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Facing Atrocity

Shame and its Absence

Abstract

In this paper I focus on four varieties of shame absence. My hope is that reflection on these varieties of shame-absence will go some way to giving us a more complete picture of the role that shame plays in our moral character and in discussions of atrocity. I note that the shame that emerges from an exposure to atrocity can be in part what leads us to identify the event as atrocious. I progress to argue that when shame is absent, this absence can serve to blind us to the atrocity that is before us and that is ours to work to prevent. Feeling shame is part of seeing the atrocity for what it is in an appropriate emotionally-engaged manner. It is thus a vital part of being human, and its absence in certain cases is an all-too-human failure of humanity.

> They were four young soldiers on horseback who advanced along the road that marked the limits of the camp, cautiously holding their sten-guns. When they reached the barbed wire, they stopped to look, exchanging a few timid words, and throwing strangely embarrassed glances at the sprawling bodies, at the battered huts and at us few still alive.
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> They did not greet us, nor did they smile; they seemed oppressed not only by compassion but by confused restraint, which sealed their lips and bound their eyes to the funeral scene. It was that shame we knew so well, the shame that drowned us after the selections, and every time we had to watch, or submit to, some outrage: the shame the Germans did not know, that the just man experiences at another man's crime; the feeling of guilt that such a crime should exist, that it should have been introduced irrevocably into the world of things that exist, and that this will for good should have proved too weak or null, and should not have availed in defence.
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> Primo Levi[1]

Much has been written about shame felt in response to exposure to atrocity, and much of that writing has been about how the emotion constrains us in a way that seems unjust or unfair. The phenomenology of shame is close to that of guilt, yet shame often strikes or creeps up on those who are guilty of nothing. This provides ample grounds for focusing attention on shame's negative nature as an emotion.

In contrast, relatively little has been written about the absence of shame: about those times when we expect shame to be present, situations in which we naturally or automatically expect a person to be ashamed, or situations

[1] Primo Levi, *If This is a Man/The Truce* (London: Everyman's Press, 2000), 187–188.

that we believe merit shame, yet it is absent. These situations might be those where the absence of shame seems to demand an explanation. I shall suggest four ways that such situations might be characterized. I will argue that two of these are particularly pertinent when we are concerned about understanding shame and atrocity.

Making Sense of Shame

Shame has many guises; or, it might be better to say the term "shame" captures a dysfunctional family of emotional experiences. Some instances of shame seem automatic—*affective*, to employ the philosophical/psychological terminology found in the literature. Other instances of shame are clearly borne of reflection; reflection, for example, on the sort of individual one is and the sort of individual one would like to be, or would like others to think one to be. In the terminology of the academic disciplines of psychology and philosophy, this has given rise to the almost exclusive identification of shame the emotion as *cognitive*: shame emerges from the act of cognizing, rather than merely being instantiated by an environmental trigger.

Because many instances of shame seem to be irreducibly reflective, this has led to it being depicted as a distinctively, or even a paradigm case of a, cognitive emotion. Gabriele Taylor, Martha Nussbaum, and Paul E. Griffiths,[2] despite other differences, agree in categorizing shame as a cognitive emotion. I should like to suggest that there is no need to accept such reasoning, for it seems to rest on the assumption that emotion terms, such as shame, ought to be categorized, indexed, or classified in kinds according to whether they *are* affective or cognitive.[3] But shame, like fear, *can* strike one in an af-

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[2] See Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Paul E. Griffiths, *What Emotions really are* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997).

[3] They are sometimes categorized according to cognate distinctions such as affect programme/higher cognitive (early Griffiths), simple/complex (later Griffiths), and affective

fect-type way or it can emerge from reflection. Shame, like fear, *can* be affective *or* cognitive.

Shame can sometimes be difficult to get to grips with, difficult to make sense of. It is not that we find it difficult to align the expression with the context or the situation in which it is expressed, such as the shame expressed by Primo Levi[4] with the context which gives rise to that shame. Shame such as that testified to by Levi can strike us as a wholly natural emotional response to the situation in which he found himself. Rather, what can seem puzzling about shame is to be found in the *explaining*. Levi's writings testify to his difficulty with explaining his shame.[5] It can seem like we know at some deep level that survivors of extreme trauma bear shame as a marker of their survival of that trauma, while we also struggle to know how or why they do or should bear shame for having so survived.

I have suggested a framework for understanding shame that I believe helps resolve this difficulty, for those for whom it is such. I have called this framework "world-taking cognitivism,"[6] but the label is unimportant. The point is how as observers we make sense of an emotional expression that has hitherto puzzled us, by engaging in something that we might call a philosophical redescription of the scenario. Such a redescription will involve bringing to view the relationship between, on the one hand, the conceptualization of the state of affairs in which the expresser of shame finds themselves, and, on the other hand, the character of the expresser. The suggestion is that shame can be rendered intelligible through such a redescription. Through redescription we seek to make manifest the *internal relations* holding between, on the one hand, the conceptualization of the state of affairs for a person of such-and-such a character, and, on the other hand, being ashamed.

emotions/emotions of self-assessment (Taylor). What all of these categorizations have in common is the depiction of shame as essentially reflective, and thus cognitive.

