and Karl thanks him. Simon realizes that he has, without thinking, "contrived to lighten the lot" of this person who, though an enemy and an oppressor, was equally as helpless as Simon. Moreover, he had done so "without thinking, simply as a matter of course."

The fly in a way represents Karl's guilty conscience in the face of death, and Simon is able to alleviate it somewhat through his small acts of kindness, if not through explicit forgiveness. In the face of mortality, Simon realizes, all people are equally helpless. He seems to feel some ambivalence about how instinctive his humane treatment of the German is. He treats Karl with kindness and respect without even thinking about it. Thus, despite all their efforts to dehumanize the Jews, Simon retains a deep sense of humanity.

Karl continues his narration: when fighting in Russia, they had come to a Ukrainian village and shot at the Russians hiding in a deserted farmhouse. Karl describes the fighting as "inhuman," but says that they had continued "to make history."

Karl seems to begin to understand the inhumanity of war, but at first he only realizes it through his own experiences, not by having sympathy for the innocent Jews.

One summer day, Karl and his unit had pressed forward to Dnepropetrovsk, where the Russians had recently retreated. Karl and his fellow officers arrived at a large square in which a group of Jews stood. He had only come into contact with a few Jews before: a family doctor whom his mother trusted exclusively to treat her, and the Jews that worked at an army base in Poland, for whom he would leave food when they cleaned his quarters. Simon notes that Karl speaks about the Jews with a "warm undertone in his voice."

Again, Karl shows how the Nazi's tactics of dehumanization can be effective not only in demoralizing the Jews but in making it easier for the Nazis to commit atrocities. Here Karl has sympathy for the individual Jews with whom he is familiar, but the Nazi generalizations and stereotypes, on the other hand, make it easy to marginalize people.

Karl explains that they had been told that the Jews were the cause of all the Germans' misfortunes—the cause of war, poverty, hunger, and unemployment. He and the other soldiers marched toward the mass of people, almost two hundred, including many children.

Here Karl shows how he has subscribed to the anti-Semitic generalizations and stereotypes that enabled Nazis to commit such grave atrocities.

The strong men among the Jews were ordered to carry cans of gasoline to the upper stories of a nearby house. The rest of the Jews were driven into the house with whips. Another truck arrived with more Jews, who were crammed into the house. The door was then locked and a machine gun posted outside the door.

Karl's description demonstrates just how trapped and dehumanized the Jews are, when men could be made to carry the gasoline cans that would eventually kill them.

Simon knows how the story will end. He tries to leave, but Karl pleads with him to stay. Simon doesn't understand why he does, but there is something in Karl's voice that prevents him. Simon speculates that it is perhaps his desire to hear the atrocities from a Nazi's own mouth.

Perhaps the fact that Karl acknowledges his own guilt is what makes Simon stay, as most of the other Nazis would not acknowledge any wrongdoing over this incident (which Simon experienced firsthand after the war as a Nazi hunter).

Soldiers had then thrown grenades at the house. Karl had watched as the flames engulfed each floor. The Nazis had rifles ready to shoot anyone who tried to jump. Karl describes a man with a small child in his arms and a woman by his side who had jumped from the second story, and Karl had shot at them. He begins to weep, remembering the eyes of the child.

Karl shows true repentance in weeping at the death of this child and family, yet again it seems that his guilt is due to this singular crime against these three individuals in particular, not the larger crimes he has carried out in general.

Simon remembers a boy he had not been able to forget as well: Eli, a six-year-old who had lived with him in the Lemberg Ghetto. Eli lived near the gate, and sometimes wandered right up to it even though he knew it was dangerous to approach it.

Simon's remembrance of Eli highlights the uncertainty surrounding the question of whether anyone besides Karl will remember the little boy he shot.

Simon explains that Eli is a pet name for Elijah, or Eliyahu Hanavi, the prophet. At Passover Seders, there is a customary cup of wine set aside for Eliyahu. The door is then left open for him and a prayer is recited so that he would come in and drink the wine. As a child, Simon had wondered why the cup remained full. His grandmother had told him that "he doesn't drink more than a tear!" The children had looked on Eliyahu as their protector.

Simon's memory of Eli spurs him further into his memory of his childhood. The narrative returns to its implications of Simon's crisis of faith. They had offered the prophet customary wine, but he had not protected the Jewish children who are now dying in concentration camps.

Eli had miraculously survived many of the raids on the children, whom Germans viewed as useless because they could not work. While the adults labored, the SS rounded up the children and took them away. Adults built hiding places into their homes and the children developed a sense for danger, but gradually the soldiers discovered almost all the children.

These children are clearly innocent of any of the crimes of which the Germans accuse them, but they are killed anyway because the Germans' purpose is to ensure that the Jews have no future as a people.

Eli would often go up to the gate because German policemen would give him something to eat. Once Simon saw him standing by a window, collecting the crumbs which someone had put out for the birds.

Again, the comparison with animals demonstrates how even Eli understands that he has fallen below the treatment of birds.

The SS Group Leader in charge of the Ghetto knew that a few children remained, and so he told the Jewish Council that he would set up a kindergarten so that the children could be looked after while the adults worked. The Jews viewed this as a sign of a more humane attitude, so the parents of the remaining children were gradually persuaded to send them to kindergarten. One morning, however, three SS trucks arrived and took all the children away to the gas chambers. Eli had stayed home that day, however. He was the last Jewish child that Simon had seen.

For all the attempts at dehumanization that the Nazis make on the Jews, it is clear that those who have really fallen below the mark of human decency are the Nazis themselves. The use of deception to carry out the murder of innocent children is perhaps the most chilling act that is relayed in the book, even though the actual violence is not described.

Simon's sympathy for Karl evaporates, but he still does not leave. Karl says that he is haunted by the screams. He continues his story, saying that he and others all had a sleepless night, and could not look at each other. Their platoon leader had scolded them for their sensitivity, yelling that Jews are not human beings.

Many respondents in the second section of the book, particularly the Christian respondents, believe that Karl is truly repentant, and therefore deserves Simon's forgiveness. Simon, for his own part, does demonstrate compassion in continuing to listen to Karl even though he is shocked and disturbed by the incident he described.

Simon hears footsteps in the corridor, and again attempts to leave. Karl tells him the nurse is standing guard outside and asks him to stay. Karl continues: in the following weeks they had advanced toward Crimea to fight the Russians. He pauses often for breath, and cries out "My God, my God." Simon thinks to himself that God is absent, and that the Führer had taken His place in Karl's life.

Again, Simon's uncertainty regarding God makes it difficult for him to know what he believes is the moral thing to do. Questioning Karl's own moral belief also begs the question: if one acts so immorally, does their belief in God matter? Many respondents later make the point that there is a vast gap between Christian teachings and Christian actions, particularly with regard to the Holocaust.

Karl describes the fighting in Crimea, how it lasted for weeks and military cemeteries sprang up everywhere with flowers on all the graves. Simon is once again reminded of the **sunflower**, and how this murderer would own something even in death. As Karl approached Russian-held Taganrog, the artillery fire became incessant. One day, when Karl was given the attack order, he climbed out of the trenches but was suddenly stopped by the memory of the burning family. At that moment, a shell exploded near him.

Once again, the symbol of the sunflower appears as a reminder of the ways in which Germans are seen as humans while Jews are not afforded even the simplest gestures of respect in life or in death. It is clear that Karl acknowledges his own guilt, as his silence and inaction in the face of the burning family now cause him to turn away from violence completely. Stopped in his tracks by the memory, he himself is now gravely injured.

Karl's face and upper body had been "torn to ribbons." The pain had become unbearable for him, and he was moved from one hospital to another. He longs to see his mother, though he knows that his father would only be severe toward him.

Some of the respondents to Simon's question argue that Karl's wounds and death are God's punishment, and therefore Simon should not feel guilty in forgiving him because he has paid deeply for his crimes.

Karl says that the Jews he had killed died quickly and did not suffer as he does, adding that the Jews had not been "as guilty" as he was. At this, Simon stands to go, but Karl holds his hand to stay. Karl says he wishes that the shell had killed him. Simon believes that he is truly repentant for his crimes, but does not say anything.

By saying that the Jews as not "as guilty" as he was, he again reveals his prejudice. Although it is unclear what he believes the Jews were guilty of, many respondents later in the book take this as evidence that his values had not changed despite his guilty conscience.

Karl asks Simon to forgive him for the crimes he has committed, saying that without his answer he cannot die in peace. Simon remains silent for a time, then decides to walk out of the room without a word. He rejoins his comrades downstairs.

Simon's silence at Karl's question stems primarily from uncertainty. Even though many others justify his choice, Simon's primary motivation to leave seems to stem from a willingness to provide compassion, but an inability to forgive Karl in the name of others and a God of which he was deeply unsure.

A fellow prisoner asks Simon where he has been, worried that if he did not return, they would have been punished back at the camp. Simon remains quiet, his mind still on Karl. The prisoners return to the camp. As they go, Simon looks at the people they pass, wondering whether they were just as wicked as the Nazis to look at human beings enduring such torture and do nothing.

Simon's silence in Karl's room, which allowed for empathy, is contrasted with the silence of the German people, which makes them at least partially responsible for the Nazis' crimes.

Simon recounts a story he had heard two days before in which three Jews had been hanged in public. They had been left on the gallows, and someone had pinned a piece of paper on each of them that read "kosher meat." The bystanders had laughed; the only woman who objected was promptly beaten.

Simon provides another example of the dehumanization of the Jews, as well as another example of how the Nazis used group mentalities and fear to silence those who could potentially stand in their way.

When they returned to the camp, Simon explains, they would be made to do exhausting exercises until the SS officer grew tired of his cruel joke. Or if a man were missing at roll call, they would execute ten men in his place as a deterrent to the others. And the same thing would happen each day, Simon thinks, until all of them were dead. As the prisoners near the camp, they are made to sing.

The systems of torture the Nazis use also become effective in preventing prisoners from attempting to escape at all because their aversion to being responsible for having more people harmed outweighs their own individual will to escape. They still retain their morality while the Nazis have none.

When the prisoners arrive back at the camp, Simon sees Arthur and Josek, and joins them for dinner. Arthur notes that Simon looks depressed. Simon looks over at the "pipe"—a narrow, fenced passage running around the camp and ending where the executions took place. Arthur explains that five people had been killed that day, including a boy. Simon thinks of Eli.

As Eli reappears again and again in Simon's memory, it serves as his way of reminding the reader how important it is to remember those who have been unceremoniously murdered in the Holocaust, and to try to honor them as much as possible.

Simon begins to explain what had happened earlier that day, but worries that Arthur will judge him for caring more about Karl than the five men who had been shot that day. He hesitates, but then tells Arthur and Josek Karl's story.

Simon's thought process here encapsulates some of his inner conflict about Karl: he empathizes with him, but he does not want to forgive him at the expense of Jews that he did not know.

At the end of Simon's story, Arthur exclaims, "One less!" Simon is slightly disturbed by the reaction. Another man who had been listening, Adam, says that he would like to watch a murderer die ten times a day. Simon understands Adam's cynicism—he had lost a career, all of his possessions, his parents, and his fiancée. Adam and Arthur move to another bunk where someone is sharing news from the radio.

Simon's inner conflict continues, especially because of Arthur and Adam's reaction. It seems that he fears that he will lose his ability to show kindness toward a dying person, even if that person did commit crimes. In this way, Simon shows that he has retained his humanity despite the Nazis' efforts to dehumanize him.

Josek remains with Simon. He says he had worried that Simon might actually forgive Karl, because he could not forgive crimes on behalf of other people. Simon wonders if the Jews are not a single community with the same destiny. Josek warns him about such generalizations.

Unlike Arthur and Adam, Josek gives a makes religious argument. His logic is echoed by most, if not all, of the Jewish respondents in the second half of the book, who argue that Simon did right by showing compassion, but he could not have forgiven Karl.

Josek explains that he believes in Haolam Emes (which he defines as another world where humans will meet again after death). If Simon had forgiven Karl, Josek reasons, the dead people would ask who gave him the right to forgive their murderer.

Part of the question of forgiveness, Josek points out here, is the question of remembrance. It is important not to forget the victims of Karl's crimes when weighing whether to forgive him, simply because they are no longer alive.

Simon asks what Josek thinks of Karl's repentance and the fact that he was truly in torment over his actions; Josek responds that Karl's torment is only a small part of his punishment. Simon thinks that Karl was looking to him as a representative of the other Jews to whom he could no longer speak.

