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Education for Self-Forgiveness as a Part of Education for Forgiveness

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The analyses undertaken in this article refer to the harm experienced in close relationships, where the lack of forgiveness and the breakdown in the relationship can be a source of additional suffering for the victim. Referring to the discussion conducted in the Journal of Philosophy of Education *in the years 2002–2003, I assume that one of the most difficult challenges for the injured individual is to determine whether change made by the perpetrator of evil encourages the individual to trust the perpetrator or whether forgiveness can actually be understood as consent to further harm. Another challenge is that the injured person must make a decision about forgiveness when s/he perceives change in the perpetrator if lack of forgiveness is not to become the cause of a definitive breakdown in the relationship. I propose the thesis that a person—by reference to acts of self-forgiveness—can learn to identify the moment when forgiveness is possible and necessary. After explaining what self-forgiveness is, what act it relates to and what its moral value is, I show how self-forgiveness and reflection on the process of self-forgiveness can benefit education for forgiveness of another person.*

INTRODUCTION

The decision to forgive or refuse to forgive a person who caused harm is one of the most difficult decisions an individual faces. On the one hand, the act of the perpetrator is the cause of harm suffered by the victim, and on the other hand, only the victim—through an act of forgiveness—can overcome (at least partly) the negative consequences of the wrong act in the life of the victim, the perpetrator and the social groups to which both persons belong (Hampton, 1988). After experiencing harm, ending the relationship with the perpetrator seems to be the easiest solution. However, sometimes the harmed individual experiences considerable negativity from loved ones for whom s/he feels responsible and for whom s/he is concerned, for example, children, parents or spouses. In this situation, ending the relationship would be another source of suffering. The difficulty in making a decision

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about forgiveness is associated not only with overcoming resentment towards the perpetrator (the victim must deal with negative feelings) (Murphy, 1998), but also with making a prudent decision (Horowski, 2019), that is, one arising from reason rather than from intense feelings. Even if the victim wants to forgive the perpetrator (Bell, 2008), s/he must not endanger her-/himself or other people as a result of the decision to forgive. Difficulties arise in the process of forgiveness because of the need for the victim to determine if the perpetrator of evil has changed enough for the victim to be able to withdraw negative feelings towards her/him, and if it is possible to trust the perpetrator again in light of the risk that forgiveness could lead to further harm. Alongside this determination, the victim must make a decision about forgiveness at the right moment, so that the perpetrator does not treat the absence of a decision as rejection by the victim.

Difficulties associated with forgiveness suggest that there are problems relating to education for forgiveness. These problems centre around several questions. Should young people be taught to forgive others? How can young people be educated for forgiveness so that forgiveness would be a prudent act rather than a kind of consent to further harm of the forgiving person by the person being forgiven? How can forgiveness be taught so that an expectation on the part of the one forgiving that there will be repentance on the part of the one being forgiven does not become a desire for revenge? These questions can be derived from discussion conducted in the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* (White, 2002; Barnes, 2002; Papastephanou, 2003) and can be summed up by the question expressed by Patricia White as to whether education for forgiveness 'could involve fostering in children some ethically questionable attitudes' (2002, pp. 58, 63).

In this article, I propose and defend the thesis that education about and for self-forgiveness—if it is well designed—could benefit education for forgiveness. A person's ability to cope with the harm done to her-/himself can help the person to learn the most appropriate response to harm done by others. To demonstrate the validity of my thesis, I will first present the difficulties that accompany the decision to forgive. Then I will try to define the act of self-forgiveness, paying special attention to the act to which self-forgiveness relates. Finally, I will attempt to show how the experience of self-forgiveness could facilitate the prudent decision to forgive another person.

DIFFICULTIES ACCOMPANYING THE DECISION TO FORGIVE

The subject of the dispute between Patricia White (2002) and Philip Barnes (2002) is the relationship between the act of forgiveness undertaken by the victim and the act of repentance on the part of the perpetrator, including her/his acknowledgement of guilt, apology and making of amends. Although Barnes's article is later, his position must be discussed earlier. Barnes represents a view that may be called classical, in which forgiveness comes as a result of repentance and apology expressed by the perpetrator. White calls this approach to forgiveness a strict view and rejects it.

Barnes looks at the act of forgiveness in the context of a relationship between the offender and the offended that already existed and can be continued. He also raises the issue of justice, but places it in a social context. This is a separate topic requiring extensive analysis and will therefore be omitted here. For us, the context of the relationship between the offender and the offended is crucial. In this context, doing harm can be seen as breaking the relationship, while seeking forgiveness can be seen as trying to rebuild the relationship. The perpetrator's acknowledgement of her/his own guilt, apology and striving to make amends does not constitute reparation for the past. Rather, it is a message from the perpetrator that s/he wants to build a relationship with the victim in the future. The past cannot be repaired. Actions taken in the present are in fact directed towards the future.