4   See *If this is a Man*.

5   See Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (London: Abacus, 1989) for a chapter-long tussle with explaining the shame he had earlier testified to in *If This is a Man*.

6   See my *Shame and Philosophy: An Investigation in Ethics and the Philosophy of Emotion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), particularly chapters 3 and 4.

Put another way, a person of a particular character in such a situation will be ashamed, for it is part of the meaning of such a situation for such a person that it be a shameful situation; and the shameful situation, of which they are a constitutive part, bears down on them. The story one can tell about the expresser's character will be one informed by their enculturation—about how their initiation into, and relationship to, their culture(s) contributes to the formation of their character.

The idea is that rather than see emotions in a way that has seemed natural to many (including writers as otherwise divergent as Gabriele Taylor and Paul Griffiths), as categorizable into affective emotions and cognitive emotions, or affective and complex, we might rather see emotions against a scale of what we might call *cultural specificity*. For if a particular emotion can be at turns both affective and cognitive, then such classification is either wrong (Griffiths)[7] or potentially misleading (Taylor).[8]

Now, the thought is that an emotion such as shame demands a higher level of cultural specificity than does, for example, the emotion of disgust. If one understands this as a way of distinguishing different emotions, then one can see why it has seemed natural to categorize emotions into two classes (or kinds): complex (cognitive) and affective. We might also see why this is an ultimately misleading and inaccurate division. For this categorization suggests that shame cannot be affective—for it does not take its place in that category—and, for example, disgust cannot stem from cool reflection. While an

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[7] Griffiths classifies emotions into two natural kinds and one pseudo-kind of socially constructed and thus pseudo-emotions. In Griffiths's classification, shame takes its place in the complex kind of emotions. Therefore, acknowledging that shame can be both affective and complex is to either acknowledge a flaw in the classification or to imply that there are two different kinds of emotion picked out by the term "shame."

[8] Taylor identifies shame as one of the emotions of self-assessment, along with guilt, pride, and remorse. This, I suggest, is misleading in that it is conceivable that shame can be borne of a wholly internalized conception of self, which is at odds with the person's own expressed assessment of self. In part, one might say that it is this that gives rise to the struggle with shame that is so familiar to those who experience the emotion in response to trauma.

emotion such as shame draws upon reasonably high-level, culturally given, and thus *potentially* culturally specific characteristics for its instantiation, emotions such as disgust or fear are characteristically indexed to more basic or even—we might say—biological characteristics. I do not mean to suggest that the former are more inclined to be complex or cognitive and the latter affective. There is no logical connection between the level of cultural specificity and the question as to whether an emotional *episode* involves thought (or *cognition*) or not. Suffice to say that an emotion that operates at a higher level of cultural specificity, and is thus primarily anchored in the cultural development of the person experiencing the emotion, is going to be an emotion that provides greater opportunity for reflexivity. This, I suggest, is what has led to the tendency to attempt to divide emotions along cognitive and affective lines. It is also why such an attempt will be at variance with the phenomenology of emotion. For however culturally specific the characteristics are that an emotion might draw upon, they can always be internalized and become habitual—part of a person's nature.

We might put this in Aristotelian terms. While it seems perspicuous to index disgust or fear to our first nature (our biological nature), it seems equally perspicuous to index shame to our second nature. Put another way, the resources we find ourselves drawing upon in offering an explanation of someone's (or our own) shame will be those that relate to the sort of character that person has (we have)—though this will not always be their specifically *moral* character. In contrast, the resources we find ourselves drawing upon in explaining disgust or fear will most often be those that relate to the sort of creatures we are—our physical vulnerability, and the traits we have evolved as a species so as to enable our survival and our flourishing. There are two important points here.

I do not mean to advance an alternative way of categorizing emotions, whether that be into classes or kinds. I am rather attempting to explain why it has both seemed natural to think that one could categorize emotions in the traditional way and why trying to do so would be at variance with the phenomena.

The usefulness of this way of seeing emotions is that it remains agnostic as to the phenomenology of particular emotional episodes, in that it does not entail a prior theoretical determination of the emotional episode as either affective or "cognitive" (though it might afford one a posterior "empirically" informed determination of the *episode* as either affective or "cognitive").