Simon's concerns are echoed later by some of the respondents who say that Karl deserves forgiveness because of his repentance, and that he could not atone because he had no time to.

At that point, Arthur returns. He tells Simon that even if he had forgiven Karl with superhuman kindness, Simon could never have forgiven himself. He reasons that Karl should have sent for a priest to confess, and the priest would have forgiven him for his crimes. Simon notes the subtle irony of Arthur's words, and asks if there are no general laws of guilt and penitence—whether each religion has its own ethics and answers. Arthur says he believes so.

Arthur here criticizes the aspect of Christianity that offers people forgiveness for any crime simply because they repent for it. Arthur's argument summarizes what readers find in the second half of the book: that different religions have different beliefs, and those beliefs dictate how the practitioners of those religions act.

Simon thinks to himself that the only universal law for the basis of judgement was the law of death, which he describes as "logical, certain, and irrefutable." That night, he dreams of Eli being brought to him. He tries to take the boy, but he only finds a bloody mess.

Simon continues to be haunted by Eli, who perhaps serves as a representation of the Jews that Karl has killed. Simon's desire to honor them holds him back from forgiving Karl.

Arthur shakes Simon awake to stop his screams. Simon says he does not want to return to the hospital the next day. Arthur berates him for his sensitivity to Karl when Jews are dying all around him. Simon sees that Arthur doesn't understand him, and confesses he doesn't want to look at the people in the street, either. Arthur leaves Simon to go back to sleep, but Simon tries to stay awake to avoid his dream. He thinks about how the Jews had tried to integrate themselves into society at large, only to be hated and rejected. The Poles in particular, he says, always treated them as foreigners—even now that the Poles were also subjugated.

When Simon is awake, he seems to have the opposite sentiment from when he is sleeping, and feels that he must forgive Karl. Arthur's argument lacks one realization: that Simon has agency in lessening Karl's suffering, but not in helping other Jews. Some of the Buddhist respondents later say that lessening suffering makes any act justifiable.

The next morning, Simon and Arthur assemble for roll call. The prisoners are split up as they had been the day before. As Simon marches to the hospital, he once again notices the military cemetery with all the **sunflowers**. Simon thinks to himself that Karl would soon join the graves.

The recurrence of the sunflowers demonstrates a slight change in Simon's thinking: where before he had been jealous of the soldiers who received them, now he is preoccupied with Karl's impending death, wondering whether he acted correctly.

Another man in line points out a passerby, identifying him as a "racial German," though three years ago he had been a "fanatical Pole." Simon explains that many people "tried to cover their imperfect knowledge of German by being particularly beastly to Poles and Jews."

The passerby's transformation implies that the more anti-Semitic one is, the more German one is. Thus, the Nazis ensure that even soldiers who are not German are buying into the torture in order to fit in and to avoid torment themselves.

The prisoners arrive at the hospital. Before Simon is assigned a task, the nurse from the prior day returns. She asks Simon to come with her; when he protests, she says a few words to the orderly in charge and takes him aside.

Even Karl's death dehumanizes Simon in a way, since in order to pass on Karl's bundle, the nurse disregards Simon's agency and treats him like a servant, taking him away against his will.

To Simon's surprise, the nurse does not take him to Karl's room, but instead leads him to a storage room. Inside, she gives him a bundle tied in a sheet with an address sewn on it. The nurse tells him that Karl had died the previous night, and that Karl wanted Simon to have his belongings. Simon refuses to take the bundle. He tells the nurse to send it to Karl's mother's address.

Many of the respondents, regardless of their religion, view the fact that Karl gave Simon his bundle as confirmation that Simon did in fact provide him with a sense of comfort, even if he felt he was unable to forgive him.

Simon returns to work, and notes a hearse driving past. The rest of the day he works in a trance. That night, he tells Josek and Arthur of Karl's death. They are not particularly interested, but tell Simon that he was right not to take Karl's belongings.

Karl's motivation for leaving Simon his possessions is never explained, but it is notable that Simon's friends believed that accepting Karl's bundle would have implied a tacit forgiveness, and therefore he should not accept it.

Arthur tells Simon to stop obsessing over what happened, particularly because he could be killed for shouting in his sleep. He says that if the world comes to its senses, they will be able to discuss the question of forgiveness, but at that moment philosophical debate is a luxury that they cannot afford. That night, Simon does not dream of Eli. The next day, they return to their regular work at Eastern Railway.

Perhaps Arthur's statement is what prompts Simon to write the book and to open up his question to the readers after the end of the Holocaust, and why Simon presumably includes responses from people of different faiths. Many of the respondents note that it is difficult to judge Simon for this reason: because they can never truly live inside the circumstances faced by the Jews at that time.

Two years pass, in which Simon witnesses a great deal of suffering and death. He says, "Once I myself was about to be shot but I was saved by a miracle," but explains no further. During these years, Arthur had died in Simon's arms during an epidemic of typhus. Adam was sent to the pipe after spraining his ankle. Josek and Simon were separated, and one day Simon found out that Josek had gotten a high fever. When Josek could not get up for work, he was shot.

Simon's list of the ways in which his friends died demonstrates the magnitude of the senseless violence and inhumane treatment of the Jews. The dispassion with which he recites their deaths only reinforces how desensitized he was and how all-encompassing the Holocaust was.

Eventually the Germans withdraw from Lemberg and the camp is evacuated. Simon moves through Plaszow, Gross-Rosen, and Buchenwald, and lands in Mauthausen. The gas chambers continue to work at full pressure there, and the prisoners no longer have to work. Simon's hunger is unbearable, to the point where he and others eat grass even though it kills some of them because they cannot digest it. He worries that the remaining Jews will be murdered all at once as soon as the Americans approach the camp.

As Simon recounts the different concentration camps through which he had traveled, it becomes clear that his and anyone else's survival is, as he said earlier, a miracle. The Jews' mistreatment and dehumanization becomes so severe that they are reduced to eating grass like animals, even with the knowledge that it might kill them.

One night, when Simon is consumed by hunger, the memory of Karl resurfaces. Karl looks angrily at Simon for not accepting his bundle. Simon screams aloud, and a doctor comes to ask what was wrong. Simon says he had only been dreaming.

Whereas before Simon had been haunted by the memory of Eli, here he is haunted by the memory of Karl. In a way, these two represent the dual sides of Simon's conscience: one telling him to forgive, and the other not to.

During the same night, a man in Simon's bunk dies. He and others try to conceal his death in order to have more space, but the free place could not be hidden. Two days later, a young Pole named Bolek takes the man's place. He had come from Auschwitz, which had been evacuated. Bolek tells Simon about the men who died on the way from Auschwitz, whether due to starvation or because they could no longer walk.

At this point, the Jews who remain alive in the camp have been so dehumanized that they have nearly lost sight of each other's humanity; in this passage, the prisoners can only see the practical consequences of their bunkmate's death rather than mourning his loss.

One morning, Simon hears Bolek murmuring prayers. Gradually, he learns that Bolek had been training to be a priest. Simon asks Bolek what he would have done in his place when Karl had asked for forgiveness. Bolek reasons that Simon could only forgive a wrong done to himself, but that Karl had no one to ask and viewed Simon as his last chance for redemption.

Bolek provides a different perspective than Simon's other friends in the camp. Though Bolek agrees with the reasoning that sins can only be forgiven by their victims or by God, he makes a distinction about perpetrators of murder precisely because they have no one to ask for forgiveness.

Bolek continues, arguing that Karl died in peace because Simon heard his confession. However, he also believes that Simon should have forgiven him if he felt that Karl was truly repentant, because Bolek (a Catholic) believes that repentance is the most important element in seeking forgiveness, and Simon had failed to grant a dying man's final request. Bolek and Simon speak for a long time on the subject. Simon states that the talk was rewarding for both of them, as they had explained their arguments and had a better understanding of each other's views.

This argument marks a distinction between many of the Jewish and Catholic respondents, seen later in the book. For Catholics, only repentance is required for forgiveness; for Jews, one must also have atoned for one's sins.

Time jumps forward, after the war has ended. When Simon is finally freed, there is no home for him to return to: Poland is a cemetery. After the liberation, Simon joins a commission for the investigation of Nazi crimes in order to carry out justice and hopefully regain some of his faith in humanity.

Simon's career path after the war hints at some of his true goals: to bring the Nazis to justice (not forgiveness for the sins they have committed) and to make sure their crimes are remembered.

In the summer of 1946, Simon, his wife and a few friends have an afternoon picnic on a hillside in Linz. As they look out at the sunny landscape, Simon notices a **sunflower** near them. He remembers Karl, and how lovingly he had spoken of his mother. He recalls her name and address, which had been printed on Karl's possessions.

Even after several years, the sunflower still evokes strong feelings for Simon. Yet now it has taken on a slightly different meaning: one of remembrance, not only of the crimes that the Nazis committed but also of the moral dilemma that Simon faced.

Two weeks later, Simon is traveling to Munich and he stops in Stuttgart on the way so that he can visit Karl's mother. He is unsure why he wants to talk with her, but hopes that it will give him a clearer picture of Karl's personality.

Simon once again shows a great deal of empathy toward Karl in attempting to get a fuller picture of his life, and in investigating further whether Simon did him an injustice by not forgiving him.

The world continues to uncover the Nazi atrocities and finds them to be "so monstrous as to be incredible." But quickly, Simon explains, priests, philanthropists, and philosophers ask the world to forgive the Nazis. They would be judged by God, the priests argue, and so "earthly justice" is unnecessary. Simon thinks this suits the Nazis, because they do not believe in God; it was earthly justice they feared most.

After the war, the theme of forgiveness takes on much greater stakes, as it becomes coupled with remembrance. Simon and others worry that if the Nazis are forgiven so quickly for their crimes, the world will also forget the atrocities.

Simon finds Stuttgart in ruins, with rubble everywhere. On walls he sees notices posted by families who have been torn apart and are looking to find each other. Simon walks through the town until he comes to an almost completely destroyed house. He knocks on the door and Karl's mother answers. He asks her name, which is the same as the one on Karl's bundle. She tells him to come in.

It is ironic that society is asking the Jews to forgive the Nazis for their crimes when so many homes and so many families remain destroyed—often irreparably so.

Simon enters the house. Over the sideboard hangs a photo which Simon immediately understands is of Karl, whom she calls a "a good, dear boy." She notes that he died in the war. Simon tells her that he is bringing greetings from her son. She asks Simon when he had seen Karl; he lies and says that, while he was working on the Eastern Railway, a wounded soldier handed him an address and asked him to convey greetings from a fellow soldier.

Simon continues to show compassion toward Karl by obscuring the circumstances under which they met. He also shows his mother a kindness by not correcting her assessment of her "good" son's morals, instead listening to her story.

Simon stares at the photograph of Karl, and remarks at his uniform. Karl's mother explains that he was sixteen and in the Hitler Youth at the time. She disapproved of his joining the movement because she had raised him Catholic. Karl's father had refused to talk to him after he had joined the Hitler Youth. When Karl volunteered for the SS, he went off to war without a word from his father. Karl's father had been passed over for promotions because he was a Social Democrat, but during the war he became the manager. Only a few weeks later, the factory was bombed and he died in the explosion.

Karl's backstory, many argue, makes him more guilty instead of less. He was raised Catholic and yet he decided to turn away from the church. He joined the Hitler Youth and the SS voluntarily and over the objections of his parents. Some argue that Karl still had his morality from his early religious teachings and was attempting to return to that virtuous life; others argue that this religious teaching was not enough to prevent him from committing atrocities, and so he is unforgiveable.

Simon understands Karl's mother's situation: he had spoken to many Germans and Austrians about the Nazis. Most had been against them, but were frightened of their neighbors. Simon wonders about those who had readily accepted the new regime, which had lifted them out of insignificance. But he also sees how this woman's concern for her family above all else had helped criminals climb to power.

Many of the respondents debate whether Karl's mother's continued denial of her son's involvement in the Nazis' crimes makes her complicit in them. Some take the opinion that her denial had allowed him to participate in the crimes; others say that she cannot be guilty for her son's crimes, just as Simon cannot forgive Karl on behalf of his victims.

Simon wonders if he should reveal Karl's crimes to his mother. But he realizes that she was not very different from himself, grieving for the ruin of her family and her people. Karl's mother remembers when the Jews had been taken away. They had been told that Hitler was giving them their own province, but later she found out the brutal truth.

In many ways, Simon's continued kindness through the situation is brought on by his sympathy for Karl's mother, not because she has illuminated Karl's backstory in a way that makes Simon more sympathetic to him.

