

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a diamond-patterned tile floor. The tiles are light-colored, possibly beige or light blue, with dark blue or black grout. The floor is wet, and there are numerous circular ripples in the water, creating a complex, organic pattern over the geometric tiles. The lighting is somewhat dim, giving the scene a moody, artistic feel.

# 2016 First Year Writing Prize

*Sponsored by the Writing Colleagues Program  
and the Center for Teaching and Learning*

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Prof. Hannah Dickinson, *Department of Writing and Rhetoric*

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Prof. Maggie Werner, *Department of Writing and Rhetoric*

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# 2016 Prize Winners

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## **William Samayoa**

### **“Forgiveness: The Opportunity to Relocate the Light”**

Nominated by Prof. Michael Dobkowski  
FSEM 18: Genocide and the Modern Age

## **Parke Schweiter**

### **“Perceptions of Reality Compared”**

Nominated by Prof. Donald Spector  
FSEM 145: Einstein, Relativity, and Time

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## **Nominees: (Student, Nominating Professor)**

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**Megan Barwick**, *Prof. Peter Mayshle*

**Matthew Blow**, *Prof. Susan Hess*

**Elizabeth Dunne**, *Prof. Laurence Erussard*

**Elizabeth Gahagan**, *Prof. David Finkelstein*

**Annelise Gentile**, *Prof. Donald Spector*

**Caroline Gerrard**, *Prof. Cheryl Forbes*

**Jennifer Morgan Hekking**, *Prof. Stacey Philbrick-Yadav*

**Austin Jennings**, *Prof. Chris Woodworth*

**Meredith Kellogg**, *Prof. Fernando Rodriguez-Mansilla*

**Alyssa S. Kelly**, *Profs. Ervin Kosta & Robin Lewis (2 nominations)*

**Alexander Kerai**, *Prof. Peter Mayshle*

**Tatiana Loftus**, *Prof. Susan Hess*

**Piers Lucker**, *Prof. Ervin Kosta*

**Ryan Montbleau**, *Prof. Laura Free*

**Sarah Olick-Sutphen**, *Prof. Ervin Kosta*

**Mitchell Palmer**, *Prof. Cynthia Williams*

**Trevor Poisson**, *Prof. Laurence Erussard*

**Hannah Rosen**, *Prof. Cheryl Forbes*

**Ryan Skinner**, *Prof. Stacey Philbrick-Yadav*

**Alexus Spann**, *Prof. Scott MacPhail*

**Jonathan Thrall**, *Prof. Scott MacPhail*

**Sarah Walters**, *Prof. Michael Dobkowski*

**Aaron Weitgenant**, *Prof. Robin Lewis*

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# Introduction

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The question of what constitutes college-level writing has been contested for at least a century. From high school teachers to college professors, policy makers to testing companies, educational researchers to journalists, and school districts to boards of trustees, each constituency has an opinion about what college writing is: College writers should forget everything they learned in high school; high school English classes should prepare students for college writing; college writing should emphasize critical thinking above all else; college writing should be practical and prepare students for the workplace; good college writing must be measurable; we know good writing when we see it. These statements represent only a small fraction of the partial, contingent, and contradictory definitions of college writing that circulate in our schools and public discourse. Research on college writing has begun to embrace these contradictions and recognize that good writing is often defined very locally: in a particular course, a particular discipline, or in a particular community.

HWS has recently embraced the process of defining writing in site-specific ways. The FSEM Fellows, a group of faculty who set the expectations and goals for First year Seminars, have spent a year talking about their goals for first year writers. In the coming years, faculty in every department will work together to identify the writing characteristics and abilities most valued by their major. However, it is not just faculty, policy makers, or researchers who should be defining college-level writing. We should also be listening to first year students, like those who we are honoring today, about what it is like to write in college.

To help shed light on the often invisible practices that produce excellent college writing, each nominee was asked to submit a cover letter describing his or her writing process. These letters all have different emphases: the challenge of understanding a difficult prompt, of completing a multi-stepped research process, of writing in a new genre, of revising a piece the writer already thought complete, of learning

really believes in. Taken together, the first year writing prize entries suggest not only that college writing is challenging, but also that college writing presents students with unexpected challenges that promote the development of new writing practices.