This way of thinking can be explored more deeply. Harm is usually seen as a cause of the weakening or destruction of relationships. This is undoubtedly true from the victim's perspective. However, it is worth noting that—from the perpetrator's perspective—this is also the manifestation of weakened/broken relationships or evidence that a relationship was not as strong as it seemed to those within it. If one spouse harms the other (for example, through adultery), s/he is indicating that the relationship with the spouse was not important to her/him. Both must decide whether they want to rebuild a relationship with the other. In these circumstances, repentance is a sign that the offender has matured enough to be capable of building a relationship s/he was not mature enough to build before. Honest repentance is a sign that the experience of hurting another person has changed the offender. Failure on the part of the perpetrator to demonstrate repentance by acknowledging her/his own guilt, apologising and trying to make amends is a sign of a lack of interest in rebuilding the relationship with the victim, in this case, the spouse. On the victim's part, it would not be a prudent decision to forgive and strive to strengthen a relationship when that relationship does not actually exist because the other party does not see it as something of value and therefore does not really want it.

When Barnes describes the logic of forgiveness, he draws attention to the function of repentance. According to him, a repentant person 'is no longer the same person—she has changed. She is different. Her beliefs and attitudes have changed with regard to the words and actions that originally inflicted the hurt or harm' (Barnes, 2002, p. 533). In the context of interpersonal relationships, acts of repentance should not be seen as a way to administer justice (this is not a court case), but as acts in which the perpetrator communicates to the victim the desire to build/rebuild a relationship with her/him. The victim needs a convincing sign to be able to establish or rebuild a relationship between her-/himself and the person who caused harm. Of course, the victim can reject this offer. In her analysis, White (2002) fails to notice this function of repentance. By offering a relaxed view of forgiveness, White suggests the victim can decide to forgive without knowing whether the perpetrator has changed or not, whether or not s/he feels safe with the perpetrator, or whether or not the perpetrator will continue to hurt her/him. Jeffrie Murphy suggests that by offering unconditional forgiveness, the victim may reinforce in the perpetrator a belief in

the rightness of her/his behaviour, making the victim indirectly complicit in wrongdoing (Murphy, 1998, p. 698).[1] The victim who states 'no problem!' is declaring that s/he wants to be a participant in a relationship that the other party is not interested in, or agrees to participate in a relationship in which s/he is abused.

In the context of interpersonal relationships, the victim must face another difficult task. Having been convinced of the perpetrator's transformation, the victim must communicate assent to and an ending of acts of repentance on the part of the perpetrator, so that such acts do not turn into a form of revenge. The victim must therefore identify whether s/he, in looking at the act of repentance, is seeking certainty about the intentions of the repentant perpetrator or savouring moral victory and superiority over the perpetrator and striving to settle accounts. This problem has been particularly exposed by White, who claims that waiting for repentance and 'celebrating' repentance can become in some cases a kind of moral imperialism (White, 2002, p. 62). Martha Nussbaum in turn indicates that this attitude is a kind of revenge and a form of humiliating the wrongdoer (Nussbaum, 2016).

Recognition by the victim of the appropriate boundaries of repentance is extremely important when the relationship between victim and offender is close and difficult to avoid, for example, when they have close kinship. If the victim who loves the offender does not recognise the perpetrator's genuine repentance and does not grant forgiveness at the right moment, s/he may lose the opportunity to build a mature relationship with the perpetrator, who has matured and changed. The perpetrator can in fact understand the lack of forgiveness as the victim's lack of willingness to rebuild/maintain a relationship with the changed offender. For the victim, this can be a source of further harm and suffering. In such a situation—if the victim is not indifferent to the good of the perpetrator and wants to rebuild a relationship with her/him—it is important that s/he interrupt as soon as possible the process of expressing remorse with the words suggested by White: 'no problem!' Lack of an appropriate response could lead to a missed opportunity to rebuild a relationship that is important to the victim.

The father in the parable of the prodigal son, quoted by Saint Luke in his gospel, is an example of a person who actually recognises the moment of repentance and expresses forgiveness. The son repents by returning to his father and asking to become a servant. The father—aware that his son has matured enough to establish a proper relationship with him—interrupts the act of repentance. He wants to get his son back, not to get revenge on him. Patricia White cites this situation as an example of the 'relaxed view', noting: 'The father does not wait to hear about his prodigal son's state of mind before rushing to greet him' (White, 2002, p. 65). This interpretation is incorrect in my opinion. The son repented by returning to his father's house. This situation, therefore, cannot be an example of forgiveness without repentance. The act of repentance, however, was not intended to account for the past. Rather, it was the son demonstrating that he had experienced life outside his father's home and now knows the consequences of his behaviour. He has changed and knows that his vision of a happy life outside his father's house was illusory. The father will never recover

his property and the son will not repair the evil done. The father, however, looks to the future and forgives, because he knows that his son finally appreciates his relationship with him; that he has a different person in front of him; and that he has a mature person in his son now, who wants to be with him.