Simon tells Karl's mother that he is a Jew. She becomes embarrassed, and says that she and her husband always lived with Jews peacefully. Simon agrees that she is not responsible for the fate of the Jews, but that Germans must take on a national responsibility for the Nazi's crimes.

As Karl's mother continues, the question of forgiveness becomes muddled because bringing Karl to justice would also involve hurting his mother, and the pair did not have nearly the same degree of guilt.

Karl's mother tells Simon of a time in which a Gestapo official had come to inquire into a case of sabotage, but had told Karl's father that he was above suspicion because Karl was in the SS. Still, Karl's mother affirms that he never did anything wrong. Simon does not contradict her, nor does he confirm her belief. He leaves her house.

Even if Karl's mother and father never committed any crimes themselves, the fact that they benefitted from their association with a Nazi does inherently associate them with an immoral regime.

Karl's mother's stories give Simon a fuller picture of Karl, but do not help Simon in his predicament. Simon thinks of the Nazis he put on trial, only one of whom showed remorse. Many of them regretted only that witnesses had survived to tell the truth. He wonders how Karl might have acted if put on trial.

Known as the most famous Nazi to show remorse, Albert Speer's response appears in the second section of the book. He argues that Simon provided Karl with a great deal of comfort, and knows that forgiveness would be asking too much.

Simon makes a few final arguments: few Nazis had been born murderers, but they had become murderers on a grand scale. He thinks about how the world counsels him to forgive and forget the crimes committed against the Jews—to remain silent about what they had seen.

Simon explains how remaining silent, forgiving, and forgetting work in tandem to erase the history of the Holocaust. But it is clear through Simon's work that he will not allow any of these things to happen.

Simon points out that he kept silent at Karl's deathbed, and then again with Karl's mother. He wonders about the silence of the bystanders in Nazi Germany as they watched Jews being led to the slaughterhouse.

Simon highlights the different silences that occur in the book: silences of resistance, silences of compassion, and silences of complicity. Silence is thus shown to be far from empty of meaning.

Finally, Simon brings up the question of forgiveness. He states that time takes care of forgetting, but forgiveness is an act of volition. He asks the reader to change places with himself and poses the question: what would they have done in his place?

By posing the question to the reader, Simon allows for a variety of perspectives, often based on the religion of the respondent. But he also ensures, through the book itself, that the atrocities will not be forgotten, even if people believe they should be forgiven.

SVEN ALKALAJ

Alkalaj introduces himself as Jewish-Bosnian, and states that he now finds himself "confronted with the same question and dilemma posed by *The Sunflower*." After the Nuremberg Trials, the world thought that what had happened to European Jews would not happen again, but he points out that there are many parallels between what took place during World War II and what took place in Bosnia decades later, as human life was radically devalued in both cases.

Presumably, Aljalaj means that he finds himself faced with the question of whether to forgive. Alkalaj's words demonstrate how slippery to slope can be from prejudice to dehumanization under the right circumstances. Additionally, Alkalaj's response points out a pattern that many of the respondents follow, which is to state their religion as a means of partially explaining their response.

Alkalaj believes that there are very few who are able to answer Simon's question accurately because they have not endured his suffering. He describes his own experience scavenging for food and living in tunnels, watching entire families perish around him.

Alkalaj's statement implies that judging Simon's situation as a universal morality tale is dangerous because he had been in such specific and uniquely torturous circumstances.

Alkalaj states that forgetting the crimes that have taken place would be worse than forgiving the criminal, because forgetting the crimes "devalues the humanity that perished in these atrocities." He also argues that Simon had no right to forgive on behalf of Karl's victims.

Alkalaj is the first of many who highlight the importance of remembrance, but he of all the respondents perhaps is the most invested in this idea because, as he stated earlier, the world thought this could never happen again, but the Bosnian genocide still occurred.

Alkalaj continues by speaking about collective guilt and punishment, noting that he does not believe in collective guilt but does believe in national responsibility, and that there must be some kind of reconciliation with those who stood by while atrocities were carried on.

Alkalaj makes a distinction between guilt and responsibility—a distinction that Simon had also implied. Karl's mother, for example, was not guilty of her son's crimes, but her denial and silence surrounding them makes her partially responsible.

Alkalaj does not definitively answer Simon's question about whether he would forgive, but he ends by saying that "to forget is unthinkable," and that people must be held accountable for valuing their own lives over the lives of their fellow men and women.

In his conclusion, Alkalaj seems to imply that memory can also be a punishment, in the sense that dehumanizing others comes with the price of remembering the crimes one has committed.

JEAN AMÉRY

Améry introduces himself as a fellow Holocaust survivor. He says that if he had been in Simon's situation, he might have been more forgiving than Simon—or he might not have been. He introduces two aspects to the argument: a psychological argument and a political argument.

Améry begins by explaining the relative authority in his answer as one of the few who can speak familiarly with Simon's experience. However, Améry is also one of the few respondents who does not make an argument on religious grounds.

The psychological argument for forgiving or not forgiving, Améry reasons, is only based on temperament or feeling. He supposes that only slightly different circumstances might have led Simon to forgive Karl. Thus, accepting Karl's request means just as little as rejecting his request, and the psychological aspect becomes irrelevant.

Améry's view contains the idea that forgiveness in Simon's circumstance is largely arbitrary because it is not based on logic but rather on instinct. In this line of thinking, perhaps Simon's compassion matters even more because the question of forgiveness seems so useless to Améry.

The political argument is also irrelevant, Améry believes, because the problem is really a theological one. Améry is an atheist, and therefore asks what difference it makes whether someone forgives another person or not. It comes down to a matter of whether Simon wanted to ease Karl's pain or not.

Even though Améry's ideas are not founded on religion, they are remarkably close to some of the later statements made by Buddhists, who argue that the only factor to consider is whether an action produces suffering or lessens it.

Améry, therefore, casts no judgment on Simon for not forgiving, and believes he had every right to forgive as well. What he finds more important instead is that what he and Simon went through "must *not happen again, never, nowhere.*"

Like Alkalaj before him, Améry believes that the idea of remembrance must supersede any concerns over forgiveness so that these atrocities cannot recur.

Améry ends by refusing the idea of reconciliation with the criminals and believes that there should be no statute of limitations on the crimes of the Nazis. The world should make sure that justice reaches them, and thanks Simon for his work in doing so.

It also seems that Améry makes a distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation. He argues that no Nazi can escape the crimes that they have committed, even if they have been forgiven by an individual. This is referred to by others using the term "crimes against humanity."

SMAIL BALIĆ

Balić opens by saying that now that there have been thirty years to reflect on Simon's question and the matter can be treated a little more dispassionately, he believes that he would have done the same thing that Simon did.

Balić's opening statement confirms some of the fears that the previous two respondents had: that time alone will fade the memory of the pain and suffering caused by the Holocaust.

There are those who argue that because Karl did not injure Simon himself, Simon could forgive him with more ease. These people miss the point of general absolution. Balíc states that he feels bound to summon up compassion for every sufferer, but that atonement for a sin is something that must be settled between the perpetrator and the victim.

As Balić states at the beginning of his response, his beliefs echo Simon's own actions. He does not feel that Simon had the right to forgive, but would have been as compassionate as possible regardless, just as Simon was.

Balić finishes by highlighting *The Sunflower's* other themes, recognizing that those who tolerate acts of torture, humiliation, and murder, are guilty even if they appear uninvolved in the actual crimes. The story also examines prejudices and stereotypes, with which the world must continue to come to terms. *The Sunflower*, he states, provides a good education on this legacy and how to move forward.

Balić's conclusion touches on nearly every other idea presented in the book: the dangers of silence and complicity, the horrors of dehumanization, and the importance of the book itself as a means for remembering the Holocaust.

MOSHE BEJSKI

Bejski first questions whether he is truly able to relate to these events given that he didn't share Simon's experience, and is only able to think about them fifty years after they took place. Bejski writes that, as a Nazi, Karl is a representative of all German Nazis, who collectively committed "abominable crimes" against the Jewish population and were involved in mass exterminations on an immense scale. He thinks Karl's confession was only brought about because of the imminence of his death, without which he would not have repented and would have continued committing crimes alongside the others.

Bejski's question about whether Karl is only asking for forgiveness because he is about to die calls into question the sincerity of Karl's repentance. This refutes the basis of the argument of some of the Christian respondents that Karl deserves forgiveness because he is truly repentant.

Simon, on the other hand, is only an individual prisoner, a witness to these crimes whose entire family has been annihilated. Bejski describes Simon and Karl as representing two entirely different worlds—one a criminal, the other a victim.

Bejski's distinction about individuality is interesting: he argues that the Nazi criminals should be thought of as a collective perpetuating a murderous system, whereas the victims should be seen as individuals, each of whose humanity should be valued.

Bejski reveals that he and Simon had many common experiences: he endured labor camps, concentration camps, and extermination camps. He was starved and made to feel subhuman. He is sure that anyone who had been in Simon's position would not have behaved any differently than Simon. Even if Simon believed he could pardon Karl, Bejski states, this act of mercy would have been a "betrayal and repudiation" of the memory of millions of Jews.

Bejski personally understands the dehumanization that Simon and the others had gone through, and therefore understands his instinct not to forgive because it is more important to honor, remember, and have compassion for the Jewish victims than it is to forgive Karl.

Bejski doubts whether "religious ethics (Jewish or Christian) or an altruistic conscience could lead to a level of self-sacrificing mercy beyond the ability of a human being." He points out that religious belief had declined a great deal in the face of God's silence during the Holocaust, and so it is possible that forgiveness could not be granted in the name of God.

Several of the following respondents are clergyman, and many of them say they would forgive because they believe that God would forgive. Yet Bejski's point about God's silence is also valid; Simon may have felt that he could not make a decision based on religious principles because his own faith had been so shaken.

Bejski points out that the burden of remembrance is now on the survivors, especially because the German people and the world seem interested in forgetting the Holocaust. He notes the number of Nazi criminals being tracked down is dwindling, and that many of these criminals continue to lead quiet, peaceful lives. In his mind, repentance is not enough to atone for these crimes.

Bejski also highlights the importance of remembrance not only for the victims but also for the perpetrators because they should not be able to escape their guilt so easily. Forgetting the crimes one has committed is an easy way to absolve oneself of blame for those crimes.

Bejski concludes by affirming that Simon's silence in the face of Karl's statement and his restraint when visiting Karl's mother "goes beyond what a human being could be expected to do."

Bejski's final point argues that Simon was extremely kind to both Karl and his mother, given the circumstances. Forgiveness, on the other hand, was not an option.

ALAN L. BERGER

Berger, who has been teaching *The Sunflower* for many years, points out that silence is the main character in this morality tale. Simon's first silence, in Karl's room, is an instantaneous and confused decision. The second, in Karl's mother's home, is a conscious choice and an act of kindness. Berger asks whether these silences are the same.

While the two silences spring from different instincts that Simon has, the end result is the same: a desire for compassion, but a withholding of reconciliation. Simon does not forgive Karl but shows him kindness; Simon does not confirm Karl's mother's belief in her son's goodness, nor does he disabuse her of that idea.

Berger speaks to Simon's question, wondering if a person is entitled to forgive on behalf of the murdered. He speaks about the two types of sins in Judaism: those committed by humans against God, and those committed by humans against other humans, and that a person cannot forgive someone who has taken the life of another person.

Berger is another example of those who practice Judaism agreeing with Simon's decision. He draws on Jewish ideas of sin and forgiveness in order to come to the conclusion that Simon acted correctly.

Berger believes that Simon could not and should not forgive Karl. Additionally, in asking for a Jew to hear his confession, Karl continued to perceive the Jews as an "amorphous, undifferentiated mass."

Berger also points out that in viewing Simon as "a Jew" rather than trying to get to know him as an individual, Karl retained his prejudice.

Berger questions whether Karl's repentance was sincere, and if it was, whether it is morally possible to be repentant for such horrible crimes. He worries about the idea of "cheap grace" that would presumably allow Karl to go to heaven, while Simon and other Jews would not (based on Catholic tenets). Berger states that if Simon had forgiven Karl, he would have "sealed his own guilt," because it would have confirmed that the Nazis were beyond the reach of justice—and that would be the "final victory" for Nazism.

Berger finds an interesting intersection between Catholicism and Judaism in the question of whether Karl will go to heaven if Simon forgives him. Presumably, Karl believes he would because he practices Catholicism, and so Berger believes that Simon should not afford him that opportunity even if Simon does not share the same religious beliefs.