This book celebrates the accomplishments of each nominated student and the writing firsts they navigated in their first semester of college. Navigating challenging writing experiences cannot be done alone. Thus, this booklet also celebrates the community of writers, professors, classmates, Writing Colleagues, Writing Fellows and readers who support good writing. Many writers were also involved in the process of discussing and selecting the prize-winning essays: the Writing and Rhetoric Faculty, CTL Staff, Writing Fellows, and jurors representing each division, Charity Lofthouse, Audrey Roberson, and Tara Curtin. We would especially like to thank Will Hochman '74 whose commitment to first year writing has made this prize possible.

We are equally grateful to the twenty-five students who submitted essays for the First Year Writing Prize. It was a pleasure to read such stunning and diverse example of first year writing and learn from the challenging questions, intellectual energy, creativity, and dedication that our students bring to the page. We hope that you will gain as much pleasure as we have from reading the writing contained in this volume.

**Hannah Dickinson**, *Director, Writing Colleagues Program*

**Ingrid Keenan**, *Assistant Director, Center for Teaching and Learning*

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# *Perceptions of Reality Compared*

**Parke Schweiter**

*Nominated by Prof. Donald Spector*

FSEM 145: Einstein, Relativity, and Time

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## **Prompt**

You are to write a 2-3 page paper on the following topic. This paper will be due in class on Tuesday, December 8, and it will also form the starting point for a more general essay you will write as part of the final for this class. Here is the topic:

In *The Fabric of Reality*, David Deutsch has introduced ideas of some versions of realities different from the world we are used to taking as real: the solipsistic notion that what we perceive as reality is actually a product of our own minds; the notion that our universe is but one of many parallel universes, whose presence is indicated by the interference of worlds with their shadows; and the concept of virtual realities, simulations of possible universes that one could, in principle, experience. Compare and contrast these three notions. In what ways are they similar? In what ways do they differ? How does Deutsch use these ideas to explore the nature of reality? Do they all contribute in equal ways? Is his use of these various ideas equally convincing? Your paper should make an argument based on the portions of Deutsch's book that you have read. Be sure you examine precisely what Deutsch means by each of these ideas and how he uses them. I am not expecting you to conduct additional outside research, nor is there an expectation that you will make a reference to other class readings. The assignment is to be typed and formatted as usual (double-spaced, 12-point font, one inch margins all around, stapled, with page numbers and your name on it). Be sure your essay has clear conclusions that the entire essay is building towards; has an opening paragraph that sets the stage specifically (in a way that makes it your opening paragraph, not a generic opening paragraph that could serve any paper addressing this assignment; makes specific references to the book that show you not only have a clear understanding of what Deutsch means by these various concepts but also how he uses; and develops an argument that goes

beyond the surface to connect and distinguish these ideas and how Deutsch uses them, rather than simply describing these ideas. Be sure to proofread your paper carefully. Avoid contractions, and do not capitalize random words. Make sure each sentence is grammatical, and that as you move from one sentence to another, your language shows the connection between the ideas in those sentences. Remember that a paper that takes a clear and bold point of view is generally stronger than one that does not. Remember also that specifics are stronger than generalities; do not make broad, overly generalized statements.

### **Cover Letter**

My writing piece, "Perceptions of Reality", was articulated two weeks prior to the assignment of the final paper for my First Year Seminar on Einstein, Relativity and Time. During our readings and in-class discussions about David Deutsch's book *The Fabric of Reality*, I constantly struggled to grasp the core concepts of solipsism, parallel universes, and virtual reality presented. They were very abstract and did not correlate with anything I had ever considered as being a part of my reality. At the same time, however, Deutsch's argument captured my interest and I yearned for a further understanding of this proposed reality. In order to follow in the direction which Deutsch was bringing me, I needed to break away from my human senses and expand my view to reach an abstract understanding of Deutsch's expansive and complex portrayal of reality. Once I was able to do so, I formulated a piece of writing which explored Deutsch's claims with accuracy and sincere interest.