The idea is to resist the temptation to provide a theory of shame, while seeking to be better placed to understand a person's shame. What is significant in our making sense of the emotion is how *this* person *takes in* the world. Understood from the perspective of world-taking cognitivism, the emotional state *is* a way of seeing (taking) the world: being alive to an aspect of the world. The shame someone might experience when they see the connections between the life(style) they live and the suffering of others can be understood in terms of that person being alive to that aspect of the world, to them seeing the relationship between people that exists in virtue of our shared humanity. Coming to see the world under this aspect is to see it as meriting (taking it to merit) shame. One might try to make someone else see those same connections and feel shame. One can try to bring the person without shame to a position where he might take the world in that way—meriting this response—but it is *they* who must come to take the world in this way—*they* must see it as this, so to speak.

When we talk of the *world* in this context, we are not talking of the disenchanted or "pre"-conceptualized (given) world, allegedly the world of the natural sciences, but rather of the conceptualized world. In talking of the *conceptualized world*, we are not talking of the world as constituted by conceptually structured acts of thinking but simply of a world that *is* thinkable. Thoughts about the world, takings of the world, are thoughts with thinkable contents.[9] The concepts through which we take our world have normative properties inseparable from their descriptive properties. It is in perceiving, grasping, and acknowledging such properties that our emotional responses

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[9] See John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 28.

to the world are elicited.[10] For example, when one sees an event as (say) shameful, one has perceived an *internal relation* between one's way of taking (seeing) that event—i.e., one's conceptual characterization of it—and one's conception of shame. Such internal relations can emerge as live for us through the forming of both our human and second nature (*Bildung*). In those situations where we might not be alive to such aspects at a particular time, we might come to be so at a later time by means of the dawning of an aspect.[11]

Let us take a look at a concrete example. Léopard was (at the time of the interview) an imprisoned Hutu perpetrator of, on his own admission, heinous crimes committed during the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Not having felt shame at the time of the genocide, nor for some time following, he tells his interviewer (Jean Hatzfeld) of how he later came to feel shame as a result of the crimes he committed.

> Some try to show remorse but tremble before the truth. They sneak around it, because of too many conflicting interests, and wind up flung backwards.
> It was in a camp in Congo that I first felt my heart ache. I prayed, hoping to find relief, but in vain. After prayers or hymns, shame waited for me, without fail. So I began being sorry out loud, paying no attention to the mockery spewing from my comrades' mouths. In prison I told my whole truth. It came out freely. Ever since then, whenever someone asks me for it, it flows the same way.[12]

Léopard's shame comes upon him as he *acknowledges* his crimes. It is true that he might have conceded his *guilt* for the acts he committed some time earlier, but only now is he coming to an *acknowledgement* of his crime. Shame seems to be a constituent part of that acknowledgement. Léopard's shame comes despite the mockery of his comrades who have yet to, or who do not,

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[10] This should not be read as implying that one needs to have learnt a language to experience emotion.

[11] I am keen not to get bogged down in abstract discussions here, so for further discussion, see my *Shame and Philosophy* for details.

[12] Léopard, in Jean Hatzfeld, *A Time For Machetes: The Rwandan Genocide: The Killers Speak* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2005), p. 154.

acknowledge their crime. Those mocking comrades are Léopard's immediate audience; they stand as the strongest candidate for playing the role of Léopard's (most immediate) honour group, so often invoked in explanations of shame.[13] Yet it is not before *their* gaze that Léopard feels his shame, so to speak, and nor was it before the court that tried and sentenced him. Léopard feels shame despite those around him mocking him for the way his shame makes him act. So, how should we best make sense of Léopard's emerging shame, on its own terms?

The process of acknowledging his crime is a process whereby Léopard comes to an acknowledgement of the humanity he shares with his victims. We can make sense of Léopard's emerging remorse and shame through understanding him moving from not seeing to seeing his actions for the moral crimes that they are. This is not to say that in perpetrating his crimes during the genocide Léopard was either unaware of, or in denial about, the status of his actions as criminal acts under international and domestic law. Rather, it is to say that he had turned away from, had denied, that which would force him to acknowledge the moral significance of his actions; he had denied, turned-away from, that which would allow him to acknowledge the true meaning of his actions. I suggest that one should like to say that in carrying out those actions as he did, Léopard was not merely violating a code to which he was bound by some external authority, but rather that he was doing violence to the very fabric of the notion of humanity and human existence, and thus his own existence.

In the perpetration of his crimes, Léopard refused to acknowledge the humanity of his victims. It was not that he refused to admit that the extension of the concept of "human being" is "member of the species *Homo sapiens*." It was rather that he had refused to acknowledge, had turned away from, the meaning of human being as a moral concept with, we might say, all its normative richness. He had gone through a process whereby he failed to acknowledge the humanity of others—that is to say, he failed to see the moral

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13 See Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt*.

claims acknowledging the humanity that another make's on one.[14] Léopard was in a state of denial regarding the humanity of those he subjected to brutality, suffering, and death, and in being so, in being able to act as he did, he had also denied that humanity to himself. This is what creeps up on Léopard; the situations in which Léopard committed those crimes had not elicited shame because he had not seen the acts as shameful. In carrying out those actions, Léopard denied—was in denial as regards—the humanity of his victims and had justified the suspending of the pre-genocide order, whereby acting in such a way is inhuman.