ROBERT MCAFEE BROWN

In 1979, Brown attended a memorial to the Jews who lost their lives defending the Warsaw Ghetto. A friend of his made an address whose theme was clear: never forget, and never forgive. He agrees that never forget is perhaps the clearest lesson from the Holocaust, but is less certain about the second conviction.

The memorials serve the same purpose as books like The Sunflower*: they add to a body of work recognizing and remembering the victims of the Holocaust.*

Brown thinks of the images of children in the gas chambers or families packed into a house that is set on fire that appear in *The Sunflower*. He writes that if God forgives such deeds, that strains the idea that God's universe is a moral one. And if God cannot forgive, then humans cannot forgive.

Brown also seems to identify somewhat with Simon's loss of faith, as he wonders how God could forgive the mass murder and dehumanization of an innocent people.

Brown contrasts these cases with cases in which forgiveness can make a difference and empower, such as the case of Nelson Mandela, who was jailed for twenty-seven years and then forgave his jailers. He sees this circumstance as building up moral capital and bringing compassion back to humanity.

Desmond Tutu, a later respondent, also brings up the story of Mandela. The difference between Mandela's story and this one, however, is that he was still alive and could personally forgive his jailers.

In Simon's shoes, Brown states that he would have told Karl to address his plea to God. After that, it is the responsibility of people as a whole to be just, to be kind, to walk with God, and to stand with the victims and the oppressed.

Brown's response, which also denies Karl forgiveness (leaving it to the realm of God) instead supports compassion and virtue on a human level.

HENRY JAMES CARGAS

Cargas opens with the idea that he prays for mercy rather than justice. He acknowledges that forgiveness can be misunderstood—that it can place one human being above another—but that it remains a virtue.

Cargas puts forward the unique idea that forgiveness can be dangerous because it puts the victim in a position of power over the perpetrator, though he dismisses this concern quickly.

Cargas addresses a reference in Christian Scripture to "unforgivable sin," interpretations of which vary. He argues, however, that if there is an unforgivable sin, certainly the Nazis have committed it. He himself would not be able to forgive Karl, as Simon could not.

In seeming contradiction with his first statement, Cargas works out his thoughts in his response and comes to the conclusion that even Christianity cannot allow for this magnitude of sin.

ROBERT COLES

Coles points out that in asking what the reader might have done, Simon is in fact interrogating himself, challenging his own moral life. He then asks that his readers challenge their own moral life as well. Coles, for his own part, states that he would likely have turned from Karl in a "tearful rage" and would have prayed that God would forgive Karl. But he acknowledges that no one can bear judgment on Simon for his decisions.

Coles picks up on Simon's crisis of faith, but quickly turns to answering the question at hand. Though he leaves his own religious beliefs relatively ambiguous, he neither leaves forgiveness to the victims nor argues that he can take it on himself, instead leaving responsibility to God.

Coles points out one additional idea, which is to take to heart what might be Simon's actual intent for the book: that society should never forget what happened to him and millions of other Jews, and that their experience should become a moral legacy.

Coles' theory is certainly plausible, particularly considering that The Sunflower *was reissued with more responses twenty years after it was first published, continuing both its philosophical discussion and the memory of the crimes.*

THE DALAI LAMA

The Dalai Lama makes a succinct opening point: that one should forgive those who have committed atrocities, though that does not necessarily mean one should forget them.

The Dalai Lama, like others, makes a distinction between forgiveness and forgetting, arguing that these crimes should not be forgotten.

The Dalai Lama points to the people of Tibet as an example, one fifth of whom have lost their lives following China's invasion of Tibet in 1949-50. He argues that to be angry and to condemn people for brutality is "not the Buddhist way." He cites another Tibetan monk who stated that while he was imprisoned his biggest fear was to lose compassion for the Chinese.

The Dalai Lama's perspective is unique as one of the few Buddhist respondents to Simon's question. He states that his religion is primarily about compassion (which he conveys by citing the monk's story), and for him compassion equates with forgiveness in this situation.

EUGENE J. FISHER

Fisher acknowledges that it is impossible for Christians to "make a moral judgment on Jewish behavior with regard to the Shoah." He accepts the decisions of those who support Simon's silence. Fisher also notes, however, that in almost all the responses, there is an uneasiness with the "either/or" notion of forgiving or not forgiving.

Fisher's comment about the discomfort with either forgiving or not forgiving allows some nuance into the dialogue. Perhaps that nuance is, in fact, the compassion that Simon showed towards Karl, which provided him with comfort but did not compromise Simon's own morals.

Fisher then explores how Jewish-Christian dialogue has evolved since the first edition of the book. Many Christians question why Jews can't simply forgive the Holocaust, when forgiveness is so central to Christianity. Fisher argues that Christians must earn forgiveness from Jews, and that it is arrogant to expect forgiveness. Instead, he believes, it is necessary to move towards a reconciliation.

Fisher elaborates on the distinctive beliefs between the two religions in real-world examples, not only as it is explored philosophically in this book. He understands the differences in their philosophies, but also argues that Christians worldwide must earn forgiveness for the crimes that so many of their fellow believers committed.

When President Reagan visited Bitburg, Fisher notes that it represented the Christian leader of the Allies meeting with the Christian leader of the Germans at a Nazi cemetery to forgive each other for what Christians had done to Jews, which he and many others viewed as ironic.

In a way, if Simon were to forgive Karl, it would be a smaller version of the irony here because Simon would be forgiving in the name of others (although a distinction must be made because Simon is Jewish, unlike the two leaders here).

Fisher also brings up some of the things the Catholic Church has done in order to make amends. Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy spoke officially for the Church at the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, stating that its attitude after the Holocaust is one of *teshuvah* (repentance).

Fisher evokes teshuvah *here, but Deborah E. Lipstadt later explains that* teshuvah *is only part of what earns forgiveness: atonement is the other piece. The Cardinal's words echo the Christian attitude that repentance is the only thing required for forgiveness.*

Fisher states that the Christian community is asking for the forgiveness of God because the offense is not only against the Jews but God and humanity as well. But he also believes that the Church must then follow through with better lessons, improved New Testament translations, and "changing the face that Christianity presents to Judaism."

This distinct perspective is one that adds a layer to the question of God being able to forgive murder; whereas Jews see it as unforgivable because the victims are dead, Fisher reasons effectively that crimes against humanity are in God's domain.

EDWARD H. FLANNERY

Flannery's opens with a question: whether it is "permitted" to refuse forgiveness to someone who is sincerely repentant. He notes that Simon is uncertain and guilty following his silence, and that his feelings are even more evident when he visits Karl's mother.

Flannery defines Simon's reaction to his actions as guilt, but his guilt is a long way from the guilt of Karl and Karl's mother. Rather, it is more an uncertainty of his conscience rather than a true sense of culpability.

Flannery states that he can understand Simon's refusal but cannot defend it. He believes that Judeo-Christian ethics mandate that forgiveness should be granted to those who are sincerely repentant. The only exception, he notes, is the New Testament reference to the "unforgiveable sin," but argues that that reference refers to the rejection of God.

Unlike Henry James Cargas earlier, Flannery defines unforgivable sin as a sin against God. Thus, even though there are patterns between responses written by people of the same religion, there is still a lot of nuance and differences within individuals' beliefs.

Flannery equates the German bystanders during the Holocaust with Simon's behavior, watching a dying man pleading for mercy. He believes that the question of whether Simon has a right to forgive Karl in the name of all Jews is irrelevant, because Karl did not ask Simon to speak in the name of all Jews.

The comparison of Simon's silence with the silence of German bystanders seems particularly severe. It is difficult to argue that easing a criminals conscience is akin to stopping the mass genocide of an innocent people.

Flannery addresses what he believes to be the primary question posed in *The Sunflower*: whether there are exceptions to the "fundamental norms of ethics and morality." He states that there are usually two answers given to this question: one is that there are universal and basic moral laws, and thus no exceptions can be made. The other, he believes, relativizes moral norms, making them subject to change based on individual needs. He says regardless, he would have forgiven Karl.

Assuming that there are "fundamental norms of ethics and morality" assumes that there is either only one religion or that all religions follow the same philosophy. Yet he does prove once again the norms of those within a religion, providing another example of a Christian respondent who would forgive.

EVA FLEISCHNER

Fleischner believes that Simon responds to Karl's request for forgiveness nonverbally throughout their interaction, by holding Karl's hand, by shooing the fly away, by listening and staying, and later by choosing to allow Karl's mother to keep her memory of her good son intact. Fleischner believes this is a humane response.

Fleischner notes the small acts of consideration that Simon shows toward Karl as examples of Simon's immense compassion, even if he remains silent on the issue of forgiveness.

Fleischner notes that, as she has taught *The Sunflower* over the past twenty years, interesting patterns emerge: the Christian students rule in favor of forgiveness, while the Jewish students believe that Simon acted correctly.

The patterns that Fleischner observes are the very same patterns that can be observed in the responses of the authors in this section of the book.

Fleischner tries to get to the bottom of this difference, understanding that the two religions have so much in common. Both believe in a merciful God, and both stress the need for repentance.

Even small differences in the beliefs of religions can lead to big differences in the actions of the practitioners when it comes to questions of how to lead a moral life.

Fleischner attributes the difference to two factors: the first is a widespread misunderstanding of Jesus' teaching to "turn the other cheek." This is applied to a wrong done to oneself, not against another. Fleischner extends this to argue that only the victims are in a position to forgive, and therefore Simon could not have granted Karl's request.

Fleischner's argument draws on an interpretation of Christian doctrine that falls in line with the opinions held by many Jewish respondents when they argue that only the victims of Karl's crimes can forgive him.

The second factor Fleischner finds in the differences between the two religions relates to atonement. Before the holiest day of the Jewish year, Yom Kippur, Jews look back over the previous year and ask forgiveness of those that they have wronged. Only after doing this may Jews then ask for forgiveness from God.

Perhaps this provides some insight for the respondents who question why Karl did not ask for a priest to hear his confession, but instead asked Simon to hear his confession. It is possible he believed that he needed to ask forgiveness of others before God.

Fleischner points out that Karl cannot atone for his crime, because the victims are dead, and that Simon cannot forgive Karl in their name. She thinks that Simon perhaps could have said to Karl that he could not forgive him, but that God might grant Karl mercy.

Following the logic of Fleischner's previous point, Karl should have asked God to forgive him in the absence of his victims, not another person against whom he did not sin directly.

However, Fleischner immediately qualifies this statement, believing that that asks a great deal of Simon in his situation. She also states that, rereading the story, she is struck by how oblivious Karl seems to Simon's suffering as he makes his confession. She questions whether Karl could have tried to help the fate of at least a few Jews before he died, rather than summoning one to his bedside.

Ultimately, Fleischner argues that Karl's missteps in asking for forgiveness come down to the idea that he still seems unaware of the suffering that the Nazis at large are causing (even if he acknowledges his own guilt) and doesn't seem to try to atone in any fashion, merely asking for his own forgiveness.

MATTHEW FOX

Fox looks first at the circumstances of Simon's story: Simon does not know whether he is going to live through the day, while Karl wants Simon to relieve him of his guilt. Fox points out that the crime to which Karl confesses is not the only crime Karl has committed: "he had participated in, among other things, the death of eighty-nine of Simon's relatives. Indeed, he was partially responsible for the very camp where Wiesenthal was facing death daily." Thus, Fox argues, his confession is only partial.

Fox points out one of the most remarkable and hopeful elements of the book: that even though Simon has been degraded and dehumanized, he still retains his humanity and shows compassion and consideration towards Karl.

Furthermore, Fox writes, Catholics must undergo penance and demonstrate contrition, and Karl was a lapsed Catholic. Thus, in remaining silent, Simon gave him the penance he could give: "the penance of Karl's having to be alone with his conscience before he died." He believes that some sins are too great for forgiveness, and that Simon did right by not forgiving Karl in the name of others.

Fox adds another aspect to Simon's silence: that it is actually a just way of punishing Karl, allowing him to atone for his crimes by having to wrestle with his own guilty conscience.

Fox also believes that Simon acted compassionately: he took Karl's hand and held it; he swatted the fly away; he listened to his story. In a way, this prepared Simon for his future vocation as a Nazi hunter.

Fox, like others, points out Simon's continued compassion with Karl. By referring to Simon's time as a Nazi hunter, Fox implies that seeking justice and being compassionate are not mutually exclusive.

Fox then considers Simon's visit with Karl's mother, where Simon let her believe that her son was innocent. He notes that Karl's mother clinging to her denial was surely a sin as well, a sin of willful ignorance of the sort that made the Holocaust possible. Fox notes that, after the war, Simon's work has been to break this silence.

Unlike other respondents, who view Simon's silence towards Karl's mother as another act of compassion, Fox views that particular silence as a lack of justice, and way of continuing to abet the willful ignorance of the Germans.

Fox concludes by recognizing how Simon's story is still relevant to society today, as people are complicit in destroying the planet and mass incarceration systems. He writes that Simon's story reminds readers to dedicate themselves to justice and compassion instead of allowing them to turn a blind eye.

Comparing this statement to Fox's opening idea, Fox argues that silence is helpful when it brings about justice, but dangerous when it allows people to become ignorant of injustice around them.

REBECCA GOLDSTEIN

Goldstein addresses her response directly to Simon. She wonders why Karl feels he has the right to die in peace. She notes that Karl summons Simon not as an individual but as a Jew—any Jew. Simon, by contrast, recognizes Karl's humanity quite clearly.

Goldstein highlights the continued inequality in the fact that Simon humanizes Karl, while Karl continues to view him as a generic symbol of a people.

Goldstein believes that when Karl turned from Christianity to Nazi ideology, his moral nature did not change much at all. He did not see the Jews around him with whom he was well acquainted (like the family doctor) as human beings. He only began to take pause when murdering them in large numbers.

Goldstein points out other examples whereby Karl showed his bias. Even knowing a few Jews individually in his everyday life did not prevent him from being able to oppress them on a mass scale.

Karl came to see his guilt to some extent, but not fully, Goldstein writes. If he had truly seen his guilt, he would have understood that he was beyond forgiveness and would never have asked for it.

Goldstein's logic here creates a paradox: if Karl had wanted forgiveness, he would have known not to ask for it because he would have fully appreciated the magnitude of his crimes. This again positions murder as unforgiveable.

MARY GORDON

Gordon sees Karl's request for forgiveness as a narcissistic act, because it places his need to be purged of guilt over Simon's need for restitution or recognition of having been harmed.

Gordon's argument supports the idea that Karl should not be treated with greater care or concern than his Jewish victims or than Simon. Karl continues to make himself superior by putting Simon in a dangerous and uncomfortable position.

Gordon writes that forgiveness can be good for both the victims and perpetrators, but forgetting never is, because it is a form of denial.

Like others, Gordon makes a distinction between forgiving and forgetting, arguing that these atrocities should never be forgotten.

Karl is wrong to ask for forgiveness for two reasons, Gordon states. He is asking one man to serve as a public symbol for all Jews. He also misunderstands penance, because he is asking for private absolution to a public crime.

Because Karl cannot publicly receive justice or repent, Gordon believes that he should not be given the privilege of receiving private absolution.

In order to atone, Gordon writes, Karl should have publicly acknowledged his guilt. Then the atonement should match the crime, and Karl should be placed in the camps to die in the circumstances of those against whom he had committed crimes.

Gordon, unlike the other respondents, argues for vengeance. But most of the others do not pose forgiveness and vengeance as two opposite ends of a spectrum; rather, they suggest that the absence of forgiveness is itself a form of justice.

MARK GOULDEN

Goulden struggles to write and think about the crimes of the Nazis, stunned by the sheer magnitude of what happened. He notes that of the 4.4 million people who were condemned to Auschwitz (roughly the population of Denmark, only 60,000 were still alive when the camp was liberated, meaning that 98.5% of all deportees were murdered by the Germans.

The magnitude of the crimes certainly puts Karl's story in perspective. It puts into perspective that if Karl can be forgiven, everyone might be forgiven for their crimes, which leaves a guiltless nation and a mass genocide without a guilty party.

This prompts Goulden to point out that the burden of guilt lay on all of the Germans—those who participated in those acts and those who let them happen—and believes that the Germans have made no acts of atonement as a nation since the war. He sees that the people of Germany, after only thirty years, have been honored by the president as allies.

Even the magnitude of the statistics that Goulden provides does not nearly do justice to the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis. The numbers amount to murders, but on top of that the visceral horrors of everyday life during the Holocaust (including starvation, humiliation, and torture) are often glossed over.

Goulden observes that people don't want to talk about the mass murder of 6 million people, nor do they want to read about it. There have been euphemisms created for what happened to mask the horrors of what occurred. He understands how easy it is to forget.

Goulden combines the silence that has continued even after the war and the idea of forgetting, arguing that silence is what enables those memories to disappear.

Thus, forgiving should come at a greater price, Goulden asserts. He wonders how any living person could forgive these monstrous acts, and whether humans can expect even God to exonerate the Nazis. Goulden concludes by saying he would have silently left Karl's deathbed "having made quite certain there was now one Nazi less in the world!"

Goulden adapts an argument made by others—that Simon cannot forgive crimes on behalf of someone else. Goulden views Karl's acts as part of a mass crime, and an individual person cannot forgive a crime against a people.

HANS HABE

Habe views the answer to Simon's question in this way: humans are not an appeal court from God. God's punishment struck Karl, and Simon should not acquit someone whom God has punished.

While Simon and other prisoners question God's presence, Habe argues that Karl's death is God's form of punishment, and that Simon should not contradict God's will.

Habe believes that murder is unforgiveable, but that one might be able to forgive a murderer after legal punishment had been served. A pardon granted to an unpunished murderer is a form of complicity. It does not foster forgiveness.

Habe stresses the importance of atonement and punishment not only from God but also from fellow human beings before receiving forgiveness.

Habe states that the true problem of forgiveness is that the principles of love and justice seem mutually exclusive, but really they should complement one another. "God punishes and forgives, in that order," Habe writes. One thing God never does, however, is hate. Simon's resistance to hatred is the most important aspect of the story, because life without hatred is the goal.

Habe is one of the few Christian respondents that agrees with Simon's decision (if obliquely), writing that Simon's compassion is more essential than the question of forgiveness. Habe argues that God can both punish and forgive, and so some of the other respondents' focus solely on forgiveness is potentially incomplete.

YOSSI KLEIN HALEVI

Halevi criticizes those who judge Simon explicitly for his decision, saying that it risks repeating the mistake of those who condemn the survivors of the Holocaust for not violently resisting or other criticisms. He points to the immense humanity Simon and his fellow prisoners showed in debating forgiving Karl.

Again, in the midst of completely dehumanizing conditions, Simon and the others found it within themselves to have a rational debate about Karl's guilt, which in and of itself is an act of compassion.

Halevi's essay thus begins not with Simon and Karl's visit, but Simon's visit with Karl's mother. He sees that Simon rejects an opportunity for "vicarious vengeance" in allowing Karl's mother to retain her pride in her son.

Halevi notes Simon's compassion in how he treats Karl's mother. Halevi's statement implies that while he might consider some to be complicit as bystanders, he does not think that Karl's mother should suffer for Karl's crimes.

Halevi speaks about his own experience in addressing the sins of Germany. He was born after the war, but refused to visit Germany, buy German products, or become friends with Germans his age. However, in 1989 he traveled to Germany just after the Berlin Wall had fallen. He visited a Protestant youth club named for a German Jew killed in the Holocaust, and was struck by how innocent the young people were.

When considering the issue of complicity, Halevi's evolution regarding the Germans demonstrates his belief that future generations should not suffer for the crimes of their ancestors, particularly in this case when they demonstrate an attempt at honoring those whom their forbearers have hurt.

Halevi knows that the memory of the past should not be obscured, but that treating a new generation with decency is morally necessary for reconciliation.

Halevi adds to the long list of those who believe it crucial to remember the crimes, but he also allows for a reconciliation with the German people as a whole, if not with individuals who themselves perpetrated the crimes.

ARTHUR HERTZBERG

Hertzberg opens by stating that Karl's personal history makes him more guilty, not less. He had been raised by a pious Catholic mother and a father who ardently opposed Hitler and his followers. Yet he still joined the Hitler Youth and then volunteered for the SS as a young person.

Hertzberg argues that the fact that Karl deliberately turned away from a religious upbringing and toward a murderous regime makes him undeserving of forgiveness for the crimes he committed while a part of that regime. This is similar to the argument that Cynthia Ozick makes later.

Hertzberg notes that in the Talmud, no one has the right to commit murder, even if one is sure that one will be killed for not complying with an order to kill. Thus, Karl should have risked losing his life rather than murdering, and Simon was right not to forgive him.

Hertzberg is yet another example of Jewish respondents who understand and agree with Simon's decision not to forgive mentioning Jewish religious law in their arguments.

Hertzberg argues that even God is not in a position to forgive, because He allowed the crimes to take place. Hertzberg cites the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, when God wanted to destroy cities because most of the people in them were wicked. God told Abraham that if he could find ten righteous people in the cities, He would spare them from destruction, implying that God must also act justly.

Hertzberg's example is a classic form of rabbinical teaching (which makes sense, as Hertzberg is a rabbi), in which the implications of Biblical stories are extended in order to make philosophical arguments about present-day situations.

Hertzberg cannot understand how God could allow the near total murder of an innocent people, and argues that no one can forgive the Nazis in the name of a silent God. The God who allowed the Holocaust, he believes, does not have the standing to forgive the Nazis.

Here Hertzberg also seems to allude to his own crisis of faith over the events of the Holocaust, but unlike Simon, Hertzberg's questions make him more certain about what Simon should have done.

But Hertzberg also agrees that Simon should not have told Karl's mother about her son, because each person should die for their own sins, and not for the sins of others.

Hertzberg makes an argument that others have made more implicitly. This logic can be seen as an extension of the argument that one can only forgive crimes against oneself: likewise, one can only die for one's own crimes.

Hertzberg, who was born in Poland in 1921 and moved to the United States in 1926, is pained by people's attempts to "explain" the Holocaust; after having lost so many relatives himself, he simply doesn't believe there is any way to rationalize the murder of so many innocents. The historical insights, he believes, merely obscure an unanswerable question of how God and man could have failed so horribly.

Behind a clear answer on the question of forgiveness, Hertzberg reveals a more personal pain about how to live in a universe where God allows so many innocent people to be senselessly murdered.

THEODORE M. HESBURGH

Hesburgh states that his instinct is to forgive Karl, because he is a Catholic priest. He argues that humans should aspire to be as forgiving of each other as God is of humans. He concludes by stating that he would forgive because God would forgive, and he is a surrogate for God.

Hesburgh's argument is emblematic of other Catholic respondents, particularly those who are clergymen and speak with the authority of God. Like the Cardinal's later response, Hesburgh argues for Simon to be more godlike and forgive Karl.

ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL

Heschel tells a parable about the rabbi of Brisk. The rabbi is taking the train to return to his hometown. In his train car, an exciting game of cards begins, but he remains aloof. His aloofness becomes annoying to the rest of the people in the game, and after growing more and more annoyed, one of the players takes him by the collar and removes him from the compartment. The rabbi then stands for several hours.

Heschel, another rabbi, also takes on a strategy employed in Judaism and Christianity in using a parable in order to illustrate his point. These stories, which have a basic underlying lesson, take the lessons and create a larger set of morals, which then translate to how one should act.

When the train arrives, the player sees the rabbi shaking the hands of many people, and asks who the man is. When he is told it is the famous rabbi of Brisk, the man asks for forgiveness. The rabbi does not grant it. The man's anxiety becomes unbearable, and the people in the town are surprised by the rabbi.

In this parable, the rabbi stands in for any person who has been wronged, while the player who abused him stands in for the criminal or perpetrator.

When the rabbi's son hears of his father's obstinacy, he asks why he would not forgive the man. The rabbi answers that he cannot forgive the man because the man did not know who he was. The man offended a common person, and so he should ask a common person for forgiveness. Heschel ends with the statement that no one can forgive crimes committed against other people.

The moral of the story—that one cannot forgive crimes committed against others—becomes Heschel's way of reasoning that Simon cannot forgive Karl for the crimes that he committed against other Jews. Thus, Heschel becomes yet another example of Jewish respondents who agree with Simon's response.

SUSANNAH HESCHEL

Susannah Heschel (the daughter of the previous respondent) opens by saying that she would have done as Simon did. In Judaism, two crimes are unforgivable: murder and destroying someone's reputation. The Holocaust, she writes, included both: murder and the defamation of the Jewish people. No restitution is possible, and no forgiveness can follow.

Many of the other respondents focus on murder, but Heschel views the anti-Semitic stereotyping of the Jews to be an equally horrible crime, particularly because this defamation and dehumanization led to the ability to treat them as less than human.