While my mind was open to understanding these foreign concepts, it proved difficult to encapsulate the numerous defining aspects of solipsism, parallel universes and virtual reality into three pages of writing. Additionally, with the need to compare and contrast these ideas together, I had to be particular about which portions of Deutsch's text I'd reference in my writing. Therefore, I decided to allocate a substantial amount of time to reading back over relevant sections of the book to pinpoint the best-fit quotations to be analyzed in the essay. On several occasions I reassessed the quotations I chose after finding they did not directly correlate to the overarching theme I was aiming for. Also, the brevity of the prompt caused me to omit several quotations that would have in fact

supported my argument to a further degree.

While I eventually reached a point of confidence in the quotations I chose for my essay, I still needed to clarify the exact ways in which they connected to the overarching theme of the true nature of reality. This led me to in-depth discussions with my professor about the precise points Deutsch was conveying about each concept in relation to reality's true nature and their numerous technicalities.

Professor Spector assisted me in deciphering the exact ideology of a solipsist along with the nature in which parallel universes exist throughout the universe. Once I developed a strong foundation for the two, I readily compared them to one another and to the third concept of virtual reality. In turn, when I began my writing process these core quotations spoke for themselves, while I simply added commentary and highlighted the importance of each in their relation to reality.

Overall, I discovered it was hardest to find the best-fit quotations and their exact applications in writing this piece. Additionally, the formulation of this essay stressed the importance of having a concrete understanding of my overall goal before I even put pen to paper. My professor made himself readily available for assistance and taught me how seemingly complex topics can become so clear after analyzing them one component at a time. Additionally, with a wide array of information to address in a short essay, it was paramount to be precise in my purpose for each sentence.

In summation, I am sincerely honored to have been nominated for this prestigious award and presented the opportunity to compete with my fellow classmates in a highly academic atmosphere here at the colleges. Writing this piece was an absolute enjoyment for me as I constantly found myself lost in thought while considering the claims made by Deutsch. My hope is that my writing does his genius justice and all who read it may be led to a deeper knowledge of the true nature of their reality. While I view my piece of writing to be particularly intriguing due to the topics it addresses, I simply ask all who read it to look upon it with open minds and refrainment from any preconceived notions of reality in order to properly understand its abstract principles and fully grasp its purpose.

## —Essay—

The breadth of reality is highly complex and encapsulates much more than what is perceived by human senses. In the book *The Fabric of Reality* written by David Deutsch, several notions of reality are explored. The three primary notions that Deutsch addresses are solipsism, parallel universes, and virtual reality. Solipsism is the idea stating what one perceives as reality is a product of one's mind or considered as a dream. Parallel universes refer to a vast number of universes making up the multiverse, whose presence is made known through shadow particle interference. Virtual reality is the technological simulation of all physically possible environments which occur in the multiverse. Each notion takes on its own assertions in which some aspects agree or disagree with technicalities of others; however, through comparison of these concepts, insight into the true underlying nature of reality surfaces.

In *The Fabric of Reality* Deutsch takes a strong stance against solipsism, declaring it a false conception of reality. According to Deutsch, "If [a solipsist] dreamed evidence of the existence of other people, or other planets, or other universes that would prove nothing about how many of those things there really are" (58). Deutsch explains solipsists believe they may deduce anything they wish about their reality, including the number of parallel universes, but overall their speculations prove nothing about its true nature. On the other hand, when analyzing parallel universes there appears to be specific ways in which they exist, depending upon the nature of shadow particles. Deutsch explains, "[The particles] do not form a single, homogenous parallel universe... but rather a huge number of parallel universes, each similar in composition to the tangible one, each obeying the same laws of physics, but differing in that the particles are in different positions in each universe" (45). Thus, there are not an infinite number of parallel universes, contrary to the solipsistic assumption of reality. This dissimilarity offers the true portrayal of a vast multiverse with each universe assembled under specific properties of particles conforming to the laws of physics and quantum mechanics.