On the cover of Jean Hatzfeld's book, in which the interview with Léopard appears, there is a quote from Philip Gourevitch (the author of another book of moving testimonies of the genocide: *We Wish to Inform You that tomorrow We will be Killed with our Families*). Gourevitch writes, "Hatzfeld's harrowing documentation of the voices of Rwandan killers reminds us once again how perfectly human it can be to be perfectly inhumane." This might superficially seem like a perplexing remark. On reflection, and having made sense of Léopard's remarks quoted above, we can make good sense of Gourevitch's comment. The first instance of "human" in the sentence denotes, I suggest, member of the species *Homo sapiens*, the second, in the locution "inhumane," invokes the moral concept "human being." This latter, I should like to suggest, is to what Léopard's shame, once it has emerged, testifies; that is to say, his shame testifies to his inability to escape fully the moral meaning of human being.

This moral meaning of human being, we might say, is internally related to—it carries with it—concepts such as dignity, compassion, and so on. Put another way, one would have significant difficulties in understanding the employment of the moral concept in the way it is employed when we talk of

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[14] I draw upon some interesting, though maybe unexpected, work here. Primarily, Section 4 of Stanley Cavell's *The Claim of Reason*. Though I have also been inspired by Stephen Mulhall's essay on Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner*: "Picturing the Human (Body and Soul): A Reading of *Blade Runner*." *Film and Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (1994), p. 87–104 and Rupert Read, "Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* as a War Book." *New Literary History* 41 (2010), pp. 593–612.

humane and inhumane, without also having grasped the concepts of dignity, compassion, care, and so on. We might say, therefore, that one helpful way to understand, or make perspicuous, Léopard's ability to commit those crimes without, until years later, feeling remorse or shame is to think of it in terms of the internal relations that under normal conditions hold between the moral concept of human being and concepts such as dignity, care, compassion, and justice, and those relations being suspended, or (it may be more accurate to say) having been *latent* in Léopard's case for some time. When those relations were re-established, when they came to life, then shame for his acts emerged.

The question that interests me is this: What are the conditions under which these relations might lie dormant, be suspended, suppressed or absented, such that shame is absent? In what follows, I suggest four ways in which this might happen. I do not intend this as either an exhaustive list or a type-categorization, but merely as a helpful way of gaining clarity about certain issues. The four types of shame-absence I call the Kaspar Hauser type, the Diogenes of Synope type, the World-Change type, and the Object-Prejudice type.

The Kaspar Hauser Type

My first suggestion as to how shame might be absent takes its name from the legend of Kaspar Hauser. I am not concerned with the specifics of the historical Kaspar Hauser, but rather with the figure of legend, particularly as presented in Werner Herzog's 1974 film, *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (the original German title being *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle*).[15]

Kaspar Hauser was not subject to the degree of enculturation typical of his peers. He was kept separate from the culture that would otherwise have be-

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[15] I do not want to become embroiled in Kasparology, as it would likely distract me from my real concern. However, it is now widely accepted that the real Kaspar's first seventeen years could not have been as the legend has it—that is, one of complete confinement. As I understand it, the consensus is that he would have been an idiot or dead after such an ordeal.

en his, isolated in a cell for the first seventeen years of his life. On exposure to the social world beyond the cell, therefore, Kaspar does not have the resources that enable shame to bear down on him in situations where his peers would expect it to do so, or at least expect an explanation as to why it is absent. This can manifest itself in many ways: for example, Kaspar cries out in pain (both physical and psychological) all too readily, having not learnt that to do so might be inappropriate in certain situations.

The legend of Kaspar Hauser represents for us an extreme case of a lack of enculturation, maybe even a caricature of such. In doing so, it serves to illustrate one way in which shame might fail to be present in a situation in which we would ordinarily expect it to be so. Kaspar was neither exposed to, nor participated in, the practices that enable the forming of one's character to the extent that one can be ashamed. Of course, with every passing day he inhabits the social world—the world of shared norms, we might say—he is developing the cultural prerequisites that might ultimately enable him to experience shame. However, on being released from his cell at age seventeen he has, according to legend, no second nature. The person who feels shame is therefore *first and foremost* a particular individual human being with a history and hopes for the future: a *person*; a culturally encumbered individual living with others in a conceptualized world of shared norms; a person having a second nature. On the day of his release from his cell, we might characterize Kaspar as culturally radically alien, transposed into this world without the cultural resources required so that he might recognize or make sense of the norms or rules that constitute the world.