Heschel continues that the Germans have not even fully repented, as they largely minimized or concealed the crimes of the Nazis. Many people who created the Third Reich remained in positions of power after the war by denying their Nazi involvement. The secretary of state after the war was Hans Globke, the author of legislation that gave Hitler unlimited power, and of the Nuremburg Laws that disenfranchised German Jews.

The offenses continued after the war, Heschel argues, because Nazis were able to quickly convince the world to forget their crimes by denying their Nazi involvement. This "forgetting" is an extension of the willful ignorance and silence that occurred during the war, when the crimes went on unhindered simply because no one wanted to risk their own life to address the wrongdoing directly.

Heschel finishes with the thought that the issue is not forgiveness, but how the victims and descendants can live without bitterness or vengeance, and without losing humanity. The descendants of the Nazis should continue to acknowledge the Holocaust in order to preserve their own humanity.

Drawing from Heschel's first point, the way she believes that the Germans can atone for this dehumanization is to remember and recognize the humanity of the Jews that were murdered.

JOSÉ HOBDAY

Hobday introduces herself as a woman of Native American descent, who has listened to the stories of genocide committed against her own people. However, when reading Simon's story, she is reminded her mother's advice when she told Hobday that she should learn how to let go of the poison inside her.

Hobday is one of the few respondents whose philosophy falls outside of Judeo-Christian tadition. Her heritage gives her a unique perspective as he ultimately chooses forgiveness, but for different reasons than many of the Christian respondents.

Hobday says that forgetting and forgiving stem from the same place, and in order to forgive one must also forget. She believes that forgiveness is necessary not for Karl's peace of mind, but for Simon's. No memory should have the power to hold someone down.

Unlike many of the Christian respondents who argue for forgiveness for Karl's sake, Hobday argues that Simon should forgive Karl for his own sake. Notably, Hobday is the only respondent who argues that forgetting could be a positive thing.

CHRISTOPHER HOLLIS

Hollis argues that Simon should have said "a word of compassion," because the law of God is the law of love. Karl was frankly confessing his crime and was sincerely repentant. Had Karl lived, he should have tried to attempt some service to the Jews. But because he was on his deathbed, he could not.

Even though Simon did not say a word of compassion, there were many gestures that communicated Simon's kindness, like swatting away the fly or holding Karl's hand. Hollis also sees the best in Karl by believing that he would have repented and worked toward reconciliation if he had lived.

Hollis views the actions of Jesus at His crucifixion when he prayed for the forgiveness of His own murderers as the "absolute moral law," and believes that Simon should have done the same.

Hollis uses a uniquely Christian argument in asserting that Simon should use Jesus as a model for his own actions.

Hollis addresses the arguments made by Arthur and Josek: that Simon could not forgive sins committed against someone else. Hollis argues that Karl's crime was an incident in a general campaign of genocide, and Simon was certainly a victim of that campaign. His forgiveness would not have been a casual word of someone who pardoned without understanding the magnitude of Karl's crimes.

Hollis makes a good point in noting that Simon's forgiveness would not have been casual, particularly as he decides to write a whole book dedicated to wondering whether he did the correct thing. Yet perhaps Hollis's analysis has a slight misstep: he views Simon as a generic victim rather than an individual, just like Karl does.

Hollis does see Karl's actions as odd in that he asked for Simon at his deathbed and not a priest. If he had in fact returned to his faith, God would surely have granted him mercy, Hollis believes. In his final words, Hollis addresses the "bitter sick joke" about God being on leave that the Jews in the camps made, because God must always be trusted and followed, as modeled in the story of Job.

Hollis's final point implies that there are no extenuating circumstances for either forgiveness or a for a lack of faith. The thesis seems clear: if one believes in God, God will forgive. If one questions God or does not follow Him, one will not be forgiven or welcomed in Heaven.

ROGER KAMANETZ

Kamanetz states that Simon's response to Karl was the best possible response. He makes a simple point: Karl did not view Simon as an individual because he simply asked for "a Jew." While Simon saw Karl as a specific person, Karl did not afford him that same courtesy. Perhaps if he had, a conversation about forgiveness could begin.

Kamanetz writes that the question of forgiveness cannot even be addressed because Karl did not see Simon as an individual person. Again, this form of dehumanization proves that Karl still retains his anti-Semitic bias and has not changed his values.

CARDINAL FRANZ KÖNIG

The Cardinal acknowledges that an individual cannot forgive what was done to others, but he *may* forgive anyway. On the question of whether there is a limit to forgiveness, he looks to the example of Christ and finds that there is no limit.

König follows the established pattern of Catholic respondents who look to Jesus as the primary example of moral living on earth.

The Cardinal recognizes that pardoning Karl would have surpassed mere human kindness. However, he believes that Simon had an opportunity for an act of "almost superhuman goodness in the midst of a subhuman and bestial world of atrocities."

König, like other ordained clergymen in the Catholic church who responded, argues that Simon's forgiveness would have made him godlike, which is what all humans should aspire to be.

HAROLD S. KUSHNER

Kushner argues "To be forgiven is a miracle. It comes from God, and it comes when God chooses to grant it, not when we order it up." He goes on to say that God's forgiveness is something that "occurs inside us, not inside God." It occurs when one finds the ability to act differently in the future. Thus, Karl should have said to himself that he rejected his Nazi life instead of asking Simon for forgiveness.

Kushner's argument provides an alternative to those who believe that one cannot be forgiven for murder. Instead of asking forgiveness from the victims, one must fully reject one's old self. Therefore, Karl doesn't need to ask Simon for forgiveness, and Simon doesn't need to grant it.

Because Karl died shortly after confessing, it is unclear whether he truly repented for his crimes. Furthermore, by summoning one Jew to absolve him of his crimes against other Jews, Kushner doubts whether he has left behind his Nazi prejudice.

Kushner questions, however, whether Karl has truly rejected his old self. In summoning a symbol of a people rather than an individual person, Karl still stereotypes Simon and makes it unclear whether he would have repented if not for his injury and imminent death.

Forgiving, on the other hand, is not something someone does for someone else. Forgiving is most important for those who are granting forgiveness. Therefore, Kushner writes that, for Simon, forgiveness would mean refusing to let Karl define him as a victim. That would be liberating for Simon, while leaving Karl "chained to his past and to his conscience."

In line with other Jewish respondents, Kushner looks at the question of forgiveness by prioritizing Simon's well-being rather than Karl's well-being. Because Simon is still being defined as a victim, Kushner argues, Karl's request should be rejected.

LAWRENCE L. LANGER

Langer argues that role-playing about Holocaust reality trivializes the crimes committed, and that discussion should instead focus on Simon's response. He wonders how someone can repent or be forgiven for an unforgiveable crime.

Langer's opening point is echoed by many others. Langer wants to make sure that the suffering of the Jewish victims of these crimes is not minimized by allowing others to step into their shoes so easily.

Langer also brings up a unique point: how Simon's language shapes the attitude towards the crimes in calling murder "a wrong" and "a misdeed." Language like this has allowed many criminals to obscure or disappear behind their crimes. This leads Holocaust survivors to sometimes blame themselves for acts or consequences for which they are not responsible.

Language has a large part in the act of remembrance. In using euphemisms for murder, or in simply saying that the Jews "died," it changes the perception of the crimes in the public eye and in some cases allows Nazis an opportunity to escape responsibility for their crimes entirely.

The fact that Karl is asking for forgiveness shows to Langer that he does not understand the magnitude of his crimes. Karl is silent on a number of issues, too, failing to explain why he enthusiastically joined the Hitler Youth, why he volunteered for the SS, or why he pursued a career with a league of killers. Simon's silence, on the other hand, makes him innocent of any wrong.

Langer's earlier point about language becomes relevant here as well: Karl is very selective in recounting his life story, perhaps to make him appear more innocent or more sympathetic to Simon. Even though the crime that caused his repentance is horrific, it is surely not the only morally deplorable thing he has done.

PRIMO LEVI

Levi believes that Simon's actions were right because they were the "lesser evil;" for Simon, forgiving Karl would have meant lying, or inflicting a "moral violence" upon himself. Forgiving Karl would have meant releasing him from the terror of punishment, but for Simon, it would have been meaningless.

Like Kushner and others, Levi (who is also a Holocaust survivor) believes that Simon's own well-being should be prioritized over Karl's. He agrees with Simon's friends that forgiving Karl would have made Simon feel even guiltier.

Levi adds that, had Karl not been on his deathbed, he would not have repented until much later. It was also exploitative, as he was using Simon as a tool to unload his anguish onto someone who had already experienced so much suffering.

Levi also argues that Karl continues to cause Simon suffering by recounting how he had committed a terrible crime and by causing Simon guilt in initiating this moral dilemma.

DEBORAH E. LIPSTADT

Listadt's argument centers on the Jewish concept of *teshuvah*, or repentance. In Judaism, *teshuvah* repairs one's relationship with God and fellow humans. What makes humans Godlike is that they have this ability to distinguish right from wrong, and to understand when they have sinned.

In contrast to the Christian respondents who argue that forgiveness is Godlike, Lipstadt argues that the acknowledgement of one's sins is actually what distinguishes humans from other creatures. Simon, therefore, does not have an obligation to forgive.

Lipstadt notes, like others have, that in Judaism one must first ask forgiveness from the wronged party before asking forgiveness of God. She puts this in contrast to Chuck Colson (who was involved in Watergate), who said he did not need to go to the people whose lives he had disrupted to ask forgiveness because he had made peace with God.

Lipstadt here gets at the heart of the largest difference between Christian understandings of forgiveness and Jewish understandings of forgiveness: in Judaism, crimes against people can only be forgiven by those people; to Christians, all crimes can be forgiven by God.

Lipstadt also explains the difference between *teshuvah* (or repentance, which occurs most completely when someone encounters the same situation and chooses not to sin) and *kaparah* (atonement). Atonement, she says, only comes after one bears the consequences of one's actions. She states that the reader does not know whether Karl actually performed *teshuvah*, and he did not perform *kaparah*. Thus, he could not be forgiven.

Lipstadt uses concepts from Judaism to argue that Karl may or may not have repented for his crimes (for he was never presented with the same situation again), and did not atone for them. Simon therefore had no basis on which to forgive him.

FRANKLIN H. LITTEL

Littel explains that the main problem for Karl was that "the only human persons who could have forgiven him were dead." Christians believe that only Divine intervention can release the soul burdened with guilt. He notes that the leaders of the churches seem to do very little in the way of proclaiming the sin and guilt of the perpetrators and bystanders.

Though many Christians believe Simon should forgive Karl, Littel offers an explanation for why it is so puzzling that Karl asked Simon for forgiveness: only God (via a priest) could have truly unburdened Karl of his guilt.

Littel notes that Christian establishments are in "defensive formation," and rarely have acknowledged anti-Judaic teaching and prejudice. They have not, he believes, acknowledged the large difference between Christian words and Christian actions. Littel believes that in order to move forward, public entities must enforce the law, and individuals and groups must be made aware of the choice between good and evil.

Littel also implicates the Church in its own small way, for also being complicit in propagating anti-Semitic teachings. Littel's last point here also carries the implication that Karl did not commit these crimes in spite of his Catholic upbringing, but that his upbringing may have contributed to the prejudice that allowed the crimes.

HUBERT G. LOCKE

Locke homes in on the silence throughout *The Sunflower*: first in Karl's room and then again at Karl's mother's home. He writes that readers should learn from this silence and remain silent themselves, learning from Simon's own choice.

Locke poses silence here also as the ability to listen, which Simon did with both Karl and his mother. Perhaps this is the biggest difference between Simon's silence and the silence of the bystanders; one involved listening and learning, while the other involved willful ignorance.

Locke rejects the idea that speaking means knowing the answer, because silence can be just as authoritative. Silence acknowledges that people are human and not gods. He remarks that even God was silent during this moment in history. If God was silent, he asks, can any of us speak?

Locke argues that being silent and listening allows for the receiving of knowledge. Locke's response is by no means definitive, but he seems to imply that readers should not judge Simon's decision, because no person can claim to be more authoritative than God, who was also silent during this tragic period.

ERICH H. LOEWY

Loewy, who escaped from the Nazis in 1938, writes that not enough has been made of Simon's exceptional compassion in the situation. He views this compassion as an acceptance of common humanity, which he supposes might perhaps have been more valuable to Karl than forgiveness.