Despite dissimilarities between solipsism and parallel universes, there exists a definite correlation. When refuting the solipsistic point of view, Deutsch claims, "The solipsist, who believes that nothing exists other than the contents of one mind, must also believe that that mind is a

phenomenon of greater multiplicity than is normally supposed” (83). Overall, while the solipsistic view regarding the complexity of one mind is false, it directly translates to the phenomena of parallel universes. While concluding his proof for the presence of parallel universes, Deutsch states, “The heart of the argument is that single-particle interference phenomena unequivocally rule out the possibility that the tangible universe around us is all that exists” (47). By comparing this point about parallel universes to the solipsistic viewpoint, reality proves to be substantially more involved than perceived by our human senses and understanding. The universe is too complex to be reduced to the contents of one mind. Moreover, the breadth of reality is too vast to be condensed into one universe.

Deutsch presents another concept of reality known as virtual reality, which shares apparent differences with the notions of solipsism. When comparing virtual reality to direct experiences, Deutsch states, “What we experience directly is a virtual-reality rendering, conveniently generated for us by our unconscious minds from sensory data plus complex inborn and acquired theories (i.e. programs) about how to interpret them” (120-121). The mind is unconscious and humans do not directly control the ways in which they interpret their experiences. On the contrary, solipsists “trust only the direct experience of their own thoughts” (81), while believing they are the only conscious mind in the world. If this statement about solipsism was true, then the two ideas would be in direct opposition; however, according to Deutsch, “Solipsism is literally indefensible, because by accepting such a defense one is implicitly contradicting it” (82). Through recognition of the false concepts of solipsism, one realizes the mind is in fact unconscious and programmed to interpret situations in a specific manner in true reality. Furthermore, a virtual reality generator could, in principle, create any physically possible event in the multiverse if it is programmed correctly.

Returning to the concept of parallel universes, there are evident ways in which the multiverse goes hand-in-hand with virtual-reality generators. In his description of virtual-reality generators, Deutsch says, “The connection between the physical world and the worlds that are renderable in virtual reality is far closer than it looks...There is no such thing as a virtual-reality environment that the user would be compelled

to interpret as physically impossible” (119). Knowing all parallel universes must also adhere to the laws of physics, any virtual-reality simulation is an accurate portrayal of a universe somewhere within the multiverse. Overall, parallel universes and virtual reality are complements of one another; if one is possible under the laws of physics then so is the other. To better convey the relation between the two, Deutsch claims, “The existence of virtual reality does not indicate that the human capacity to understand the world is inherently limited, but, on the contrary, that it is inherently unlimited. It is no anomaly brought about by the accidental properties of human sense organs, but is a fundamental property of the multiverse at large” (103). The development of virtual-reality is a necessary component to fully understanding the multiverse and thus the breadth of reality.

By analyzing solipsism, parallel universes, and virtual reality collectively, flawed conceptions of reality are ruled out and conclusions about the true nature of reality begin to surface. The majority of these aspects points towards the notion of parallel universes as the basis of reality. In summation, the whole of reality is made up of a large number of universes, all interacting through particle interference and following the laws of physics. Furthermore, as technological advancements in the field of virtual reality progress, simulation of these parallel universes will allow for additional understanding of the multiverse. As a deeper knowledge of the multiverse through virtual-reality generation is developed, humankind will further breach the gap between perceived reality and its true nature.

### **Bibliography**

Deutsch, David. *The Fabric of Reality*. New York: Viking Adult, 1997. Print.

# First Year Writing Prize

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*My FSEM was a course that created many firsts for me as a student, for instance, composting, but also enjoying and being proud of submitting work that was the best of my ability. Having a writing colleague changed my entire experience with writing, because the idea of someone seeing my writing at its rawest was frightening, especially when that person held my future in their grading book. Having my writing colleague there to support me and critique me was the best learning experience that I could have asked from Hobart and William Smith Colleges.*

**-Alyssa S. Kelly**

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*There's a certain vulnerability with asking someone to read your work. You're not only putting yourself in their hands but also implicitly saying, "I trust you to do this for me so please don't let me down". For someone who is a decidedly aggressive introvert, this prospect is in part terrifying, in part completely impossible.*

**-Elizabeth Dunne**

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*I was so passionate about what I was writing I didn't want to stop, so I didn't.*

**-Jonathan Thrall**

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## *e Nominees on Writing*

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*This research paper was the most difficult and most involved piece of writing that I have ever worked on. I never needed to search for and look into so many sources before. I never needed to compile so many sources in order to weave them so intricately into my own ideas and arguments before. I never needed to argue a thesis that delves into such an obscure part of history before. As such, it should be a wonder that I was able to put this paper together at all.*

**-Austin Jennings**

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*Writing became my support, the thing that allowed me to process and internalize the subjects. And at the same time, writing allowed me to paint my emotions, my fears and my ideals on a blank canvas. ... I realized that writing will always be essential to my discovery and reflection of myself and the world around me.*

**-Sarah Walters**

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*I had never completed a factsheet before. I preferred to stay within the realm of typing black onto white with a title as my only creative leap.*

**-Alyssa S. Kelly**

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# *Forgiveness: The Opportunity to Relocate the Light*

**William Samayoa**

*Nominated by Prof. Michael Dobkowski*

FSEM 18L: Genocide and the Modern Age

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## **Prompt**

Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower* explores the issues of justice, forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation. In doing so he probes to the core of the human encounter with evil, drawing on religious traditions, psychology, philosophy, and the personal experiences of victims and even a perpetrator. Focusing on one (maybe two?) of the essays in the symposium, reflect on the following questions: Is forgiving always more moral than refusing to forgive? Is it ever immoral to forgive? Is repentance a pre-condition for forgiveness and what does repentance entail? What does forgiveness have to do with genocide?

## **Cover Letter**

When I first received the email from my FSEM professor informing me of the nomination I almost fell out of my seat. Despite the bitter cold that swirled around me, I felt a warmth begin to radiate out from my chest. It was the burning fire of pride. This nomination is significant to me because it validated that the hours of conversation and myriad of pages I scribed in really did create a piece rich of rhetoric and eloquence. I am writing this letter to both express the enormous joy this nomination has produced in me and secondly, to reveal how this essay and I achieved this honor.

At the time I was assigned this essay, which required me to explore the concept of forgiveness in the context of genocide, I was struggling with my own personal definition of forgiveness. I saw this essay as more than just a paper I had to turn in, I saw it as an opportunity to really explore within myself to find what I thought forgiveness was. When it came to begin writing, I noticed that rather than filling up my notebook pages with my usual tree of ideas, I found my words and ideas filling up the room. I

had always found that my mind was clearer after I expelled my thoughts into the world with words, giving them shape and meaning. My Writing Colleague had managed to transform my empty rambling into a journey of inspiration. As we conversed she would notify me when an interesting idea lingered in the air. I made sure to capture this moment on paper, and I wrote down every time a potential point was produced. I then placed this paper down and chose the avenue I would follow. The first thing I wrote, which took several hours to do, was my introductory paragraph. I took this piece to my professor and we continued the conversation. He read over the paragraph and asked me how I would give merit to my argument about forgiveness. As I verbally constructed my justifications I noticed that he was able to aid me in focusing and strengthening my ideas. I jotted down these ideas, and before I left his office hours I realized that what I had created was my initial outline. Equipped with a blueprint for my essay, the concreteness of my arguments, and the foundation of my introduction, I began the essay's construction.

When I left the informative meeting for the FYWP I found that one point resonated with me. The committee would be professors and fellows from across disciplines. I understood that my essay was strong, but its' audience was limited. I scheduled a meeting with a Writing Fellow the Monday right after the meeting. I started our meeting with a conversation and I told her how I wanted to expand the scope of my essay and refine it. She was enthusiastic that I told her this, and every time she found something that she wanted to know more of I made sure to circle that paragraph. I then took the essay and paragraph my paragraph edited and revised it, I wanted to make sure that every single part of this paper reflected my thesis. After meeting with one Fellow, I returned for another appointment to gain another perspective. As I conversed with more Fellows, I wanted to hear each interpretation of the essay they held. I wanted to know if my argument was clear and universally understood.