Similar conclusions could be made with reference to the example of marital betrayal mentioned above. Betrayal is, in a sense, a turning away from the spouse and an expression of a lack of interest in further relationship building with her/him. Forgiveness that is not a consequence of changing the attitude of the perpetrator can be compared to the action of a person who does not care about facts and strives to remain with her/his spouse who wants to leave, or the action of a person who strives to maintain a relationship with silent consent to further betrayals. Such forgiveness can actually lead to self-humiliation. On the other hand, if the perpetrator of evil understands the harm s/he did, still wants to build a marriage relationship and expresses this in various ways, then maintaining a situation in which s/he must undertake numerous acts of repentance can turn into a quest on the part of the victim to humiliate the perpetrator, seek revenge and actually prevent the marriage from continuing. In this situation, both people must answer the question as to whether they want to continue building a common future. The victim faces a more difficult task. S/he must not only set her/his own goals, but also—if she wants to continue building this relationship—s/he must have confidence that the perpetrator's attitude of repentance is authentic and that s/he can trust the perpetrator. Has the perpetrator changed and matured? Does the perpetrator treat the betrayed spouse as someone with whom s/he plans a life together? After that, acts of repentance should cease.

In summary, it can be said that there is a tension between forgiveness and repentance and that both victim and perpetrator must indicate the appropriate boundaries for each attitude.[2] The victim needs the perpetrator to undertake repentance so that s/he can gain confidence in the perpetrator's transformation, maturity and interest in rebuilding the relationship. Nevertheless, after acquiring the certainty that there is a changed person standing in front of her/him, s/he should stop seeking acts of repentance from the perpetrator, so that the process does not become one of ongoing revenge. In my opinion, this is a challenge for education. Nurturing the inclination to forgive is not the goal of education. The school's task is to prepare young people to make prudent decisions to forgive, so that the victim does not, on the one hand, risk further harm nor, on the other hand, disguise revenge and humiliation of the perpetrator in ongoing demands for repentance, thereby destroying a difficult but important relationship. How can this goal be achieved? Marianna Papastephanou's (2003) suggestion that education should focus on preparing to ask for forgiveness does not solve this problem. I propose the thesis that education for self-forgiveness can be a way of achieving this goal. Self-forgiveness will therefore be the subject of analysis in the next section of this article.

WHAT IS SELF-FORGIVENESS?

Several years ago, at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland, I organised a meeting between students of pedagogy and people sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. I did this to give the students the opportunity to ask questions, not only about life in prison, but also about the families of those imprisoned—their wives and children. I was aware that in a few years these students would work as teachers in nurseries, schools, day-care centres for children or in orphanages, and that they might therefore be taking care of the children of imprisoned persons. Taking this into account, I thought it would be important for them to look at the family through the eyes of the fathers sentenced to imprisonment. I expected, however, that the majority of questions asked by students would concern life in prison, relations between prisoners and officers, and prison subculture. After several minutes of conversation, one of the students asked whether it was difficult to get used to living in a prison. To my surprise, one of our guests replied that this could be a long process, and that reaching self-forgiveness was the crucial moment. This statement began a long discussion about the fact that he, by killing another man, had destroyed not only his victim's life and the lives of his victim's loved ones, but also his own life and the lives of his own parents, wife and children. He had trouble coming to terms with this, and consequently he could not accept his stay in prison and start to adapt to his life behind bars. Only when he forgave himself did he begin to think about his future and about what he could still achieve in life under the conditions in which he would now have to live for many years.

The aforementioned discussion prompted reflection on self-forgiveness and on its importance for the perpetrator's personal development and involvement in social life. The subject of this reflection is controversial. On the one hand, self-forgiveness may seem to be a form of self-indulgence (Dillon, 2001, p. 53), self-justification, self-absolution (Moore, 1987, p. 214), self-contradiction (Papastephanou, 2003, p. 504), self-interested condonation and excuse making (Griswold, 2014, p. 122; Gamlund, 2014, p. 238) and avoidance of continued guilt, remorse and responsibility (Cornish *et al*., 2018). Victims of crime and their loved ones would not want the wrongdoer to experience the relief that self-forgiveness brings. On the other hand, the issue of self-forgiveness has become familiar in psychotherapeutic and counselling literature in recent years. This literature identifies self-forgiveness as a condition for the perpetrator's achievement of mental balance and as something that is important for her/his social relations (Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1996, p. 110; Massengale *et al*. 2017; Cornish *et al*., 2018). Consequently, if self-forgiveness is a condition for regaining the ability to function in interpersonal relations, it is desirable for several reasons. For example, the children of persons sentenced to imprisonment are not guilty of the wrongs that their parents have committed, yet they suffer the consequences of their parents' deeds. For the sake of their children, these parents should therefore try to attain the best psychological condition possible so that they are able to perform their parental role.

Dilemmas relating to self-forgiveness can be partly resolved once the act to which self-forgiveness relates is well defined. This is not easy. Hannah Arendt, who focuses on the philosophy of politics and consequently perceives human action to be an act in the public sphere, claims that forgiveness occurs only in the context of interpersonal relationships and that for this reason 'nobody can forgive himself' (Arendt, 1958, p. 237). According to her: 'forgiving … enacted in solitude or isolation remains without reality and can signify no more than a role played before one's self' (*ibid*.). Per-Erik Milam tries to undermine both Arendt and other so-called victim-only-view positions by offering a definition of the phenomenon of self-forgiveness. He claims that 'self-forgiveness occurs when a moral agent, in response to her offence, believes herself to be responsible and to have done wrong; she experiences a negative self-directed attitude like guilt, shame, or regret; and she forswears this attitude because she perceives that she no longer possesses the objectionable quality of will that was behind her initial offense' (Milam, 2017, p. 65). In Milam's description of the phenomenon of self-forgiveness, there is one element that is described very generally and needs to be elaborated. Milam does not refer to the act to which self-forgiveness relates. He only states that there is a phenomenon of self-forgiveness that can't be identified with any other phenomenon. The issue of what the person can forgive her-/himself for is taken up by Charles Griswold, who considers two possibilities: forgiving oneself for injuries done to others and forgiving oneself for injuries done to oneself. What is interesting is that Griswold claims that the perpetrator can, in the name of the injured person, forgive her-/himself for injuries done, once certain necessary conditions are met. He distinguishes the following cases: (1) the victim is unwilling to forgive, even if the offender meets the necessary conditions; (2) the victim is unable to forgive in the same above-mentioned situation (the offender meets the necessary conditions but the victim died or it is not possible for these people to meet); (3) the victim is willing to forgive if the offender meets the necessary conditions. Griswold claims that the offender can forgive her-/himself in the name of the injured person after fulfilling threshold conditions in a situation where the injured party is unable or unwilling to grant forgiveness. He realises that the possibilities for abuse are enormous, and therefore points out that the perpetrator should first carefully check from the perspective of a third party if s/he has fulfilled all the conditions for forgiveness and if s/he has given adequate consideration to the victim (Griswold, 2014, pp. 122–124). There are significant differences between the above-mentioned positions. These differences are a result of the differences in the definition of what the person can forgive her-/himself for. There is a danger that Milam's and Griswold's views could be interpreted as providing consent for actions of objectionable ethical value. They do not point to the offences for which the persons can forgive themselves. Immature persons who forgive themselves for the harm they have done to other people may treat this self-forgiveness as permission to continue to act immorally and absolve themselves from wrongdoing.

The problem of the act to which self-forgiveness relates and the moral value of self-forgiveness can be resolved—in my opinion—by reference to

the 'victim-only-view' position. Before the concept of self-forgiveness is formulated, it is worth looking at what constitutes the 'victim-only-view'. According to this view, no one has the right to forgive on behalf of the victim of a wrongful action; therefore, offences can be forgiven only by the victims of these acts (Ziemiński, 2016, pp. 189–190). A wife whose husband has been killed can forgive his murderer, but only for the loss she suffered herself. She cannot forgive on behalf of her husband who has lost his life. For the wrongdoer, obtaining this forgiveness can be important, but it doesn't mean that s/he receives complete forgiveness. This is a situation in which the perpetrator of evil cannot receive forgiveness because of the death of the only person capable of forgiving the loss of his own life. From this point of view, the claim that it is possible to forgive another person in the name of the victim is to mistake forgiveness for pardon, mercy or restitution. The wife of the dead man may forgive the person who killed her husband for the harm she has suffered, but she cannot forgive her/him on behalf of her dead husband. She can also support the perpetrator's request for pardon and thus contribute to her/his return to social life. Pardon acts are performed in public space. They mean that the culprit does not have to suffer more because of her/his deed. They are not the same as forgiveness. This difference between pardon and forgiveness can be seen in the example of the parable of the prodigal son already referred to. After returning to his father's home, the son receives a pardon (a merciful father is a symbol of God as the legislator and judge) and forgiveness for the evil he did to his father. He does not, however, receive the forgiveness of his older brother. It is worth noting that the father could not forgive the younger son on behalf of the older son.

Inability to forgive oneself on behalf of another person doesn't mean that the act of self-forgiveness makes no sense, however. The act of a particular person can create negative consequences in the life of another person, in the life of the perpetrator, or in the life of both. By hurting another person, the offender usually intends to achieve some benefit for her-/himself. Often, s/he does not expect to bear the negative consequences of her/his own actions. According to the 'victim-only-view' position, self-forgiveness refers to the wrongs that the perpetrator does to her-/himself. The husband's betrayal caused by the pursuit of sensual pleasure harms his wife and can lead to divorce and family breakdown. Forgiveness is not possible on behalf of a betrayed spouse. However, it should be noted that the perpetrator of the wrongful act also becomes its victim. He loses his wife and contact with his children, and his family falls apart. A person who hurts another person, especially someone close to her/him, runs the risk of never being forgiven and of living apart from that person for the rest of her/his life. In my opinion, this is an example of something for which a person can forgive her-/himself. Self-forgiveness in the case of homicide can be interpreted in a similar way. Self-forgiveness may be difficult for many killers, especially if they watched the victim die (though I am not referring here to the cases of killers who do not have empathy and treat another person as soulless and unable to suffer; Baron-Cohen, 2012). One of the prisoners who participated in the meeting with students at the university had beaten

another man so badly that the victim had lost his life. He claimed that he constantly remembered the death of his victim and often imagined the victim's family—his parents, his wife, his children—whom he had observed during the trial. Sometimes he dreamed at night that he had killed a man, and then woke up sweating. He will never experience the forgiveness of his victim and will probably never experience the forgiveness of his victim's family, but he can forgive himself for destroying his own life.

The consequences experienced by the perpetrator are not limited to the influence of an act on the life of the wrongdoer. When Karol Wojtyła analyses a human act in order to get to know a functioning subject, he points out that an act not only causes external (transitive) effects, but also determines its perpetrator (intransitive effects) (Wojtyła, 1994). Internal effects can be divided into two groups. The first includes only one effect. An individual's behaviour determines whether, through her/his behaviour, s/he becomes more human or more similar to creatures that don't control their own behaviour through reason. In other words, humanity is a fact in a concrete human being, and at the same time humanity develops and matures. A person—in her/his own consciousness—is a witness to her/his own maturation, how s/he develops her/his own humanity. If a person knows that s/he should act differently than s/he did, s/he assesses her/his maturity and development as a human being. According to Wojtyła, shame is a consequence of realising that actions are not directed by reason (Horowski, 2016). The second group of internal effects caused by an act includes character traits that develop in a human being. Wojtyła thus refers to the neo-Thomistic notion in philosophy (Horowski, 2015) according to which virtues and moral vices develop through human actions (Keenan, 2016). According to this approach, repeated evil deeds make the person perform evil deeds with increasing ease. Another bribe makes a person become more and more unfair. Subsequent betrayals lead to the development of the defect of infidelity. The problem of developing negative character traits is addressed by Robin S. Dillon (2001, p. 53) in his analysis of self-forgiveness. He begins his article by telling the story of a woman named Alison. As a teenager, she had a friend Dana, who had a physical disability. The disability didn't matter to Alison and she spent a lot of time with Dana. Other students, however, laughed at Dana. Alison also sometimes laughed at their mockery when Dana didn't see it. She wanted to be accepted by Dana's offenders. Since then, she has felt something akin to self-loathing, because she had been too cowardly to break her relationship with the perpetrators who mocked Dana. The protagonist of the cited story was therefore aware that she had become someone she didn't want to become.

Identification of the act to which self-forgiveness relates makes it possible to define the phenomenon. Using the definition of forgiveness formulated by Murphy (1998, p. 698) (based on Joseph Butler's (1827) writings), one can say that the person forgiving her-/himself is the one who has, on moral or religious grounds, forsworn resentment for self—forsworn the anger or sometimes even the hatred that s/he feels when s/he believes that s/he has wronged her-/himself. Murphy maintains that it is difficult to resent oneself, but—agreeing with Norvin Richards (1988), who linked

forgiveness with overcoming a variety of feelings such as anger, hatred, loathing, contempt, disappointment, sadness—he states that self-forgiveness could be understood as overcoming—for example—self-hatred or self-loathing (Murphy, 2003, p. 59). In my opinion, maintaining that self-forgiveness relates to self-inflicted harm means that the act of self-forgiveness is morally justified. It is noteworthy that self-forgiveness is the cessation of a focus on the evil that someone has done to her-/himself in order to begin to pursue the good that can be achieved in the future. Self-forgiveness is a change in the subject on which attention is focused, that is, the abandonment of a focus on past events in order to build a better future.

Before looking at the value of self-forgiveness for understanding the process of forgiving another human being, it is worth noting two specific features of self-forgiveness. First, the process of self-forgiveness can only take place in the individual who is aware of the evil s/he has done to her-/himself and who consequently directs negative feelings toward her-/himself (Holmgren, 1998, pp. 75–76). Secondly, the process of self-forgiveness is associated with restoration of self-worth widely elucidated by Holmgren (1998) or self-respect described by Dillon (2001). Referring to their reflections, it can be said that self-worth or self-respect plays a significant role in the process of self-forgiveness. According to analyses by Dillon, it can be said that, on the one hand, self-forgiveness is the pursuit of regaining self-respect lost as a result of doing evil. On the other hand, this self-respect had not been completely lost by doing evil, because the perpetrator can feel guilt, shame, disappointment with her-/himself and self-condemnation, but at the same time recognise her/his own intrinsic worth, which has been preserved despite the evil committed. This is a significant difference from the situation in which one tries to forgive another person, because in that situation the victim does not usually see the value of the person who harmed her/him.

The analysis of self-forgiveness presented above is not complete, but it includes elements of self-forgiveness that are relevant to the individual in the context of learning about forgiveness in interpersonal relationships from the experience of self-forgiveness. In the next part, I will attempt to show the significance that reflection on the experience of self-forgiveness can have for the quality of the decision to forgive another person.

SIGNIFICANCE OF EDUCATION FOR AND ABOUT SELF-FORGIVENESS FOR EDUCATION FOR FORGIVENESS

An analysis of the issues that pose a challenge in education for forgiveness and an outline of the specific elements of the phenomenon of self-forgiveness allow us to ascertain how education for and about self-forgiveness can be of benefit to education for forgiveness, especially when the experience of harm is related to relationships that are valuable in the life of the victim. I argue below that an attempt to face the challenge of self-forgiveness and to reflect upon the harm that an individual has done to her-/himself and upon the process of self-forgiveness can help her/him understand the phenomena of harm, repentance, forgiveness and revenge in interpersonal relationships, and especially to set the right boundaries for

these phenomena, primarily the boundary between the expectation for repentance and the decision to forgive. As can be seen, I do not treat education for self-forgiveness as the essence of education for forgiveness. However, I believe that it can support the preparation of the maturing individual for prudent action in situations calling for decision-making about forgiveness.

Before pointing out areas where education for self-forgiveness could benefit education for forgiveness, it is necessary to make three introductory remarks. Firstly, attending to the above-mentioned problem, I assume that self-forgiveness is understood in the context of the evil the individual has inflicted on her-/himself through decisions that have resulted in missed opportunities in life, the loss of important relationships, the irretrievable loss of some good in life, or the individual becoming somebody s/he didn't want to be. I also assume that self-forgiveness is not a kind of self-indulgence, self-justification, self-absolution, self-contradiction, self-interested condonation and excuse making, or avoidance of ongoing guilt or remorse. That is, it is not an escape from responsibility for the evil committed, but a decision made in the context of awareness of the evil that the individual has done. Consequently, self-forgiveness is morally justified.

Secondly, I assume that self-forgiveness is similar to forgiveness given to another person, although there are differences between these phenomena. The main difference is that self-forgiveness applies to a perpetrator whose dignity is valued by the victim, because the perpetrator and the victim are the same person, while forgiveness concerns another person who either never had value in the eyes of the victim, or who had a value that was lost. I assume, therefore, that negative feelings towards oneself after acts that destroy oneself are not the same as negative feelings of the victim towards another person who has hurt her/him. In the situation analysed here, however, one can see the similarity between forgiveness and self-forgiveness. Decisions that resulted in self-inflicted harm arouse negative feelings towards oneself, and in the analysed situation, the perpetrator is a close, loved person, valuable to the victim despite the feeling of harm and resentment the victim feels towards her/him.

Thirdly, I combine education about self-forgiveness with education for self-forgiveness. I assume—referring to critical realism (Archer, 2000)—that the basis for the development of a person is the experience of some reality. Understanding is a consequence of experience. The reflection provoked by the teacher should therefore have a reference point in previous experience. It can therefore be concluded that a lack of experience of self-forgiveness would prevent a teacher from reflecting on it. However, the point of reference for reflection on self-forgiveness can be moved. This point can be the experience of harm that a person has done to her-/himself. The teacher, by explaining about what maturing persons can forgive themselves for and in what circumstances they can forgive themselves, can encourage the students to face poor decisions they made earlier in their lives and to forgive themselves for these decisions. Consequently, the teacher will have a starting point for reflection on self-forgiveness and knowledge that can be used in education for forgiveness.

Referring to the above assumptions, I see the value of self-forgiveness in three areas. These relate to (1) understanding the phenomenon of forgiveness; (2) understanding the significance of meeting the condition of repentance and change of attitude on the part of the perpetrator for making the decision to forgive; (3) understanding the significance of identifying correctly the boundary between the expectation for a perpetrator's transformation and a victim's desire for revenge.

Experience of Self-Forgiveness as a Way of Understanding the Essence of Forgiveness

The victim's understanding of the nature of forgiveness is both one of the conditions and one of the problems regarding forgiveness of another human being. 'Reparation' by the perpetrator of evil or the perpetrator experiencing suffering similar to that experienced by the victim is often treated by the victim as a condition of forgiveness. In many cases, a victim who understands forgiveness in this way prevents in practice the possibility of forgiving and rebuilding relationships with the perpetrator who has changed and become a trustworthy person, because the past cannot be repaired and it is impossible to cause suffering similar to that experienced by the victim. Harming another person implies humiliation and violation of her/his dignity and value, so a punishment cannot lead to such an effect and thus become a kind of revenge. In order for forgiveness and the rebuilding of a relationship with the abuser to be possible, the victim should understand that forgiveness is not about 'fixing' the past, but is a concern for a better future. S/he should understand that the past cannot be changed, but that the decision made by the victim will affect the victim's future, the future of the perpetrator of the evil, and the possible relationship between them, as well as all those who experience the consequences of the decision. This understanding of forgiveness is seen in the merciful father who welcomes his son home. He does not want his son to correct the evil caused by his departure, nor does he want to punish his son, but he strives for his closest relatives, his two sons, to live in his home.

A reflection on the experience of self-forgiveness could be used in education to help students to understand the nature of forgiveness. The two processes are similar. Immature, reckless decisions made by individuals harm not only other people, but also the acting persons themselves. Individuals committing harm irreversibly lose valuable goods, important relationships and life opportunities. Self-forgiveness is a withdrawal of negative emotions towards oneself, although the negative effects of bad decisions cannot be undone. If individuals who have hurt themselves subject the process of self-forgiveness to reflection, they may understand that lost goods cannot be recovered and the solution to the problem caused by wrong decisions is not about punishing themselves. Consequently, they can also understand that self-forgiveness is the cessation of a focus on evil caused by ill-considered decisions and the withdrawal of negative feelings directed towards oneself after acts that cause harm to oneself. It is the cessation of self-accusation and preoccupation with lost opportunities. Self-forgiveness is a withdrawal

of these negative feelings so that the pursuit of a better future (despite the evil done in the past) and a focus on achievable goods are possible. The comparison of forgiveness and self-forgiveness gives maturing individuals the opportunity to understand that forgiveness cannot be conditioned by the expectation either that the perpetrator will repair the evil or that the perpetrator will experience suffering similar to that of the victim. Rather, it is a decision aimed at building a better future in the context of harm done in the past.

In conclusion, I think that appealing to the harm that the individual has done to her/himself can be used in education to help students understand the process of forgiveness. If—through reference to personal experiences and with the help of the teacher—the process of forgiveness for self-inflicted harm were subjected to reflection, then the acquired knowledge could become the foundation for reflection on the process of forgiveness and a starting point for a change in understanding the nature of forgiveness. Such a reflection could mean that an understanding of forgiveness would not be stereotypically associated with the perpetrator 'repairing' the past or experiencing suffering similar to that which s/he caused. Consequently, maturing individuals could understand that forgiveness is a decision about the future, made in the context of harm experienced in the past.

The Experience of Self-Forgiveness as a Way of Understanding the Conditions of Forgiveness

The second problem faced by an individual struggling with harm done by a loved one is to determine the conditions that should be met by the perpetrator for forgiveness to be prudent (that is, safe for the victim). If an individual does not have a criterion to assess whether making a decision about forgiveness is good or bad in a given situation, then there is a risk that the victim will refer to the emotions that are dominating at that time. Consequently, the decision taken may be hasty and erroneous, and it may lead to the risk of further harm. Preparing the individual for making decisions about forgiveness so that decisions are well thought out and not taken lightly under the influence of emotions is a challenge for education.

By referring to the struggle with self-inflicted harm and subjecting this experience to analysis, it is possible to see what conditions must be met by an individual so that s/he can forgive her-/himself. These conclusions can help indicate to the victim what conditions must be met by the offender for the victim's forgiveness to be reasonable. As was stated in an earlier analysis, forgiveness is prudent not only when the perpetrator perceives her/his actions as bad, but also when s/he has changed. Some perpetrators plead guilty, but at the same time they do not change their attitudes. They try to justify their actions and sometimes expect pardon from the victim. In consequence, victims cannot feel safe in their presence. Therefore, it is important for the victim to recognise the relationship between the change in the perpetrator's attitude and the process of forgiveness. This can be recognised by reference to the harm done by the individual to her-/himself and to the process of struggling with this experience. It is important for the

teacher to pay attention to two issues. The first step is to help a maturing person to identify a relationship between forgiveness and a sense of regret for the wrong done. If an individual considers a decision to be wrong because of the consequences of that decision in her/his life, it means that s/he would prefer that s/he had not made that decision—that is, s/he regrets the decision. The fulfilment of the condition of regret for the wrong on the part of the perpetrator struggling with self-inflicted harm is in a sense obvious, because it is difficult for a person not to consider an act as bad for her-/himself unless s/he has experienced the negative consequences of the act. Therefore, the more important task for the teacher would be to show the relationship between self-forgiveness and a change in a perpetrator's attitude. It is important for the teacher to pay attention to the fact that a person who has harmed her-/himself through morally wrong decisions can forgive her-/himself if s/he has changed to the extent that s/he can expect to no longer cause similar consequences in the future. This goal can be achieved by contrasting self-forgiveness with self-indulgence, self-justification, self-absolution, self-contradiction, self-interested condonation and excuse making, or avoidance of ongoing guilt or remorse. These acts are not evidence that individuals have changed enough that they can trust themselves. Persons who justify themselves or pardon themselves admit that they have done harm to themselves, but they do not change enough to avoid similar actions in the future. Rather, they strive to deny that they are responsible for a given evil, and thus allow themselves to repeat the evil. Understanding the process of self-forgiveness can help a maturing individual to properly recognise the process of forgiveness and the conditions necessary for forgiveness. Comparing these two processes, the maturing person can see that the condition for forgiveness is not only the perpetrator's recognition of her/his act as evil, but also the transformation of the perpetrator so that the victim is safe in her/his presence and certain that s/he will not be hurt again.

The Experience of Self-Forgiveness as a Way of Understanding the Difference Between Looking for Certainty of a Perpetrator's Transformation and Striving for Revenge

The third challenge faced by a person hurt by a loved one is to determine the moment when it is necessary to make a decision about forgiveness. The refusal to grant forgiveness does not lead to positive changes in the perpetrator (they have already taken place), but becomes a kind of revenge. If the victim's attitude is identified by the perpetrator as revenge, then it can become the impetus for the perpetrator to lose hope of forgiveness and reconciliation, and this can lead to a definitive breaking of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. It is then possible that the victim will lose the chance to rebuild a relationship that is important to her/him and that s/he could experience another harm connected with a definitive breakdown of the important relationship.

Reflection on the experience of suffering self-inflicted harm in the process of self-forgiveness may become an opportunity to recognise/identify an important moment in the process of forgiving another person where a

decision on forgiveness should be made so that refusal to forgive does not turn into a hidden form of revenge. Harm done to oneself can cause negative feelings about oneself. Loss of important goods or missed opportunities can lead to self-accusation, causing a person to direct negative feelings towards her-/himself and leading her/him to underestimate her/his own worth. In extreme cases, this can even resemble something similar to taking revenge on self. However, the process of self-forgiveness is conditioned by the desire to regain self-value and self-respect—that is, dignity. Analysing this process on the basis of her/his own experience, an individual may notice that admitting evil, expressing regret about a decision and changing attitudes make further blaming of her-/himself and the maintenance of negative feelings directed towards her-/himself unreasonable. These negative feelings cannot change anything—they can only destroy the person. These feelings should be withdrawn because they no longer make sense. They don't lead to anything good. By understanding the process of self-forgiveness and comparing it to the phenomenon of forgiveness, an individual can understand that at some point negative feelings directed at the person responsible for evil also lose their justification. If the perpetrator of evil has changed, then maintaining resentment towards her/him becomes a kind of revenge, because it can no longer result in any positive effects. This is the right time to withdraw resentment and make a decision to forgive, because otherwise revenge (even if subconscious) can lead to a complete breakdown in the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. Referring to the above assumptions, breaking close relationships would be a source of further suffering for the victim.

CONCLUSION

In the above reflection, I have attempted to argue that education for and about self-forgiveness can be of benefit for education for forgiveness. I assumed that the task of education is not to encourage forgiveness, but to prepare for taking prudent decisions about forgiveness. I referred to the situation in which the harm suffered by an individual was caused by a person important to her/him. In this situation, ending the relationship with the perpetrator would be a source of further suffering for the victim. A victim who is aware of the danger of breaking relationships may seek reconciliation. Consequently, forgiveness that comes too hastily may suggest to the perpetrator that s/he has been given permission to continue committing similar acts of harm. At the same time, a victim's inability to make a decision to forgive or to delay such a decision can be understood by the transformed perpetrator as the pursuit of revenge on the part of the victim and may lead to the definitive breakdown of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. I argued in this article that education for prudent forgiveness could be accomplished through education for self-forgiveness. Self-forgiveness was seen from the 'victim-only-view' perspective as forgiveness for self-inflicted harm. In relation to education, this action is ethically justified and does not prompt students to make morally questionable decisions. In my opinion, the experience of self-forgiveness—when the victim is also the

perpetrator of evil—and reflection on this process can help young people to understand what forgiveness is, and prepare them to correctly identify when forgiveness is possible and a decision to forgive should be made.

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NOTES

1. Barnes also writes about this danger: 'there is the danger that some people will overlook offences and in this way tacitly encourage the offender to re-offend' (Barnes, 2002, p. 538); 'If the offence is serious enough and an evil motivation is sufficiently obvious then it may be wise to end the relationship before a more serious offence is committed' (Barnes, 2002, p. 536).
2. It is worth noting a peculiar shift of emphasis in the interpretation of the act of forgiveness. The interpretation proposed here transfers attention from the events of the past to the present and future. Forgiveness is a step into the future, entering into a 'new' relationship with a person who has previously hurt. In this perspective, forgiveness can also be an act of hope through which the victim wants to change the harming person's way of thinking. In this situation, forgiveness is not associated with repentance, but aims to change the mindset and, consequently, to lead to repentance. Katarzyna Szymala (2015) writes about forgiveness as an unpredictable decision proving the humanistic, subjective feature of interpersonal relations. Analysis of this type of situation is also a reference to the problem of forgiveness of the unforgivable, about which Jacques Derrida wrote (2001; Maliszewski, 2016, pp. 18–19). In order not to complicate the argument, the author omitted this thread of the issue.

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