Loewy notes Simon's compassion, but also implies that perhaps Karl's true desire was to be treated like a human being, demonstrating that it was the Nazis who truly lost their humanity during the Holocaust.

Loewy understands Simon's refusal to forgive Karl, because he cannot forgive the murder of someone else, nor should he need to point out the possibility of forgiveness from God because he is not a rabbi.

Loewy adds to the long list of Jewish respondents who agree with Simon's decision not to forgive because he could not forgive in the name of Karl's victims.

Loewy also agrees with Simon's decision to lie to Karl's mother, viewing it as a well-calculated and kind decision to shield her from the truth. He finds a lesson in these two visits: that compassion and rationality are both necessary when grappling with ethical questions. Simon exercised both, and Loewy hopes that he himself would have the strength to act in a similar fashion.

Loewy views both of Simon's judgements as compassionate, and views compassion as essential when weighing ethical questions. Even without Simon's forgiveness, Karl felt comforted by his kindness, and certainly Karl's mother would have been devastated by the truth.

HERBERT MARCUSE

Marcuse thinks that he would have acted in the way that Simon did. He believes that one should not be able to murder and then simply ask and receive forgiveness. He concludes simply that easy forgiveness simply perpetuates the very crime it aims to alleviate.

Marcuse, who is Jewish, also agrees with Simon's decision not to forgive, but for a less common reason: what Martin E. Marty refers to in the next response as "cheap grace." Marcuse's worry that easy forgiveness diminishes the seriousness of crimes, particularly those as severe as mass murder, and devalues the lives they destroy.

MARTIN E. MARTY

Marty notes that the question of "What would I have done?" becomes "What *should* I have done?" Marty disagrees with many of the respondents' assertion that all persons in a people must act a specific way. He argues that there is one freedom that cannot be taken away from a person: the freedom to choose one's own attitude in the face of any circumstance.

Marty makes a worthwhile point: that not every person must act the same way, even if they are a part of the same religion. While this seems to contradict some of the patterns seen in the book, it is also true that there are a variety of perspectives, even within each religion, and that every person is entitled to their own moral interpretation of a situation.

As a Christian, Marty writes that he can only remain silent given Simon's specific circumstance. He believes non-Jews and especially Christians should not give advice about the Holocaust for a long time.

Like Hubert G. Locke, Marty advises that Christian respondents follow Simon's silence and remain open to listening and learning.

Marty then asks a more general question: is there a situation in which he might withhold forgiveness in the face of true repentance. His first instinct is that more value would come from forgiveness than from its withholding, but he has some reservations.

Marty's reasoning takes a similar angle as some of the Buddhist respondents, when he asks if there is greater value in (or if less suffering would be caused by) forgiving Karl.

Marty's first fear is "cheap grace," whereby one can commit any number of sins and then be easily forgiven. His second fear is that crimes against a people will be taken less seriously if individual people start forgiving in their name.

Marty's fear echoes Marcuse's earlier: that easy forgiveness makes it easier for those crimes to be committed again. Additionally, he worries about the further devaluing of the Jews as a people.

Marty then addresses whether Germans who do express repentance should be forgiven, and whether it is valuable to prolong a people's sense of guilt. He mentions his own guilt as a white American, a people who also participated in mass murder and enslavement. He wonders whether drawn-out self-hatred and loss of pride is not what Nazism in part sprang from.

Here Marty disagrees with Simon's assessment that the silence of the Germans makes them complicit in the crimes (though it is unclear here whether Marty is referring to future or present generations of German people).

Marty states a final fear: that the victims will be forgotten, or that the Holocaust itself will disappear from memory. Yet Marty still believes that, in the face of these fears, providing forgiveness to someone who is truly repentant can allow both parties to be free.

Marty's final fear is perhaps one that is echoed by most of the respondents: that the crimes should never be forgotten, even if they are forgiven.

CYNTHIA OZICK

Ozick breaks up her response into sections. She first addresses Karl's Christian education, and how this education should have prevented him from growing up to be an SS man, but it did not. She wonders whether worshiping a God in human form (i.e., Jesus) makes it easier to accept an all-powerful Führer.

Ozick makes a similar argument as Hertzberg earlier, but here Ozick seems to indict the Christian religion itself because it allows humans to worship another human, which Ozick writes made it easier for Hitler to rise to power. Judaism, by contrast, insists on the abstract nature of God and prohibits the worship of idols.

Next, Ozick draws on the Biblical idol Moloch, who is associated with child sacrifice. Ozick writes that the Second Commandment, which prohibits worshipping idols, implies that "we must resist especially that killing which serves our belief." In Germany, Moloch began by feeding on Jewish children, but also eventually ate even the little boys who served in the church.

Ozick demonstrates how Hitler is like Moloch because he asked for child sacrifice in the name of a false belief. Ozick sees how that destroyed not only the Jewish children, but the morals of Christian and Catholic children like Karl as well.

In the third section, Ozick juxtaposes vengeance and pity, stating that often people believe that vengeance is brutal and forgiveness is kind. The rabbis say, however, that "whoever is merciful to the cruel will end by being indifferent to the innocent."

Ozick's quote is another form of the argument that forgiveness makes it easier to commit sins, and that forgiveness for murder cheapens life.

Ozick understands that many believe that vengeance is not the answer. She states, however, that vengeance does not combat evil with evil. Vengeance, in her eyes, is the act of bringing public justice.

Ozick highlights the difference between Christian doctrine, which requires repentance for forgiveness, and Jewish doctrine, which requires both repentance and atonement (which means one must be brought to justice).

Ozick compares Karl, who has a moral revelation, to the brute who has no conscience. She writes that it is all the more important to condemn Karl because he had a conscience, and he simply repressed it. He is a moral person, but still sends children into the fire. She concludes by saying that the fly Simon swats away should sooner be with God than Karl.

Ozick takes an opposing view from many who believe that because Karl came to listen to his conscience, he deserves forgiveness more than others. Ozick argues that he deserves forgiveness less because he has a conscience and was still able to commit horrendous crimes. His religion does not spare him.

JOHN T. PAWLIKOWSKI

Pawlikowski focuses on the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. Even though Simon did not speak the words of forgiveness, his conversation in the camp and his unwillingness to destroy Karl's image for his mother implies to Pawlikowski that Simon's innermost feeling comes close to forgiveness.

Pawlikowski's argument forces the reader to question the definition of forgiveness itself. He makes a distinction between private, individual acknowledgement of repentance, and public, general forgiveness. Simon's compassion seems to imply the former.

The public form of forgiveness, Pawlikowski writes, is reconciliation. This process requires repentance, contrition, taking responsibility, healing, and reunion, for which Karl and Simon had too little time. Thus, Pawlikowski agrees with Simon's decision, but notes that he might have offered a sense of forgiveness while making it clear that he could not speak for all Jews, unburdening himself from the uncertainty that prompts him to write the book.

Reconciliation, on the other hand, would have involved a much larger kind of forgiveness, and may not even have been possible because the victims of Karl's crimes were no longer alive. To Pawlikowski's second point here, in a way, Simon did convey his personal sense of forgiveness, because Karl left him his belongings.

Pawlikowski wonders whether Simon's own uncertainty about God is truly what haunted him in his encounter with Karl, in the sense that perhaps Simon was uncertain how to approach Karl and the question of forgiveness in light of his wavering faith.

Pawlikowski's hypothesis does have a lot of merit, because Simon asks people of many different faiths what they would have done. This implies that Simon worries that morality can be somewhat subjective and varies from religion to religion, and thus he asks for advice from a variety of sources.

Pawlikowski concludes by addressing what he feels is an incomplete picture of Polish-Jewish relations in *The Sunflower*. He acknowledges the anti-Semitism that had been present, which Polish bishops have repudiated. But there was also the Zegota movement, the only organization aimed at saving Jews during the Holocaust.

Pawlikowski directly acknowledges the anti-Semitism that Simon depicts in his book, but attempts to create a fuller and more complex picture of Polish-Jewish relations.

DENNIS PRAGER

Prager, who is Jewish, sees that (aside from the divinity of Jesus) the greatest difference between Judaism and Christianity is the difference in conceptions of forgiveness and how to react to evil. In Judaism, he writes, only victims can forgive, and therefore murder is unforgiveable. Tolerance of murder is the characteristic of a "world in decay."

Prager's essay addresses some of the differences seen throughout many of the other essays, just as Eva Fleischner notes them. Judaism views murder as the unforgiveable sin, while Christians argue that forgiveness is limitless.

Prager provides several examples of this difference, including one incident in which a Catholic Cardinal visited a gang of young men in prison. They had been accused of raping and beating a woman jogging in Central Park, and the Cardinal had told them that God loved them. Prager had been furious, and publicly noted that someone ought to write an article entitled "How to Get a Personal Visit from a Cardinal."

Prager's fury is based on the idea that many Christians seem more interested in finding ways to forgive people for their sins rather than condemning the evil deeds in the first place. This idea can be seen in many of the Christian essays in the book. The difference in tone between Christian and Jewish respondents is sometimes striking.

Prager provides four reasons for this difference in conceptions of forgiveness and how to react to evil. First, the Christian doctrine of forgiveness blunts the anger people feel in the face of oppression. Second, the notion that one should pray for one's enemies is taken to mean one should not fight them. Third, the belief that God loves everyone makes it impossible to hate evil people or fight them. Finally, the Christian emphasis on the afterlife has led to a de-emphasis on saving actual lives.

Prager's argument is a good, logical explanation of how different tenets and beliefs in a religion (for Christianity versus Judaism, the limitlessness of forgiveness and God's love and the belief in an afterlife) can lead to different ways of leading one's life, even though both are moral systems.

DITH PRAN

Pran, who is a witness and survivor of the Cambodian killing fields, admits he could never forgive or forget what the top leadership of the Khmer Rouge has done to his family and friends. His father died of starvation, and his three brothers and sister were killed.

Pran also focuses on the idea that one should never forget. Hearing from people who have experienced other genocides only highlights why learning to stop these atrocities is so important.

Pran feels that it is important to make a distinction between the leaders of the Khmer Rouge (who intentionally plotted to destroy human beings) and the individual soldiers on the ground (whom he feels were trapped, uneducated, poor, and feared death enough to be forced to do wrong). Neither group contains moral people, but he feels far more able to forgive the soldiers, and would have forgiven Karl.

For Pran, those who orchestrated the killing are those who should not be forgiven because they not only devalued the lives of these people but they do not even bear the guilt of physically murdering. They are able to claim innocence only through technicality when in reality they are the most guilty.

TERENCE PRITTIE

Prittie tries to understand Karl's motives in asking for forgiveness, admitting that it is only natural when one is in pain and fears impending death to ask for forgiveness for the sins one has committed.

Prittie's arguments center on Karl's impending death, countering those who believe that he should not even ask for forgiveness. Any person in pain deserves compassion.

However, Prittie argues that if Simon were to forgive Karl, it would only be "mock-forgiveness," purely because Karl is dying. Karl should not have been asking forgiveness from Simon, but instead from God. In walking out of the room, Simon did the most decent thing possible.

Prittie agrees with Simon, and extends his argument to say that although someone who is suffering might deserve compassion, this does not necessarily mean that they deserve forgiveness.

MATTHIEU RICARD

As a Buddhist, Ricard believes that forgiveness is always possible and one should always forgive. Based on his religion's teachings, an action is considered sinful if it producers suffering, while a virtuous action is one that brings about more happiness in the world.

Ricard's argument is also implicitly made by the Dalai Lama. Buddhists believe that actions should be taken based on whether they reduce suffering; therefore, Simon should forgive Karl.

Ricard continues by saying that granting forgiveness is not condoning past crimes, but instead acknowledging the inner change a person has experienced in repenting. This offers the opportunity for the perpetrator to escape the "whirlpool of wrongdoing." Finally, Ricard counsels that a Buddhist might have told Karl to pray for his future lives, in which he is destined to undergo much suffering.

Again, the beliefs of Ricard's religion dictate how he thinks Simon should act. Because of Buddhism's emphasis on reincarnation and karma, Ricard believes that Karl is already destined to suffer for his sins, and therefore Simon does not need to add to this suffering by not forgiving him.

JOSHUA RUBENSTEIN

Rubenstein views Karl's crimes as common in a century filled with violence, citing Cambodia, Rwanda, and Latin America. For him, Simon's encounter with Karl brings to mind an incident involving Heinrich Himmler, the Reichsführer SS and chief of the German police, in which he acknowledged how difficult it must be to commit mass murder and remain a normal human being.