After seeking multiple perspectives, I decided to get some space from the essay. I remember walking into the CTL not expecting to work on the essay for the completion, I was looking to work on another essay. Yet, I found myself relying on this new insight of my writing process again. After the Writing Fellow read the essay we engaged in similar conversation I

had engaged in the last few weeks. I was beginning to understand that no matter my essay, I wanted to talk about it to really give life to the ideas that I sometimes could not directly expel. Understanding this element of my writing process, I asked the Fellow to give my FYWP essay another glance over. This would supply another eye and dialogue that would aid evolution of this essay, and the same fire arose when he said he thought it was ready for submission. I was so proud because this essay reflected the hours of labor and nurturing I had invested into growing the paper. When I met with my current Writing Colleague, our conversation revolved around how I felt regarding submission. As we spoke I remember writing down a line that stuck with me as I wrote this cover letter.

I was beginning to understand that I was not just seeking to converse with many simply because I wanted more revision advice, I genuinely wanted this essay to grow and prosper so that I simultaneously became a stronger writer. Through the past weeks I found myself spending more time talking rather than writing, not only in this essay but for all my other writings. I have understood that my writing process begins with me exploring my ideas, taking an ownership of my knowledge, and then making sure it is clear and compelling to my potential readers. My writing process reflects my own idea that writing is never stagnant, it is an art that exists in many dimension and is not limited by space or time.

I am grateful for this nomination not only because it verified in me that I could write well, but because in revising and improving this essay I discovered how I could become a great writer. Once again, many thanks for this consideration and happy readings!

### —Essay—

Those who study genocide must criticize the response of all those involved (i.e. victims, perpetrators, as well as witnesses), but they must also imagine what they would do if they found themselves in one of those roles. While many scholars, and scholarship, have discussed this one aspect of the crime of genocide, there is another aspect that is almost never explored. This forgotten element is the act of forgiveness; a process that seems to have no connection to the action of genocide is creatively constructed by writer Simon Wiesenthal. In his book *The Sunflower*, Wiesenthal retells the experience of when he was entrapped in a concentration camp and was brought to a dying SS soldier who sought

forgiveness for his sins. Wiesenthal further complicates the reader's experience by following the main narrative with a symposium of essays written by individuals of vastly different standings whom all reply to the question: "What would I have done?" Through Wiesenthal's firsthand account and the replies of two other notable individuals, one realizes that while there exist exceptions, forgiveness is always the most righteous action for a genocide victim, and it should be done to ensure the genocide is not a success.

To fully analyze and appreciate the morality in offering forgiveness, one must first understand what it is and what it entails. For the purpose of this paper, the definition of forgiveness employed is one provided by symposium correspondent Rabbi Harold S. Kushner. He defines the act of forgiveness as "...a letting go of the sense of grievance, and perhaps most importantly a letting go of the role of victim" (186). Kushner's definition is important because it is specific and relevant to the atrocity of mass murder. He states that forgiveness is not the act of ignoring the death that occurred, but rather embracing the life that is left. This is a crucial process because while the killing may end, the effects still echo. These effects exist in the fear that manifests in survivors and in the second memory of later generations. In order to guarantee that the perpetrators are not victorious in their actions of destroying a people (victory being that the victims live with their grievances), the victims must forgive the crime committed upon them. The victims do not forgive for the killer's sake, but to gain self-closure so that they may end the chapter of living with fear, and begin a new one devoted to life's beauty. It should then be evident that granting forgiveness in the case of mass murder is more moral than refusing it. As Kushner reiterates, "...[to] refuse to give [the perpetrator] the power to define me as a victim [and to] refuse to let [the murders] blind hatred defines the shape and content of my Jewishness" (186). Kushner's motivation for forgiving reveals that while one considers it moral to pertain to how one treat others, it also applies to how one treats themselves. One could assume that when an injustice, like murder, is performed on them they have the desire to reciprocate with something equally evil. The morality of self is needed here for the victim to not only resist their primal urges, but to also allow themselves to find closure. The victim must be moral and apply forgiveness so that they are not

consumed by their inner evil urges, and are able to engage in all the remaining good in their world. By forgiving, one is able to subdue evil internally and not allow it to percolate into the exterior world.