We might contrast this with a person experiencing (affective) fear. Such a person is *first and foremost* simply a human being, with the sorts of human frailties characteristic of the species. They are a *person* maybe, but here in contrast to the emphasis on cultural encumbrance in the case of shame, the emphasis is on how the person is encumbered by awareness of their flesh and blood existence and their awareness of their susceptibility to pain.

The legend of Kaspar Hauser can serve to highlight the extent to which the absence of shame might have a cultural source. For while Kaspar's case is extreme, what it serves to highlight for us is that shame's indexing to our

second nature means that a malformed second nature might lead to either an excess or a deficiency in shame. The Kaspar Hauser type of shame-absence, we might note, seems passive, in that the absence of shame is brought about by factors that are in the main external to the person whom we would normally expect to feel shame in this scenario.

The Diogenes of Synope Type

World-taking cognitivism proposes redescribing an emotional episode by making manifest how the person having the emotion need be alive to the internal relations between certain relevant concepts, such as their conception of themselves as this person and their conceptualization of the situation (what we might call the shame scenario).

If we are to say that seeing the internal relations, being alive to them, is a way of characterizing someone's shame, then the contrast class, as it were, is not seeing, not being alive to them, in the sense in which Kaspar Hauser is unable to be so at the moment of release from his cell.

However, there is another similar though informatively different way in which shame can be absent. I mentioned that in the case of Kaspar Hauser the absence of shame was passive in that external factors had denied him the resources for shame. This suggests that there might be a way in which one might be shameless in a manner similar to Kaspar, but actively so. Here the person has actively sought to shed the emotion of shame, by turning away from, refusing to acknowledge, those internal relations that hold between concepts such as shame, dignity, human being, and so on. This is the shamelessness sought by the ancient cynics. I have in mind particularly Diogenes of Synope, whose shameless propensity to publicly masturbate in the Athenian marketplace is discussed by Raymond Geuss:

> Diogenes of Sinope, who lived in the fourth century B.C., was in the habit of masturbating in the middle of the Athenian marketplace. He was not pathologically unaware of his surroundings, psychotic, or simple-minded. Nor was he living in a society that stood at the very beginning of what Elias calls "the

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process of civilization"; that is, he was not living in a society fairly low on the scale of what we take to be our cultural evolution, one in which such forms of behaviour were not yet subject to systematic disapproval and socially regulated. Rather, we know that the Athenians objected to his mode of life in general and to this form of behaviour in particular. They clearly considered him a public nuisance and made their disapproval known to him. We know this because the doxographic tradition specifically records Diogenes' response to a criticism of his masturbating in public. He is said to have replied that he wished only that it were as easy to satisfy hunger by just rubbing one's belly.[16]

Diogenes is deliberately turning away from the internal relations that would normally give rise to one's shame at being viewed masturbating in public. His act is undertaken with a refusal to acknowledge the relationship between the disgust of others directed at his action and his own disgustingness and thus lack of dignity (as a human being). In refusing to acknowledge such, shame is absent. Diogenes *actively* denies shame. Shame relies on acceding to a number of sophisticated relations between concepts; in refusing to acknowledge the applicability of one of those concepts, Diogenes achieves shamelessness.

The point to be clear on here is that in contrast to the Kaspar Hauser type of shame-absence, Diogenes of Synope *sees* the relations but *actively* denies the significance of certain of them. He refuses to *acknowledge* them; he refuses to let them weigh on him, as it were. This takes discipline. Diogenes must discipline himself that *to elicit disgust* in others is *not to be*, *nor even have good grounds for being*, *disgusting* or *devoid of dignity*. Not only must Diogenes believe this but he must live this belief. We might say he must *be* the embodiment of this thought.

Relations such as that between others' disgust and one's sense that one is disgusting are generally *grasped*, and not in need of *interpretation*; to deny such relations, therefore, takes work. Diogenes cannot simply decide to judge

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[16] Raymond Geuss, *Public Goods, Private Goods* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 12 f.

differently on any given occasion. Diogenes is not refusing to acknowledge that the concepts of disgustingness and lack of dignity are internally related to the concept of shame. Rather, he is refusing to admit, refusing to acknowledge, that he is disgusting and devoid of dignity by virtue of his actions eliciting disgust in others. Diogenes's shamelessness, then, involves an active turning away from, a denial of, that second nature (*Bildung*) which invokes, which *activates*, relations between the meaning of disgust, (human) dignity, and shame. Such a turning away, such a denial, a refusal to acknowledge, needs to be, if it is to be successful, the product of training in counter-enculturation. It needs to be a process whereby the place those concepts have in one's life, the significance they have for one, becomes fundamentally altered. In this sense, Diogenes sees his second nature, his *Bildung,* in the shame it bequeaths him as tyrannical, as restricting his natural (in first-nature sense) freedom.

The Diogenes type of shame-absence highlights the extent to which our enculturation is not a wholly passive matter, it is not that we are in some sense determined by our culture in our emotional responses to the world. Even those emotions such as shame, which are indexed at a high level of cultural specificity can be controlled, with work. One might baulk at the extremes to which Diogenes of Synope went to absent a shame he saw as illegitimate, but again in being somewhat extreme the example serves to highlight the significant role of the person and the extent to which they are responsible for their shame or its absence.

The World-Change Type

In my discussion of Kaspar Hauser, above, I noted that we might see his emergence into the world from his cell as something like a radically alien individual transposed into this world, lacking the cultural resources required to recognize or make sense of the norms or rules that constitute the lifeworld. This might suggest to one a third way in which shame can be absent. Here it is the lifeworld that changes, so to speak. Put another way, in Kaspar Hauser's case it was his radical lack of enculturation—initiation into the life-

world—which meant he was devoid of the resources to experience shame. He was simply unequipped to see the relationships between the relevant concepts. However, there might be a scenario whereby unlike Kaspar, one has had available to one all the resources for enculturation, but that at some stage in life one is unfortunate to find oneself placed in a context so radically different from one's context of enculturation. Here it is the (new) lifeworld that is radically alien, and it is so to the extent that it does violence to the relations between concepts, such that they now fail to hold. One case might be that which we touched on above when talking of Léopard. Auschwitz is another example.

Auschwitz created a whole new set of relationships between concepts, and in doing so subjected to violence the relatively stable relations of the pre-Auschwitz world—and later the post-Auschwitz world. This is of course not to deny the very brutal acts of violence (in the literal sense) that took place there. Only, one might gain a fuller understanding of the magnitude of the crime committed at Auschwitz if one also comes to see the way in which Auschwitz also subjected to violence the person's ability to respond emotionally to their world.

The oral testimony of Edith P., an Auschwitz survivor and interviewee of Lawrence Langer's, is painfully illustrative here. I quote this passage because Edith P.'s words, and Lawrence Langer's comments on those words, really speak eloquently to the point I wish to make here.[17]

> Edith P. ... tells of an instance of when she was suffering severely with dysentery but had enough "humanity" in her, as she reports, to prevent her from relieving herself inside the barracks. She was too ashamed. But she could not go to the latrine, because an order for Blocksperre had been issued, a temporary sealing of the barracks while a search was carried out for two missing inmates. She violated the order and left anyway, only to meet a particularly brutal SS

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[17] The interested reader can find an extended version of this quote in the concluding section of the final chapter of my *Shame and Philosophy*, where I discuss the quote for related but different reasons. What I reproduce here is Edith P.'s testimony interspersed with Langer's commentary on that testimony, as it appears in his book.

woman guard who, learning of her mission, on the spot told her to turn around and gave her ten lashes on the back with her whip. Although she managed not to cry, Edith P. admits that she was humiliated. She explains that the pain was not the problem. "Physical pain you can stand," she says, "but how can you bear the emotional pain?"

... Edith's public loss of dignity and the attendant emotional pain imply a complex system of motive and effect largely beyond her control. "My body healed," she confesses, "but it never healed my soul, that I had been humiliated this way, in front of my family." (Her sister-in-law and the sister-in-law's three sisters had witnessed the whipping from the barracks) … When the "rules" changed in Auschwitz, when Edith P. discovered that shame made no difference because it was not allied to dignity as she had supposed (all of this having nothing to do with her, of course, but with her persecutors), then humiliation replaced pride.[18]

As Edith P. testifies, basic human functions such as going to the toilet are now related to episodes of deep humiliation. Langer interprets this as follows: "When the 'rules' changed in Auschwitz, when Edith P. discovered that shame made no difference because it was not allied to dignity as she had supposed (all of this having nothing to do with her, of course, but with her persecutors), then humiliation replaced pride."

There is no shame in relieving oneself in the barracks because there is no dignity in the alternative—a public beating/humiliation. When dignity is deprived at every turn then shame penetrates every minute of one's existence, and is, or at least may be, absent. For if shame is ever-present, if every possible course of action is shameful, then no single act can be distinctively shameful. When the post-Auschwitz rules (norms) are established, in the years following liberation, shame can return because the relation between shame and dignity has been re-established. One can perceive shame once more because its contrasts in pride and dignity are re-established also.

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[18] Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 103.

Auschwitz subjected the concept of dignity—and by extension, shame—to violence. This is of course only one aspect of the violence perpetrated in Auschwitz (and comparable sites of extreme trauma), but it is a significant aspect. Edith P.'s dignity was stolen from her at Auschwitz and when the post-Auschwitz norms allowed dignity, and thus shame, the possibility of re-emergence, then shame could be felt about the complete deprivation of dignity and shame when forced to live by the rules of Auschwitz.

Auschwitz serves then to highlight what I am here calling the World-Change type of shame-absence. It is an example of how a brutally alien world of norms can be imposed, which then serves to alter the very fabric of the life experience of those subject to that imposition. Auschwitz and other sites of comparable atrocity are extreme versions, and in being so extreme help highlight for us the way in which less extreme world changes might impact upon our emotional well-being, by denying to us our capacity to experience—in this case—shame.

So far I have focussed upon ways in which the resources for a shame response might be absented, either actively as with Diogenes of Synope or passively as in the other two types of absence. The fourth way that shame might be absent is a little different. Here I am open to the thought that the absence of shame is something that might well run deeper than the question of the cultural resources at a person's disposal, and (as in the case of Diogenes) the person's relationship to those.

The Object-Prejudice Type

There is much discussion in contemporary philosophy of the emotions regarding the extent to which emotions require objects. This is sometimes discussed in terms of the extent to which emotions are essentially or characteristically intentional. One of the reasons for this discussion is that while one group of theorists, the cognitivists, have taken the (formal) object of each emotion as an essential explanatory and type-individuating factor, their opponents have been keen to point out that there are examples of emotional states that do not seem to have objects: anxiety is one oft-cited example. This

has seemed to present something of a problem for cognitivists, so much so in fact that it is cited by authors such as Paul Griffiths as one of the insurmountable problems faced by cognitivism and which, according to such critics, should lead us to see it as a degenerative research program.

The criticism and the difficulty that cognitivists seem to have in dealing with it is, I suggest, misplaced. For one might hold that in those cases where there seems to be no object, one is not obliged to concede that this is objectless emotion. Rather, I suggest that emotional episodes that appear objectless can be seen to have an object, only that object is a complex diffuse object and in being so, we see past it or through it in searching for an object. In doing so, and then failing in our search (for a simple object), we manifest a philosophical prejudice against complex diffuse objects.

I want to suggest that this prejudice has more practical implications, over and above those it might have for weighing the merits or otherwise of theories of emotion. One might note, therefore, that there are times when we might be able to offer a rationale for a feeling of shame, or for fear, or for anger, yet the emotion is not present. It seems that the presence of a rationale is simply not enough, even if that rationale is one acceded to by the person in the shame scenario (or fear scenario or anger scenario). This differs from our three earlier types of shame-absence, in that there is here no explanation of the absence in terms of relations holding, or failing to hold, and being acknowledged or denied between relevant concepts. In the situation I wish to discuss here, we can assume that we are not dealing with either a Kaspar Hauser, a Diogenes of Synope, or with a world change. Yet still shame is absent when we can provide a clear rationale for it being present.

So how might this look? Let us consider some potential candidates for objects of a person's shame. Though, first, two notes of caution:

There is no normative claim being made here. The following list is descriptive, in that it comprises shame-objects easily found if one conducts a survey of expressions of shame. There are some entries on this list that one might rightly take as indicative of perverse cultural distortions of moral sensibilities. Shame, we might note, can serve as a cultural barometer: it indicates to us the subtle character-forming ways in which our culture operates

below our radar, so to speak. The liberal who laughs at a racist joke and is then consumed by shame when reflecting on this (or challenged about it, or observed laughing) serves to show us that at a deep level in our culture there are still prejudicial assumptions about people with different levels of skin pigment (and so on) and that the way our culture mediates the lifeworld to us—through enculturation—is out of step with (lags behind) the attitudes expressed by its more progressive individuals. The shame of our hypothetical liberal testifies to the need to change attitudes from the bottom-up: that means changing practices, the way we employ certain categories in communicating, and so on.

The entries on the list are not mutually exclusive categories.

Potential objects of shame:

a. the painting I have just finished (which is of poor standard);

b. my exposed naked body (which I have just unwittingly exposed to a nonintimate other);

c. my moral character (which is seen by others as/I now accept as falling short of my presentation of/assumptions about that character);

d. my dignity (which I now see I have failed to uphold/which is denied me);

e. my sibling (who has been raped and whose resulting loss of chastity taints the whole family);

f. the lifeworld of which I am part (which I now see as disgustingly inhumane in being so systematically unjust);

g. humanity (which fails to act collectively and effectively to prevent its own destruction and the destruction of the ecosystem of which it is a part despite knowing the threat and the solution).[19]

Now, as one works one's way down this list, one finds that the objects become more complex and diffuse, and thus more difficult to grasp. Entries f. and g. take the lifeworld and humanity as the objects of shame. This can, I

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[19] This point is explored in relation to a different set of issues (though with a little overlap) in my and Rupert Read's "Wittgenstein and Pragmatism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pragmatism*, ed. A. Malachowski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

suggest, not only lead one to think that in such situations there is no object, it can also lead to an absence of shame. For while one might well accede to the rationale for shame, as presented in list entries f. and g., one might still not feel shame.

Let us take a topical example. I choose this example precisely because its status as an atrocity will be questionable to many readers. I will begin by discussing fear and progress to a discussion of shame.

One of the problems with motivating ourselves (as a society, as a species) to make the changes required to mitigate or prevent climate catastrophe as an outcome of anthropogenic global warming (AGW), changes such as the radical change in our cultures required to move to a low-carbon or carbon-free "steady state" economy, is that the problem of AGW is so diffuse. There is no clear object for us to fear, and fear needs an object. Put another way, fear of a threat to one's existence is a characteristically emotional response: we see a snake on the path as we are hiking and we *feel* fear, even if later we remind ourselves that snakes pose no threat in this locale.

On a (neo-)Jamesian, anti-cognitivist account, one might characterize the problem of AGW thus: the threat posed by AGW and explained to us by climate science via various media just does not provide the environmental triggers so that our physiological response (sensations, changes in the autonomic nervous system) might be triggered, and which emotional responses on a Jamesian account are the awareness of. Now, if one takes a purely Jamesian approach hereabouts, then there is nothing we can do about this but wait until there is an event of such magnitude, which is unequivocally climate-change-related, and which will serve as an environmental trigger. The problem with such a sit-and-wait approach is that waiting for such an event—an environmental Pearl Harbor—might be to wait until it is too late (to prevent fatal runaway overheating).

On the cognitivist account, it seems difficult to make sense of our inaction. The science is unequivocal, the precautionary principle invokes rational grounds for acting now, yet we are simply failing to act in any meaningful way. Surely an understanding of the science would lead to a forming of the evaluative beliefs such that one would fear the consequences of failing to act

to mitigate climate change and thus take action to absent that fear. Yet fear, it seems, as an emotional state, is lacking.

The problem I suggest is the problem of diffuse objects. Our emotional/psychological makeup as human beings seems prejudiced in favour of simple objects with which we are directly acquainted. The threat posed by AGW, though no less real, is something akin to a threat that we might characterize as having a complex diffuse object.

What is required to motivate action is an *engaged* acknowledgement of the problem we face. The problem of how to mitigate AGW—in being complex and diffuse—seems to fall short of bringing about such an *engaged* response, and both (orthodox) cognitivist accounts of emotion and Jamesian empiricist accounts do not help us to understand and effect the required change.

Shame and Atrocity: Notes toward Conclusion

I suggest that world-taking cognitivism helps us here, in the sense in which it rejects the Jamesian implication that emotions are passive (essentially affective), while also providing a way of understanding how they might be responses to a meaningful world, without inferring from that that they are chosen. What might this do for us in practical terms? Well, it might tell us how best to frame the way in which we communicate the threat, so that it brings about the integrated engaged response we require. It might show us the kind of *cultural prerequisites* for individuals being in a position whereby and wherein they acknowledge the threat posed by AGW.

We *should* feel shame; we (in particular, those of us living in the West) are actors in an atrocity. We are a part of, and have a part in, the unfolding of this atrocity that is much greater than one might argue of those who were overcome with shame at surviving earlier atrocities (those such as Primo Levi). Put another way, we are agents of this atrocity, not simply victims or potential victims; our carbon profligate lifestyles ensure this. Why the absence of shame?

My point is that shame can be absent when we *should* expect it to be present because the complex and diffuse nature of the object of that shame

leads to (or allows) emotional disengagement (a disengagement from the object, we might say). At the same time, we find no problem in providing a rationale for shame being present; only it is not. Furthermore, we engage in numerous stratagems of denial to keep any latent shame at bay.

I am talking here, of course, of someone who is knowledgeable enough to see the rationale for shame: they understand the climate science, they understand the changes in our way of life required, and they understand the consequences, both for humans and for the ecosystem, of failing to make the changes.

Of course, there are other ways in which shame might be absent in this context: one might fail to feel shame primarily out of ignorance, but this would be different: a version of the Kaspar Hauser type. One might fail to feel shame because one is in denial, and this would be a version of the Diogenes of Synope type. One might also argue that many do not feel shame at our failure to act to mitigate AGW because our culture does not equip them to do so.

Discussions of atrocity are often intimately related to discussions of shame that results from exposure to those atrocities. In one sense the shame that emerges from an exposure to atrocity is part of what identifies the event as atrocious. What I would like to argue is that when shame is absent, this absence can serve to blind us to the atrocity that is before us and that is ours to work to prevent. Feeling shame is part of seeing the atrocity for what it is in an appropriate emotionally engaged manner. It is thus a vital part of being human, and its absence in cases like that that I have just described is an all-too-human failure of humanity. One hopes, not a fatal one.

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