The story of Himmler demonstrates that the Nazis believed their biggest obstacle was not killing the Jews, but ensuring that the German people retained their humanity while doing so. It is staggering to Rubenstein that Himmler does not realize how untenable those two ideas are, and how the Nazis have lost both their humanity and any moral standing.

Rubenstein writes that he is completely indifferent to Karl's plea for forgiveness, because Karl seems to have been motivated more by his approaching death than by the enormity of his crimes. Rubenstein concludes that Simon was merciful enough with Karl. To grant forgiveness as well would have been a betrayal of his and his family's suffering.

Rubenstein views Simon's actions of kindness and compassion as going far beyond what Karl deserves; Karl's repentance, on the other hand, was brought about less by his conscience and more by his fear of retribution in death.

SIDNEY SHACHNOW

Shachnow speaks to the experience of a soldier, having spent forty years in the army and thirty-two as a Green Beret. He has undergone the military training devoted to breaking down the aversion to killing. The times that he had killed enemy soldiers continue to disturb him, though he notes he never killed anyone who was not also trying to kill him.

Shachnow speaks as someone who has also killed, but the differences between him and Karl are crucial: he did not kill innocent civilians, he did not kill people based on prejudice, and it appears that he did not ask for forgiveness of someone who could not grant it.

Yet at the same time, Shachnow states Karl does not deserve forgiveness. Shachnow is also a Holocaust survivor. He understands that the misery Karl inflicted on innocent men, women, and children defies any extenuating circumstance. Karl did not deserve forgiveness or mercy, and Shachnow believes that God will send him to hell instead.

Of the differences between himself and Karl, Shachnow highlights the dehumanization of innocent people as Karl's largest crime, perhaps because he also endured this dehumanization as a Holocaust survivor himself.

DOROTHEE SOELLE

Soelle writes that she has two contradictory replies, which she finds that Simon also makes: "No, I cannot forgive you," and "Yes, I can believe your remorse." As a German, she thinks, she may not have the right to say anything besides "no," but as a Christian, she cannot separate herself from an instinct of "yes." She does not know which she might have said.

Simon's kindness does imply belief in the sincerity of Karl's remorse, even if he doesn't implicitly forgive him. Soelle also becomes another in the list of Christian respondents who would have forgiven (even though she hesitates to stand firm on her answer because she is German).

ALBERT SPEER

Speer, a Nazi leader, acknowledged responsibility for his crimes at the Nuremberg trial. Even after twenty years of imprisonment, he cannot forgive himself for supporting a regime that carried out the systematic murder of Jews and others.

Speer's response is unique among the essays because he understands the situation from Karl's perspective, but he also understands that he is past forgiveness because of the atrocities he committed against the Jews.

Speer notes that Manès Sperber (who wrote the following essay) assumes that Simon would not condemn Karl if he had lived and remained faithful to his conviction of remorse. Speer reveals that in 1975, he and Simon sat facing each other for three hours at his Documentation Center, and Speer had been touched by Simon's lack of hatred, which had helped Speer a great deal. He assumes that Simon's compassion also helped Karl, when he did not withdraw his hand or reproach him. He feels that Simon gave him God's grace.

Speer verifies (at least for himself) what many others hypothesize: that Simon's compassion was in some ways more helpful than his forgiveness in easing the suffering of Speer's (and Karl's) guilty conscience.

MANÈS SPERBER

Sperber is unsure how he might have reacted in Simon's situation, but he establishes one principle: it is possible to forget even the worst crime committed against us, and if that happens, the question of forgiveness is superfluous. Without repentance and confession, forgetting is a continuation of the crime.

Sperber joins the respondents who believe that forgetting the Holocaust would be unthinkable, particularly because forgetting the crimes without punishment would essentially render them acceptable in the future.

Sperber acknowledges Karl's guilt, but says that Karl differed from others because he brought the accusation against himself. Still, Simon was right in refusing to pardon him. Yet Sperber wonders whether Simon would still condemn him if Karl had lived and been truly changed. He thinks not, and believes that no one should refuse to forgive a person whose guilt becomes the source of a truly tortured conscience.

Sperber references an argument based in Judaism: he believes that Karl should go unforgiven because he did not have the opportunity to atone. However, if he had lived and had endured some form of punishment, he would have been worthy of forgiveness then.

ANDRÉ STEIN

Stein asks if Karl even had the right to ask for forgiveness, whether his repentance was authentic, and whether anyone committing crimes against humanity should expect forgiveness. He is dismayed by the eagerness of many to forgive child-killers, torturers, and rapists by placing the blame on an ideology rather than people.

Stein makes a similar argument as Cynthia Ozick when she refers to the idol of Moloch. The argument is that killing in the name of one's beliefs is exceptionally harmful. Stein worries here that people's beliefs can be blamed for actions that people carry out—rather than the people themselves.

Stein views true repentance as involving empathy towards the victims. But Karl still thought of the Jew as an object that he could summon and from whom he could expect generosity.

Stein also refers to Karl's reference to Simon as "a Jew" as evidence that he still holds onto the ideology that led him to kill in the first place.

Simon's silence, Stein writes, is the "only authentic means of communication." Simon listened with the ears of those who were dead or close to death, as Karl's story reminded him of Eli, his mother, and his friends. Yet, he still listened to Karl, which served as an immense act of charity.

Stein argues that Simon's silence was not a silence of indifference in the face of someone who was suffering, but a silence of compassion, because the alternative was to speak (wrongly) on behalf of people who were no longer alive.

Stein addresses a few of the other viewpoints that have been raised, arguing that the consequences of participating in genocidal acts should include dying with a guilty conscience. He also wonders why Simon should be expected to act with superhuman goodness towards Karl—i.e., why the victim should be expected to act more morally than the perpetrator.

Stein picks up on the essence of the unfairness of the situation that Simon is put in. Whether consciously or not, Karl and many of the respondents who demand forgiveness are asking Simon to act with extraordinary kindness, while Karl needs to do very little in order to be relieved of his conscience.

Stein states that he is not at peace, however, with Simon's decision to let Karl's mother believe in her son's goodness, stating that millions of people were murdered by a nation of "good sons." Karl's parents are not guilt-free in his joining the SS, and Simon enabled Karl's mother to continue living a lie.

Stein, like Michael Fox, views Simon's silence as a way of allowing Karl to go unpunished in the memory of his family and of allowing Karl's mother to remain ignorant of her son's actions.

NECHAMA TEC

Tec writes that she intuitively knew after reading Simon's story that, for her, forgiveness would not be an option. Her initial certainty was followed by a "flood of arguments," through which she came to recognize the complexity of the situation. As a Holocaust survivor, Tec has been asked whether she thought Jews should stop prosecuting the Nazis, particularly as so many of them are now so old. Her answer had been a clear-cut no, because the survivors have no right to forgive crimes committed against others.

While other Jewish respondents believe that the Nazis should not stop being prosecuted because this enables the world to forget their crimes, Tec takes a different angle on the issue, writing that allowing the crimes to go unpunished is a form of implicit forgiveness.

Tec points out that Karl's guilt over a single family did not seem to include the Jews in general, nor did he show any compassion for Simon. His self-pity blinds him to the suffering of others. Karl himself states "I do not know who you are, I only know that you are a Jew and that is enough." Only Simon's Jewishness matters, making him a faceless representative of a mass of people.

In terms of Karl's forgiveness, Tec's argument is one of the most biting ones, quoting Karl directly to show that he seems uninterested in Simon's personal story and his suffering. Karl is merely interested in Simon's Jewishness.

On the other hand, Tec believes that Simon's actions are remarkable. His silence not only shows an appropriate lack of forgiveness, but also a measure of compassion. Whereas Karl was indifferent to issues that did not bear on him directly, Simon and his friends demonstrated immense humanity in considering the moral implications of forgiveness in the concentration camp.

Whereas Karl has lost his ability to relate to other human beings, particularly the Jews, Simon treats a person who is complicit in the system causing his own suffering with immense humanity and compassion, especially in even asking himself whether Karl deserves forgiveness at all.

JOSEPH TELUSHKIN

Telushkin picks up on certain statements Karl makes, which imply that he is suffering more than the Jews he killed, or that the Jews were not "as guilty" as he was. In light of these statements, Karl's sincere confession suddenly becomes slippery.

Karl's statement that the Jews are not "as guilty" as he is becomes one of his most questionable, and Telushkin picks up on it as evidence that he sees the Jews as responsible for their own suffering.

Telushkin agrees with Simon's decision not to forgive Karl. Even if Karl wanted to die with a cleaner conscience, what had he done to earn it other than desiring it? He believes it is the responsibility of religion to teach people that they should repent evil before, not after, they commit it.

Like Dennis Prager in his response, Telushkin points out a tenet of Christianity that puts an emphasis on repentance and forgiveness rather than on preventing evil.

TZVETAN TODOROV

Todorov reiterates the argument that the only person who can forgive is the one who experienced the injury, and therefore murder is unforgivable. Because Todorov was not raised as a Christian, he considered justice and morality to be far more important than absolution.

Todorov, along with Améry, are the only two respondents who announce themselves as atheists, and their responses focus much less on the question of forgiveness than the question of justice, arguing that Karl needs to be brought to justice.

Todorov questions whether Karl's repentance should be taken into account, because a majority of Nazi criminals felt no regret for their actions. He believes that Karl might deserve different treatment: not absolution, but recognition that he is attempting to change. This is followed by the question of what we can do with evil that is now in the past, and how we can put it to use in the moral education of people.

The Sunflower *itself might be one answer to Todorov's question. Simon uses his encounter with Karl constructively by writing a book that investigates morality, philosophy, and religion, and which remembers the victims of the crimes while still treating the perpetrators with some compassion.*

Todorov concludes that society needs to stop identifying evil with the Other and good with oneself, and begin recognizing that we are all capable of evil so as to be better prepared to reject it in the present.

Like Telushkin in the previous essay, Todorov believes that people should be more compassionate so that they do not have to ask for forgiveness at all.

DESMOND TUTU

Tutu speaks to his own experience during apartheid, and how many people who had been tortured and whose loved ones were killed are ready to forgive the perpetrators, while others are not.

Tutu finds validity in those who are not able to forgive, but finds those who are able to forgive extraordinary. This is very close to the argument of "superhuman goodness" that Cardinal König makes.

Tutu views Nelson Mandela, the first democratically elected South African president, as a model. He served in prison for twenty-seven years. His eyesight was ruined and his family was harassed. Yet he invited his white jailer to his inauguration. Tutu states that this kind of forgiveness ensures that there will be a future.

While Mandela's forgiveness is certainly worth noting, it is also important to see how his situation is different from Simon's. Simon is not forgiving a crime that was committed against himself, which is a sticking point for many of the Jewish respondents.

ARTHUR WASKOW

Waskow theorizes that Karl has shattered the "Four Worlds": Doing, Relating, Knowing, and Being. To forgive, Karl and the person forgiving would need to work together to connect the shattered worlds.

Waskow refers to Kabbalah, a school of Jewish mystic thought, in order to make his argument. He refers to the "Four Worlds," which are spiritual realms that make up the creative life force of God. Because Karl has shattered these worlds irreparably, he is beyond forgiveness

Waskow states that he could not do this, because there is no way to repair the physical damage done to the Jews that Karl murdered. Only in one of the worlds can they work together: the world of knowing. From Karl, Waskow learns that sadism can be mass-produced, as well as the necessity of creating a deeper and broader sense of community among different peoples. He cannot accomplish this with Karl, however.

Waskow, like Tzvetan Todorov, sees the importance of learning even from cruelty and creating a more humane global community.

HARRY WU

Wu recalls his own experience in China's prison labor camps. In 1957, a woman named Comrade Ma accused Wu of "anti-rightist" tendencies, leading him to be imprisoned in a detention center for nineteen years. Years later, when he met Comrade Ma in person years later, he found that he had nothing to say to her. He only wanted her to see that he had survived and had not given in to despair or suicide. She did not apologize or ask for forgiveness.

Wu's experience also ends in a silence, as he finds that he has nothing to say to his jailer, because his survival is statement enough. This is true of Simon, too, as his survival and his writing of the book is a statement of both humanity and compassion, a remarkable thing considering what he had gone through.

Like Simon, Wu would not have forgiven Karl, but also would have understood that he was part of a horrible and vicious society. Karl is responsible for his own actions, but the society shares the responsibility as well.

Like others, Wu blames not only the individuals who carried out the crimes but also the silent society that allowed these atrocities to occur, and which therefore takes on some of the guilt as well.

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