Equipped with a clear definition of forgiveness and its effects one must understand that while it is considered a moral act, there are times when forgiveness cannot be granted. One scenario in which forgiveness could not be processed occurred to a young Wiesenthal. As portrayed in *The Sunflower's* main narrative, Simon and a lot of fellow prisoners are taken to his old high school which has turned into a hospital where the prisoners would spend the day working. While the group is being dispersed, a nurse manages to take Simon aside and takes him to where the dying SS soldier, Karl, awaits him. Karl promptly begins to confess to Simon about the various killings and evils he has committed, and how haunted he is by his actions. When Karl concludes his cathartic confession he tells Simon "I do not know who you are, I only know that you are a Jew and that is enough...while I have waited for death, time and time again I have longed to talk about it to a Jew and beg forgiveness from him" (54). As Karl reveals all of his victims are dead, and using the definition provided by Kushner, the conditions are not present to give forgiveness. In order to forgive in the Jewish faith, the victim must actively and consciously make the decision to create closure. Yet, with all who suffered because of Karl being dead, they lack the opportunity to do so. As further emphasized by Simon's late acquaintance Josek, Simon "...suffered nothing because of him, and it follows that what he has done to other people [Simon is] in no position to forgive" (65). This returns to Kushner's definition of forgiveness because it concretizes the claim that forgiveness can only occur between actors of the same scene. The only individual allowed to forgive is the one who suffered under a particular victimizer.

In the case of the Jews, the Nazi regime stole all of the former's freedoms and possessions. The few whom survived were left with only their memories and the choice to either retain resentment or make peace with the past. If Simon granted Karl forgiveness based on those who died under Karl's actions, he would have granted the final victory to the Nazis. To reiterate, forgiveness is a personal matter and one cannot grant it on behalf of another. Simon being Jewish understood that because Karl did not apologize while his victims were alive, they were unable to begin the

process of achieving closure. Simon also respected the fact that granting forgiveness was a right that belonged to Karl's particular victims solely. By remaining silent and not granting it, he allowed the victims to die with their last right in tact; the right to forgive or not, not allowing the Nazis to have fully stolen all the victim's rights. Forgiveness is only appropriate when granted by specific people towards specific crimes, otherwise it is an immoral stripping of rights.

Another key point discussed in *The Sunflower's* symposium is the distinction between forgiveness and repentance, and how the latter is merely a part of the process of holistic forgiveness. In the symposium essay by Deborah Lipstadt, she spends a fair amount of time arguing that in Jewish tradition to earn repentance, one must undergo many steps which ultimately lead to a collective forgiveness. She states that first, the sinner must have a human interaction with his victim and apologize, then turn to God and express remorse and vow to never commit the same crime, and lastly, prove so by being in a similar situation and consciously choosing to not commit the sin again (194-5). By undergoing a process of seeking peace with various forces, one is really seeking repentance first, which is different from forgiveness. Forgiveness entails creating closure and releasing ill will, whereas repentance is the act of acknowledging one's crimes and demonstrating a changed character. Repentance relies on an exterior display, while forgiveness exists in one's soul. While Karl attempted to earn forgiveness for his crimes against the Jews, he failed to do so because he was not able to repent to all the necessary forces. While he did retain his faith, Karl was unable to acknowledge his crime due to all those whom he sinned against being dead. Karl may have verbally expressed remorse, but due to his severely burned body, he was unable to go out into the world and encounter a similar scene. The only way to confirm that Karl's ethics changed would have been to witness his treatment of the Jews he would have encountered, and see if he would kill them or aid them escape. Simon, conscious of his Jewish traditions, remained silent because while Karl attempted to repent, he did not undergo the whole process to earn a true forgiveness. Repentance is a process that requires a public display of remorse in order to accumulate to earn a holistic forgiveness that guarantees both parties an opportunity to live a live free of grievances.

Across genocide studies it is generally agreed that the perpetrators ultimate goal is to dehumanize a specific group, through systematic killing, and then in the expectation of the victims' retention of all consuming grief. It then becomes evident that the role of forgiveness in a genocide is that it ensures that the victim is not perpetually entrapped in a cycle of emotional, physical, and psychological abuse. Wiesenthal confesses in his narrative that when liberation finally arrived for him "...there was no home to return to...[everything] reminded [him] of the tragedy which [he] barely survived," he then decides to join a commission to locate Nazis in order to "regain [his] faith in humanity and in the things which mankind needs in life besides the material" (83-4). The significance of Wiesenthal's choice is that it shows how pervasively the Holocaust effected him, to the point where he could no longer see hope for humanity or life itself. His method of seeking closure then came from being able to consciously make a decision and confront those who had tortured him and thousands of others. However, the value of forgiveness exists in the latter part of his account where he states that he then devoted his life to rekindle his faith and morality.

