

Climate Change and Cultural Transformation

Chapter 7

DEATH AS TEACHER: LEARNING DYING

In this world, what is the greatest terror?

The fear of death. Shankara, *Crest Jewel of Discrimination*

What is death?

Ignorance. Shankara

Montaigne held - following the ancients – that to philosophise is to learn how to die. But, as some of our greatest poets testify, our fear of death often gets the better of us. It famously terrified Leo Tolstoy. After finishing *War and Peace* he was on his way to look at a new home he wanted to buy with the proceeds from his novel. Putting up one evening in an inn in a place called Arzamas he had a nightmare that night in which he was visited by the spirit of death. He was overcome by despair, fear and terror the like of which he had never experienced before. All his achievements and everything in life he celebrated suddenly seemed to amount to nothing by comparison.

As A.N. Wilson, one of his biographers, wrote about this incident:

What had begun in *War and Peace* as an exercise in mythology – a reconstruction of his personal and national history – had ended in a series of unanswerable questions: what forces move the nations? Why do things happen? Why are we here? What is the point of anything? We know that we have nothing to look forward to but death.

Wilson believed this experience was to become part of Tolstoy's personal mythology which he wrote up into a short story some fifteen years later. ⁱ

The story based on his Arzamas experience was *The Death of Ivan Illych* about a man, who had led a relatively unremarkable life as a married civil servant until he contracted cancer in middle age, an event which turned his life upside down but which he was unable to come to terms with until the very end. His own fear and denial was reflected in the silence of his family about him. No one was able to acknowledge the truth. It couldn't be talked about. This left him isolated and alone with his own thoughts. In his depression Ivan Illych came to view his past life as meaningless and his future death as too awful to contemplate. At the same time he was disgusted by his increasingly decaying body. In his fear of death he tried to put his disease out of his mind.

As the illness progressed, however, death drew its attention to him not "in order to make him take some action but only that he should look at it, look at it straight in the face". He couldn't, but this just increased his agony:

Ivan Illych's worst torment was the lying – the lie, which was somehow maintained by them all, that he wasn't dying, he was only ill, and all he had to do was to keep calm and follow doctor's orders and then something good would emerge. Whereas he knew that whatever was done to him nothing would emerge but more and more agony, suffering and death. And this lie was torture for him.... ii

Only at the very end after months of suffering was he able to face death and die. But he died without needing religious consolation. It was, as Wilson remarks, "merely the acceptance of mortality itself which brings him peace". iii

Culture and death

As with Ivan Illych the acceptance of mortality does not come easy to us today. Culture - said Hegel - is what history does with death. We fear death and build monuments as if to protect ourselves from it. In this sense history is a series of immortality projects. Our political and cultural artefacts – the many forms of empire and art - are forever trying to defy time, as is our science and technology. But the

faster history goes the more difficult it is to hide from ourselves the reality of death.

Phillip Aries thought that the study of attitudes towards death throughout history may tell us less about eternity and more about the nature of our societies. In *The Hour of Our Death* he documented the thinking and ritual practices about death in Western European cultures over a thousand year span. He had set out with the “modest” plan of looking into the problems of modernity’s difficult relationship with its own impermanence but found himself engaged in a much greater project. The slow progress of his research was about the practical immensity of the task but there was “another more profound reason, which had to do with the metaphysical nature of death”.

When Aries thought he had reached the outer limits of his field he found himself pushed further, both backward and forward in time. He discovered that different periods of history had very different attitudes towards death. The representation of “death” emerged from a culture’s experience of itself:

I sensed a relationship between attitudes toward death in their most general and common expression and variations in the awareness of self and other, the sense of individual destiny or of the collective destiny of the race.^{iv}

Ernest Becker had written in the 1970s about “the denial of death” in the modern world and had tackled the problem of “the vital lie” – modern man’s refusal to acknowledge his own mortality. ^v Awareness of death, Becker believed, was our primary repression, not sexuality. Aries continued this theme when he pointed out that death had now become invisible. In the Middle Ages the “wild” force of death was “tamed” by the rituals of the community and the Church. The role of *memento mori* - such as the tomb, images of skeleton or skull, or portraits of the dead - also played an important part. Death was a more visible, acknowledged, and shared experience.

With the rise of individualism and the development of scientific rationality, the social practices of earlier times faded along with traditional beliefs in an afterlife and in the

existence of evil. As a result the experience of “wild” death became more common. Responses to this development varied. While the Romantics found death “beautiful” and fell in love with it, science and technology, disconnected from any sense of a metaphysical realm, came to ignore death altogether as if it just didn’t exist. As Aries argued this had a profound effect on how and where many people die in the modern world - less in the comfort of their homes but more in the strange, clinical setting of a hospital ward where Western medicine has confined them. In hospital their dying is too often unacknowledged and can pass in a social and literal silence. ^{vi}

Aries’ research refers to the experience of the earlier and middle decades of the twentieth century but there is evidence to suggest that our relationship with death at the beginning of the twenty-first is changing. There are signs that people are now challenging the sequestration of death by modern medicine and are not as fearful and denying today. In their attitudes and practices they are reclaiming it as a natural and transformative experience. ^{vii}

Responses to death in the Twentieth Century

In the twentieth century there were attempts to address the silence. Psychologists and psychotherapists pointed out the importance of mourning for mental health ^{viii} while Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, who inspired the widespread hospice movement, re-introduced the spirit of compassion, understanding, and acceptance into the treatment of the dying. ^{ix} Though this work has been important it also encouraged the view that death and dying were the domain of professional experts who know more about death and the “correct” way to die than the “lay” population. In the general population we have not been encouraged to take responsibility for the way we die.

Attitudes to death in the last century have been very contrasting. On the one hand the violence of the age, made possible by scientific and technological advances, was responsible for death on a scale unimagined before. The sheer numbers involved and the casual and shocking nature of so many deaths left whole populations

traumatised and numbed. It is no wonder that modern psychologists have attempted to address the sense of fear, aggression, and loss associated with that experience or that psychotherapy has often taken the form of bereavement consolation.

Fear and Aggression

The sense of death is most in apprehension. *Measure for Measure*, 3.1.

The fear alone of death has all kinds of consequences for us individually and collectively. Montaigne says his doctors are of the view that “there is no emotion which more readily ravishes our judgement from its proper seat”.^x Fear and aggression are often two sides of the same coin. Our fear, for instance, often forms our politics. Take terrorism for example. Clearly, it is not terrorism itself - terrible though it can be for its immediate victims - that terrorises us so much as our fear of terrorism and of the death it brings. Terrorism may not so far have killed many people, but, ironically, as the allied invasion of Iraq in 2003 demonstrated, the misguided reaction to it, arguably, led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands more.

Our fear also distorts our understanding. We are often fighting the spectre we have made of it in our imagination rather than the thing itself. As Jason Burke has written the real Al-Qaeda is very different from the British and American construction of it^{xi} while John Gray argued that Al Qaeda is a Western rather than Islamic phenomenon in its cultivation of nihilistic violence and the use of modern technology for those ends. In that respect it mirrors the nihilism at the heart of Western modernity. Unconsciously we may know this which may be why we are so troubled by it.^{xii} It was impossible at the time to ignore the similarities between Al Qaeda and the Bush administration in their demonization of - and wish to destroy - each other by violent means.

Fear is clearly blinding as the terrorists know to their own perverse advantage. It is the other face of aggression. At the same time the suicide bomber would seem to have a different relationship with death than ourselves which we cannot assume is

purely deluded. It may be, while we are too fearful of death they do not fear it enough. Psychoanalysts have tended to theorise aggression as a primary drive, antithetical to sex, libido, or the creative principle, but human destructiveness is not necessarily an innate instinct. It can equally be read as a reaction to other frustrations or fears rather than a drive in its own right. The psychoanalyst, