



**"THEIR HEARTS MELTED AND BECAME AS WATER."
LAMENTATIONS: ETHICS AFTER AUSCHWITZ**

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Sorrow

Alas!
Lonely sits the city
Once great with people!
She that was great among nations
Is become like a widow
...
Bitterly she weeps in the night,
...
See, O Lord, and behold,
How abject I have become!

There is a movement from the impersonal towards a more personal voice that is figured through the widow and so through some sense of the feminine. Is it through the feminine that we can know loss and so give voice to sorrow?

When we speak makes a difference to how we can speak? I am writing just after mid-summer in June 2009 and it is a rare and glorious sunny day in London. I walked to the post box round the corner to post a letter to my daughter congratulating her on her degree results. As I walked around the block, as if in preparation for this writing, I was aware of the ways Jewish tradition at the end of a shiva – a period of mourning when we are enclosed at home – brings this particular period of mourning to a close by suggesting that the close mourners gather to walk around the block. It is the process of walking that enables a transition to take place and so mark the ascending of a soul to a different level as it leaves a familiar space. This is a connected to a ritual of covering mirrors in a house of mourning so that the soul is not confused when it might see its – his/her image. Practices of mourning are framed around individual loss and we still imagine with Freud that notions of mourning and melancholia might be able to illuminate the catastrophic losses of the Shoah. This is a hope that might also endure since Freud was framing these ideas as a way of 'coming to terms' with the terrible losses of the First World War that he had lived through.

Emmanuel Levinas in 'Judaism and Christianity' reproduced in *In the Time of the Nations* (The Athlone Press, London, 1994) shares that as a child

“Christianity sounded to me like a completely closed world, from which, as a Jew, nothing good was to be expected. The first pages of the history of Christianity I was able to read told the story of the Inquisition. Already at eight or nine years old I was learning about the sufferings of the *Marranos* in Spain.” (p. 161)

“Later I came to read the Gospel. I believe that that read, which no longer disagreed with me, marks an anathesis. The representation and teaching of what is human, which I found there, always seemed close to me. I happened upon *Mathew 25*, where people are quite astonished to learn that they have abandoned or persecuted God, and are told that when they turned away the poor who knocked at their doors, it was really God in person they were shutting out.”

This allowed Levinas to recognise that

“the true communion was in the meeting with the other, rather than in the bread and wine, and that it was in that encounter that the personal presence of God resided.”

But this ‘teaching of what is human’ might also help define a transformed sense of ‘the human’ and so an ethics after Auschwitz.

But this is something that Levinas had already read in *Isaiah* ch. 58 that

“people who want to see the face of God and enjoy his proximity will only see his face once they have freed their slaves and fed the hungry.” (p. 162)

For Levinas this was

“also the understanding of the person of Christ. What remained incomprehensible was not the person, but all the realist theology surrounding him. The whole drama of his theological mystery remained unintelligible. It is still so today, whereas concepts such as God’s kenosis, the humility of his presence on earth, are very close to Jewish sensibility in all the vigour of their spiritual meaning.” (p. 162)

But as Levinas insists

“That is not all. The worst was that those frightful things, from the Inquisition and the Crusades, were tied to the sign of Christ, the cross. This seemed incomprehensible and required explanation. In addition to that, there is the fact that, properly speaking, the world was not changed by the Christian sacrifice. That was even the essential thing. Being Christian, Europe could do nothing to put things right ... I still feel this quite strongly. The reading of the Gospel was always compromised in my view – in our view – by history.

Then came what you call the Holocaust and what we call the *Shoah*. At that time two things became very clear. First, the fact that all who participated in the *Shoah* had in their childhood, received a Catholic or Protestant baptism; and they found no interdiction in that! And the second fact, very, very important: during that period, what you call charity or mercy appeared to me directly.” (p. 162)

Levinas goes on to share a personal story. A friend who worked in the same department lost a child. The father was Jewish and the mother Christian. The funeral service was held at the church of Saint-Augustin in Paris. As he recalls,

“It was before May 10, 1940, but our old world was already everywhere in jeopardy. During the religious service I happened to be near a picture – a painting or a fresco – depicting a scene from *1Samuel*: Hannah leading her son Samuel to the Temple. (The Temple that was to be destroyed ...) My world was still there. Especially in Hannah, that extraordinary figure of the Jewish woman. I thought of her silent prayer: ‘Her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard.’”

Levinas was able to recognise a Jewish world within Christianity – even though it might have been appropriated for its own purposes and read in a different context.

Levinas recalls Hannah’s response to Eli the high priest, “No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I poured out my soul before the Lord.” As Levinas recognises

“That woman was truly praying from her heart: the pouring out of her soul. The authentic relation, concreteness of soul, the very personification of the relation. That is what I saw in the church. What closeness! That closeness remained within me.”

As I explore in *Jewish Philosophy and Western Culture* (London: IB Tauris, 2007) what remains vital is the separation of Christianity from its Jewish sources and so from the Jewishness of Jewish that was achieved through a Greek refiguring that was to prove so appealing to Simone Weil amongst others. It was the universalism of a Christianity that was to be framed through Paul as open to all others, men and women, black or white that was deemed to be morally superior to a 'particularistic' Judaism that was taken to be a 'tribal' religion. This superiority was to be framed through an identification of Judaism as 'Carnal Israel' as Daniel Boyarin has helped us grasp so well in *Paul: a Radical Jew* and in *Carnal Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press) where bodies were deemed to be 'animal' and so identified with sexuality and the 'sins of the flesh'. It was a recognition that bodies and sexualities are 'part of' what it means to 'be human' rather than threats that need to be denied, controlled and repressed. But Christianity insisted upon figuring 'the human' in radical opposition to an 'animal nature' so that it is only through denial of our 'animal natures' that we can aspire towards 'becoming human'. So it is that embodiment becomes a threat to 'the human' that comes to be framed through a 'rising above' – transcendence – of an 'animal nature'.

So it is that a rationalist modernity, as Kant frames it and as I have explored in *Kant, Respect and Injustice: The Limits of Liberal Moral Theory* (London and New York: Routledge: International Library of Philosophy 1987) is framed through the secularisation of a dominant Christianity. When Kant imagines 'human nature' he does so in radically dualistic terms where it is an independent faculty of reason that is to be identified as 'human' while nature remains 'animal' and so has to be controlled for it comes to be identified with bodies, sexualities as the 'sins of the flesh'. This was also the mark of the supposedly inferior nature of Jewish spirituality that could supposedly not escape its connection with embodied lives. It was Pauline Christianity that sought to define 'the human' as a disembodied spiritual self and so though a transcendence of everyday embodied life that was taken to be sinful. As 'the earthly' came to be framed in contrast with 'the spiritual' and identified with the 'animal' so it was only through death that the soul could supposedly escape from a body that had imprisoned it for so long and so know a freedom that would allow it to return home.

As Val Plumwood explores in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993) through Platonic and later Cartesian traditions within modernity living nature has been reduced within a disenchanted world to dead matter and so as a resource that has value through its exploitation for human needs. Possibly if we are to reach a vision of 'the human' that fully grasps its relationship with nature it will only be through recognising how an ethics after Auschwitz has to also engage with the mistreatment and exploitations of animals as part of the degradation of nature. Levinas does take an important step while recognising "the idea of an omni-human universality". He insists in ways that challenge modernity's ethical framing of the assumed superiority of the 'universal' over the 'particular' that

"The authentically human is the being-Jewish in all men (may you not be shocked by this!) and its reflection in the singular and the particular."

If this is striking Levinas does not engage well with Freud who in some way is speaking out of Jewish sources when he reclaims sexuality and emotional life as part of 'the human' so enabling resources that help us to value the depth of feelings of sorrow that Hannah expresses. But Levinas does recognise that for Jewish tradition at least,

"What matters is not 'faith' but 'doing'. Doing, which means moral behaviour, of course, but also the performance of ritual. Moreover, are believing and doing different things? What does believing mean? What is faith made of? Words, ideas? Convictions? With all my bones (Psalm 35:10)! ...'Doing good is the act of belief itself.' That is my conclusion." (p. 164)

Reflecting upon Auschwitz more directly, Levinas says:

"Sometimes what happened at Auschwitz seems to mean to me that God requires a love that entails no promise on his part. Thought can stretch that far. The meaning of Auschwitz would be a suffering devoid of any promise, totally gratuitous."

But like many of us, Levinas cannot really bring himself to accept his own thoughts admitting,

"But even then I rebel, thinking it is too costly – not just for God, but to humanity ... Christ without defence on the cross eventually found himself leading the armies of the Crusades! And he did not come down from the cross to stop the murderers." (p. 166)

In contrast what seems for Levinas 'fundamental to the Judaic faith' as he explores it in 'On Jewish Philosophy' is that

"the relation to God is inseparable from the Torah; that is, inseparable from the recognition of the other person. The relation to God is already ethic; or, as *Isaiah 58* would have it, the proximity to God, devotion itself, is devotion to the other man." (p. 171)

But what he is also ties this to

"the obligation of responding to the unique, and thus of *loving* ... The love of God in the love of one's neighbour. This original ethical significance of the face would thus signify – without any metaphor or figure of speech ... (a God) ... who approaches precisely through this relay to the neighbour – binding men among one another with obligation, each one answering for the lives of all the others." (p. 171)

Sufferings

3:1 I am the man who has known affliction
under the rod of his wrath;
He drove on and on
In unrelieved darkness
4 He has worn away my flesh and skin;
He has shattered my bones.
5 All around me he has built
Misery and hardship;
6 He has made me dwell in darkness,
Like those long dead
...
8 And when I cry and plead,
He shuts out my prayer.

5:17 Because of this our hearts are sick,
Because of this our eyes are dimmed.

As I returned from walking around the block I saw my neighbour with her helper who had also been walking. She had been the wife of a rabbi and had originally come on the Kindertransport. She has a form of dementia and her mind has crumbled. She can get suddenly angry – a violent anger that I know from my mother's dementia. She suffered for a while but through her suffering she was also making connection with her childhood in Vienna. She was mourning for the loss of her younger sister. Somehow she carried feelings of guilt and responsibility, also for the fate of her father who never made it to London but was murdered – we think for there are so many gaps and doubts – in the clearance of the ghetto in Drohobitch. How do we know when "our hearts are sick" or when "our eyes are dimmed"?

There was a sickness of heart in so many Second Generation families where losses were hinted at but often not spoken about. My mother's survivor generation felt guilt as refugees who had been 'the lucky ones' to make it out of continental Europe – they were to remain self-defined 'conti-

nentals' till the end of their lives. But their children were to be protected from their losses and there was often an unspoken contract that the parental generation would 'carry' and 'hold' these losses themselves while the children would somehow 'become' normal through 'becoming English'. They would offer a kind of redemption for their parents who were destined to be marked by their accents as 'bloody foreigners'. But this meant that the adults knew that a catastrophe had already happened but that the Second Generation often grew up in a frozen silence intuiting a sickness of heart and a dimness of vision, but never really understanding where these feelings were coming from. Often we inherited memories unconsciously from our parents that we could not place for ourselves so they remained as hauntings.

Blake Morrison reviewing the *Collected Poems of Ian Hamilton* recognises the unspoken hauntings of the war generation for those growing up in the 1950s and 60s. He had written how "early on I had several shots at getting 'more of the world' into my verse" but in the end "to stop fretting and to keep the whole business of 'my poetry' separate from the rest of my so-called literary life." In an unpublished poem 'The Veteran', a "grey, hard-veined" survivor of an earlier war contemptuously asks him what he does:

"I said I write / Three times before he got it. The he leant / So close I took his rotten breath inside me / And asked 'What about?'; and he's right."

Hamilton respected the courage of those who had fought in the Second World War. The 60s might be fun, but compared with the 40s they were frivolous,

"The Vietnam was drags on / In once corner of our living room"

one of his poems begins. Yet Hamilton did write about "true things, significant things". As Morrison notes, "burdened as he was, the best of his poems are marvellous for their unburdenings ..." This is "Old Photograph":

"You are wandering in the deep field / That backs on to the room I used to work in / And from time to time / You look up to see if I am watching you. / To this day / Your arms are full of the wild flowers / You were most in love with." (Review *Saturday Guardian* 20.06.09 p. 6)

As Morrison suggests it is as if ghosts are

"animated by the poet's memory. We infer loss – a broken relationship, a falling out of love – but can't be sure ... the poem has an emotional force nevertheless: there's the pressure of all that hasn't been said as well as what has. All but three of the words are monosyllables, as if the poet were too choked to speak." (p. 6)

He also notes "a strange mixture of impersonality and intimacy" and that thanks to a late interview Hamilton gave

"we know there are two 'you's': his father Robert, who died of cancer when Ian was 13, and his wife Gisela, who suffering from a mental illness. Sometimes the two seem almost interchangeable ..." (p. 6)

Blake Morrison appreciates

"Whether it's his father or his first wife he's writing about, the motive is equally magical: to write a poem so perfect that it will heal the wounded or bring back the dead." (p. 6)

Somehow this echoes the kind of unspoken silences that many of us grew up with as Second Generation children of refugees in North West London. As I describe in *Shadows of the Shoah: Jewish Identity and Belonging* (Oxford: Berg 2000) this helped shape particular forms of loneliness and isolation in the midst of Jewish communities that could not really speak about the recent catastrophe of the Shoah. It was as if the worst had already happened and we were to grow up somehow to be 'normal'.

Weeping

In *Midrash Rabbah* we discover

“R. Simeon b. Yohai said: ‘The Holy One blessed be he, spoke to Israel: ‘You are weeping (now) with a frivolous weeping, but in the end you will weep with a real weeping.’ When did Israel weep with a frivolous weeping?’ Another interpretation: she weeps and makes the Holy One, blessed by He, to weep with her, for it is written, ‘And in that day did the Lord, the God of hosts, call to weeping, and to lamentation’ (Isaiah xxii, 12); she weeps and makes the ministering Angels to weep with her ...” (p. 94) (The Midrash vii Soncino: London ed A. Cohen)

“In the past I used to go up with songs and psalms ... Now I go up with weeping and come down with weeping.” (p. 141)

There is another Midrash that speaks of

“Two teachers (differ about the meaning of the word). One said that it signifies breaking of heart, the other that it signifies hardness of heart.” (p. 212)

As the Shoah became unspeakable it was difficult to discern whether our parents had broken their hearts or whether – and possibly for the sake of their children, or so they might tell themselves – there was a hardness of heart that came from the blocking of tears. There was a moment of terrible intensity as my mother would weep momentarily as she put something on her head to light the shabbos candles. She would turn towards us as if we had somehow not registered the depth of her pain that had been made all too apparent before returning to normal, as if nothing had taken place. Of course there were times when she would talk about what the ‘Nazis had done to the Jews’ often when we watched those terrible TV images of dead bodies being pushed by tractors into mass graves. As children we did not know what we were seeing and how it related to the spaces we were growing up in – for the exile of family from Vienna and Warsaw and the ‘new lives’ they were creating in London. Again the spaces that we think matter to how we can think and for me speaking – even in a gathering such as this – has a particular resonance in Germany. This was also where my step-father came from and where he was denied his degree in Law. Possibly this is also where the earth weeps.

There are painful histories that call for their own lamentations. For if there was only one Temple that had to be destroyed twice there were other communities and other synagogues that were to be burnt and communities murdered during the Crusades. But do we have to think in radically different terms about these losses and the kind of lamentations they call forth. As I was reading in *The Jews and the Crusades* (trans and ed Shlomo Eidenberg Maddison: University of Wisconsin) in ‘Narrative of the Old Persecutions’ (Mainz Anonymous)

“When the saints, the pious ones of the Most High, the holy community of Mainz, heard that some of the community of Speyer had been slain and that the community of Worms had been attacked a second time, their spirits failed and their hearts melted and became as water. They cried out to the Lord: ‘Alas, O Lord, God! Will you completely annihilate the remnants of Israel? Where are all your wonders which our forefathers related to us, saying: “Did You not bring us up from Egypt, O Lord? But now you have forsaken us, delivering us unto the hands of the Gentiles to destroy us!”’” (p.105)

Albert Friedlander in ‘Ten Years Later: Leo Baeck and European Judaism’ in one of the first issues of *European Judaism* recognises how Baeck, born in Lissa,

“presented him with the two-fold aspect of East and West within European civilisation; and he was ever conscious of this.” (p. 6)

He was not a Westernised Jew who had assimilated into a European modernity through forgetting more traditional Eastern traditions and cultures. He could bring Vienna and Warsaw into some relationship with each other as he remembered the fate of different Jewish sufferings. He had also

absorbed teachings from Dilthey in Berlin and as Friedlander, himself a student and biographer of Baeck notes,

“the appeal to experience, to a certain immanentism, and a high regard for man’s abilities to discover God outside the traditional framework.” (p. 7)

But he also recognises Baeck as

“the rabbi of the Midrash who battles against the Christians, who speaks in veiled allusions concerning ‘Edom’ – once Rome and now the new Germany.” (p. 7)

At the same time Friedlander recalls – a reference I still need to follow up – that Ernst Simon had written a penetrating study of the ‘secret Midrash’ entering German Jewish literature after the rise of Hitler.

Talking about a ‘secret Midrash’ it can be illuminating to read the two essays that open the collection of Theodor W. Adorno *Can One Live After Auschwitz?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) This is a question that still haunts the present and brings to mind *Lamentations* written after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. How could Judaism continue when the place where God was supposed to reside on earth had been destroyed? This touches the core of the relationship between God and Israel, a relationship that has been so beautifully explored in some of its more intimate aspects in Sheila Shulman ‘The Dialogue of God and Israel’ (Leo Baeck College, May 1989 / Iyar 5750). She reminds us that, to paraphrase Pascal, that the God of the philosophers is, in different understandings, a principle, a force, an idea

“but in any case not a phenomenon about which the language of the senses or the emotions or even the imagination can say anything useful or accurate. Insofar as the God of the philosophers may be apprehended at all, it is through the disembodied intellect.” (p. 4)

In contrast the rabbis

“direct the passionate attention ... to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” (p. 4)

In the particular Midrashim she explores she explores the rabbis’

“conviction (sometimes it is more like their hope) that there is a loving and particular relation between the Divine and the human, that it is a consciously chosen bond, and, most daringly, they suggest that the relationship works both ways, that human action and passion have, as it were, reverberations, even effects, in God. They suggest that not only is the relation, the bond, unique and intimate, but that it is in truth interdependent to the point of mutual need.” (p. 5)

Sheila Shulman seems to be recognising in the rabbinic Midrashim something that Adorno is also reaching for but within a quite different idiom and tradition of Critical Theory. As she recognises it,

“rabbinic consciousness which, while richly speculative, was not given to either systematic theology or to philosophical abstraction. The concrete, specific image, the irreducibly personal utterance, the language of intimate, immediate experience, are all at least as sophisticated, as cognitively illuminating, and often more transforming, than the discourse of formal philosophy or theology.”

This insight echoes something important in Levinas as I have hinted, but as I explored in *Jewish Philosophy and Western Culture* it is an insight Wittgenstein was also reaching for in his later philosophy and part of the reason he was thinking of his later philosophy as ‘Hebraic’ rather than ‘Greek’. But possibly it has been feminist work and sexual politics, particularly in the 1970s before it came to be refigured through post-structuralisms, that found ways “that resists abstraction and is addressed to the full particulars of experience.” It recognises love as a particular form of attention, as Weil frames it, or as a particular way of knowing others and the world. As Shulman puts it,

“It is the language of desire and longing (with all the consciousness of potential absence in the sense of presence), the language of passionate attention to particulars, the language that can only speak of reality in metaphors because it understands reality as relation – it is the language that operates all through midrash and agada and makes it so fertile, so endlessly engaging, so close to the grain of lived experience.” (p. 7)

Adorno also turned the question of “whether there can be life after Auschwitz” on himself by going on to ask

“whether in particular a person could go on living who had accidentally escaped and should by rights have been murdered as well. The continued existence of such a person calls for the same coldness, that fundamental principle of bourgeois subjectivity, without which Auschwitz would not have been possible.”

He called this coldness the “drastic guilt of those who were spared.” It is this ‘coldness’ that seemed to be ever-present but remained unnamed in the post-war years when Auschwitz seemed to become unspeakable for many years. Philosophy, which, according to Hegel, is “its own time comprehended in thoughts,” had failed in its efforts in the post-war world of analytic philosophy to comprehend the rupture that civilisation had experienced with the Holocaust, let alone to give it any ‘meaning’. An Enlightenment modernity had built itself around notions of historical progress and somehow these hopes could only be revived through a forgetting of the station ramp and gas chambers so making it impossible for philosophy to understand “why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism” as Adorno and Horkheimer recognised in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* which they wrote together in exile in California, possibly as another kind of ‘secret Midrash’.

As Rolf Tiedemann insists, Adorno never hesitated to urge respect for a moral law that had seemed to become obsolete since Kant. But rather than engage with the secularised Christian assumptions that informed Kant’s work there was a shared rationalism that Critical Theory found difficult to break with. They called for a substantial form of rationality that could engage with ends as well as means so questioning forms of instrumental rationality that still frame the logics of late capitalisms. Adorno still insists

“Hitler has imposed a new categorical imperative on human beings in their state of unfreedom: to arrange their thoughts and actions in such a way that Auschwitz should never be repeated, that nothing of the sort should happen again.”

But at the same time he does recognise that

“To treat it discursively would be an outrage: it gives us a bodily sensation of an external moral factor. ‘Bodily,’ because it represents our active sense of abhorrence in the face of the intolerable physical pain to which individuals are exposed.” (p. 358)

When Adorno came to write *Negative Dialectic* he came to retract the notion that writing poetry after Auschwitz had become impossible and insisted that he meant that there was an unbridgeable gap in writing poetry before Auschwitz and attempting to write it after Auschwitz. As he recognises

“A perennial suffering has just as much right to find expression as a victim of torture has to scream. For this reason it may have been wrong to write that after Auschwitz poetry could no longer be written” (p. 355)

The danger that we face in a post-modern culture is that it filters out memory and screens out experience as ‘experience’ comes to be framed as an effect of discourse. With new technologies seeming to making ‘everything’ available in the present, we are in danger of weakening historical consciousness. There is no transcendental synthesis as Plato or Kant might wish but knowledge has to recognise its “temporal core” as Walter Benjamin was the first to speak. For philosophy in the age following Auschwitz, this temporal core is to be found in the screams of the victims and the weepings of the survivors. Since then,

“the need to enable suffering to speak ... (has been) the precondition of all truth.” (p. 29)

As Tiedemann has it,

“The culture industry had helped to accelerate the course of events and to predispose individuals to their utter reification. Enlightened thought, Marxism above all, had failed where it was needed most.” (p. xviii)

Enlightenment modernity had failed in its supreme aim of “liberating human beings from fear.”

The yellow patch that was imposed on Jews in Germany not only separated them from other Germans but made them indistinguishable from each other. Echoing notions of 'the human' that informed an Enlightenment rationalism, the individual Jew ceased to a real, living, suffering human being. People were reduced to a mere instance, an abstraction, in whom concrete difference merged in indistinguishable sameness. Jewish women were all to be named as 'Sarah' and so supposedly indistinguishable from each other. This reflected processes that show how the Holocaust is to be understood, as Bauman explores through instrumental reason, as an extreme of processes working within modernity. As Adorno recognises the anti-Semitic pogroms and the extermination camps

"demonstrate(d) the impotence of what might have restrained them – reflection, meaning, ultimately truth" (3:195)

Echoing themes that we can hear in *Lamentations* Adorno concerns himself more urgently with the individual, the single person, the more the individual is neglected within an administered society and concludes that

"The need to enable suffering to speak is the precondition of all truth. For suffering is objectivity that weighs upon the subject; what the subject experiences as its innermost subjectivity, its expression, is mediated objectively." (6:29)

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the critique is aimed at the

"cold, stoical character that existing society imposes on human beings" (3:193)

This is a coldness that is still often reported by third generation young Germans as they reflect upon their relationships with their families when they attempt to talk about the war years. They are often offered history as 'information' that they 'should know about' but this is rarely communicated as felt experience and they rarely see tears and sorrow expressed in their families. The Holocaust is 'learnt about' as something that 'happened in the past' that they need to know about 'as history' but it is more rarely experienced as part of an unspoken and ghostly present that needs to be emotionally expressed in the present. Adorno recognises how coldness has remained a constituent of bourgeois subjectivity that helps to form post-war identities and difficulties people still have in talking about family histories. Often there is a break between official public memorialization and the education the third generation has received at school and what remains as an unspoken haunting within family memories where sometimes there are pictures of grandparents in uniform that are part of the scene, but rarely commented upon.

This is why Adorno's essay 'The Meaning of Working through the Past' remains so vital in the present. So often this notion is invoked

"to close the books on the past and, if possible, even remove it from memory. The attitude that everything should be forgotten and forgiven ... I once wrote in a scholarly dispute: in the house of the hangman one should not speak of the noose, otherwise one might seem to harbor resentment." (p. 3)

Adorno recognises

"One wants to break free of the past: rightly, because nothing at all can live in its shadow, and because there will be no end to the terror as long as guilt and violence are repaid with guilt and violence; wrongly, because the past that one would like to evade is still very much alive." (p. 3)

If we are to deal with "unconscious and not-so-unconscious defensiveness against guilt" then we can learn from Jewish traditions, including *Lamentations*, the weakness of a modernity that is shaped around visions of historical progress that rely upon 'putting the past behind you'. This will disturb the possibilities of deeper connection in the present, as Freud recognises in his insistence that we have to do 'emotional work' that allows us to face repressed fears, shames and guilts tied up and entangled with the past, if we are to create a greater sense of personal freedom in the present.

Within post-modern cultures where experience is being framed through new technologies we can see a further atrophying of a consciousness of historical continuity that Adorno warns us about. Through the Internet we seem to be living in an eternal present where everything, including the past, can somehow be made available to us in an instant. It has become even easier to think that guilt itself is

“merely a complex, and bearing the burden of the past pathological, whereas the healthy and realistic person is fully absorbed in the present and its practical goals.” (p. 5)

This is why it can be helpful to return to Biblical traditions to remind us of different ways of engaging with traumatic histories and the importance of weeping so that a kind of removed and cold impersonality does not form as a mode of self-denial. Adorno comes to think of the ‘authoritarian person’ through character traits that include

“a rigidity and inability to react, conventionality, the lack of self-reflection, and ultimately an overall inability to experience.” (p. 9)

Adorno warns us that with post-war capitalism

“the objective conditions of society that engendered fascism continue to exist. Fascism essentially cannot be derived from subjective dispositions. The economic order ... renders the majority of people dependent upon conditions beyond their control and thus maintains them in a state of political immaturity. If they want to live, then no other avenue remains but to adapt, submit themselves to the given conditions; they must negate precisely that autonomous subjectivity to which the idea of democracy appeals; they can preserve themselves only if they renounce their self.” (p. 13)

Above all, as Adorno insists,

“enlightenment about what has happened must work against a forgetfulness that all too easily turns up together with the justification of what has been forgotten ...” (p. 14)

Something significant for the present can be learnt from reading *Lamentations*,

“Essentially it is a matter of the way in which the past is made present; whether one remains at the level of reproach or whether one withstands the horror by having the strength to comprehend even the incomprehensible.” (p. 15)

As Adorno reminds us in ‘Education after Auschwitz’

“The premier demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again.” (p. 19)

As he warns us,

“One speaks of the threat of a relapse into barbarism. But it is not a threat – Auschwitz was that relapse, and barbarism continues as long as the fundamental conditions that favoured that relapse continue largely unchanged ... If barbarism itself is inscribed within the principle of civilization, then there is something desperate in the attempt to rise up against it.” (p. 19-20)

But Adorno also recognised that given the difficulties of changing the objective conditions we have to focus upon the subjective dimensions if we are to attempt “to work against the repetition of Auschwitz.” This means, at the very least,

“One must labor against the lack of reflection, must dissuade people from striking outward without reflecting upon themselves. The only education that has any sense at all is an education towards critical self-reflection.” (p. 21)

But though Adorno appreciates Freud, as does Wittgenstein, there is a rationalism that makes it difficult for him to really engage with the significance of *felt knowledge* as a way of escaping the coldness that he analyses. In *Kant, Respect and Injustice* I question the philosophical rationalism that allows Adorno to say

“The single genuine power standing against the principle of Auschwitz is autonomy, if I might use the Kantian expression: the power of reflection, of self-determination, of not cooperating.” (p. 23)

But Adorno also offers us different resources, possibly resources that can suggest an embodied experience that is warm and so is living in a way that coldness is often defended against. It might

touch the possibilities of expressive prayer in which people allow a lamentation – and so tears – that would otherwise remain blocked for the losses of the Shoah. It is the reciting of a Kaddish with feeling for those who have no one to mourn for them. It allows for an expression that can sometimes be blocked as ‘acting out’ within more traditional psychoanalysis that can itself be fearful of emotional expressions that might be necessary in moving people on beyond the terms of insight and interpretation. Adorno himself recalls

“the twisted and pathological relation to the body ... Everywhere where it is mutilated, consciousness is reflected back upon the body and sphere of the corporeal in an unfree form that tends towards violence.” (p. 25)

Adorno also implicitly questions a masculinity that is embodied in traditional education as “the idea of being hard.” “I remember,” Adorno writes,

“how the dreadful Boger during the Auschwitz trial had an outburst that culminated in a panegyric to education instilling discipline through hardness.”

Exploring themes later to be historically explored by Klaus Thewelait in *Male Fantasies*, Adorno questions

“The idea that virility consists in the maximum degree of endurance long ago became a screen-image for masochism that, as psychology has demonstrated, aligns itself all too easily with sadism.” (p. 26)

He recognises that

“Being hard, the vaunted quality education should inculcate, means absolute indifference toward pain as such. In this the distinction between one’s own pain and that of another is not so stringently maintained. Whoever is hard with himself earns the right to be hard with others as well as avenge himself for the pain whose manifestations he was not allowed to show and had to repress.” (p. 26)

Though Adorno talks in general humanistic terms, he might well have responded to the insights of feminism that was reaching for a different form of ethical sensibility. Rather than thinking that anxieties should be hidden from public view as a sign of professionalism, feminisms helped us grasp, as does Adorno “that anxiety must not be repressed.” We must allow ourselves the sadness and the tears of lamentation for

“When anxiety is not repressed, when one permits oneself to have, in fact, all the anxiety that this reality warrants, then precisely by doing that, much of the destructive effect of unconscious and displaced anxiety will probably disappear.” (p. 26)

But these are elements a Kantian moral theory cannot acknowledge for it is tied into a tradition of moral rationalism that shapes the vision of ‘autonomy’ that Adorno values in general terms. But if we are to recognise emotions and feelings as sources of knowledge as a way of forming a notion of embodied experience that is warm and responsive to the sufferings of others, then we need a form of ethical theory that can listen and learn from the tears of *Lamentations*. We must recognise how Kantian moral traditions that focus upon giving priority to principles failed to speak up against Nazism but also played their part in forming characters that were, as Adorno recognises, often framed

“by the inability to have any immediate human experience at all, by a certain lack of emotion, by an overvalued realism.” (p. 27)

This means that it is still true, as Adorno cites the saying of Paul Valery before the last war, that inhumanity has a great future. But there are also trends that are moving in a more positive direction with young people not only learning to be more emotionally literate and engaged but also recognised how the domination of nature traces back to the domination of people’s own natures. Possibly it is through a reading of Jewish traditional sources, including *Lamentations*, that we can help frame embodied ethical traditions that can illuminate predicaments we live with in the present and the moral loneliness and isolation that people too often adjust to.

Adorno can be helpful here too, echoing themes Simone Weil was also to explore, when he talks about “the fetishization of technology” and the

“overvaluation that finally leads to the point where one who cleverly devises a train system that brings the victims to Auschwitz as quickly and smoothly as possible forgets what happens to them there. With this type, who tend to fetishize technology, we are concerned – baldly put, with people who cannot love.”

As Adorno quickly seeks to clarify his meaning,

“This is not meant to be sentimental or moralistic but rather describes a deficient libidinal relationship to other persons.”

Then touching on our own readings of *Lamentations*, he suggests

“Those people are thoroughly cold; deep within themselves they must deny the possibility of love, must withdraw their love from other people initially, before it can unfold.” (p. 29)

It is through a loving recognition of others, through their differences, not despite them or through transcending them, that we can create a love ethics that can recognise the connections between spirituality and power and so with Benjamin also appreciate that some of the values we need most are held in traditions that have been historically defeated, as Jewish traditions had to learn to refigure themselves after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. This helped redefine a Jewish ethics of love that was framed through the heart in ways that remained embodied with a feeling connection to self so always insisting that sexuality remains part of what it means to be human rather than something that has to be rejected and so controlled as ‘animal’ and so tied to the ‘sins of the flesh’.