By seeking out criminals and bringing them to justice Wiesenthal was forcing the killers to repent, channeling Lipstadt's methodology. While also regaining his ability to make consciously make his own decisions. Wiesenthal had to consciously decide that he no longer would be the victim and found closure with his feelings of vulnerability, what Kushner defines as forgiveness' intent, and then was able to confront the perpetrators. Wiesenthal further demonstrates the role of forgiveness in genocide when he encounters Karl's mother and hears her memories of her son. Rather than shattering Karl's mother's fantasized version of him where he remained a pious man Wiesenthal leaves the house "...without diminishing in any way the poor woman's last surviving consolation-faith in the goodness of her son" (94). In doing this, Wiesenthal silently employs forgiveness, not on Karl's earlier demand, but on the stripping of and shattering of hope that he himself endured. By choosing to forgive the evil's committed on him, Wiesenthal was able to spare another human soul the same pain he felt; he was able to convey real human emotions. Perhaps unknowingly, he did not allow the Nazi regime to succeed in their attempt at dehumanizing him. The role of forgiveness in a genocide is that.

it permits a victim, and later generations, to not allow the same evil that caused them suffering to continue to exist in the world, both internally and in external interactions.

In Simon Wiesenthal's groundbreaking book *The Sunflower*, he explores the complexity of the concept of forgiveness with a context regarding one of humanity's greatest crimes; genocide. He does so through the recounting of his own account being a Holocaust survivor, as well as with opening the discussion to a myriad of notable figures. The importance of Wiesenthal's book, as well as the essays by Harold Kushner and Deborah Lipstadt, is that they all reveal that forgiveness is a process, which requires many steps like repentance, that concludes with the ability to find closure. A closure that allows a victim of any crime, even genocide, to reject the temptation to let others' evil corrupt them and continue the cycle of suffering. While difficult, forgiveness is an action which can only promise good for the individual; and it should only be done for the sake of the individual. Without forgiveness, the world would surely plummet into even more misery and chaos and genocide would not be recognized as the severe crime it is. Thus, while abstract and epithermal, forgiveness is an act that should be pursued to allow one to find closure as well as the opportunity to see the remaining light left in the world.

### **Bibliography**

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*It all began with a cup of hazelnut coffee and a dark chai tea—the coffee was for sipping and the tea for smelling. I had a messy pile of post-it notes covering my desk, hidden by printed passages, highlighters, a pile of memoirs and a marked up prompt sheet. In the background hummed the tunes of my “writing vibes” playlist... My first draft, of my first essay, for my first college class.*

**-Hannah Rosen**

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*It occurred to me that the main challenge I was to face would not be understanding the content, but rather depicting its meaning. No longer was I writing descriptive essays. Now, I was faced with creating an analytical argument which provided more room for error... I practiced disconnecting myself from the writing so that I could view it as another reader might. I began asking myself “why” throughout the paper to make sure that I was answering that vital question.*

**-Ryan Montbleau**

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*As I reworked each draft I found myself cutting down what I had written. My first drafts were flooded with emotion that included a lot of repeating myself. I often struggle with this in writing essays that are personal to me. I feel the need to overwrite to validate what I am saying. However, throughout each continuing drafts, I cut down to concisely and confidently state my opinion.*

**-Tatiana Loftus**

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*I’ve got a thing about outlines.*

**-Elizabeth Dunne**

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*Writing does something to my thought process that nothing else can. It wasn't just about a grade, it was about trying to make sense of my own thoughts. It was about figuring out how to catch up my command of language to my ideas, so that I could support the thoughts I had come to value.*

**-Matthew Blow**

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*Here I sit a full semester later and I am still finding new ways to rework this essay. Funny isn't it, how a piece of writing is never really finished?*

**-Hannah Rosen**

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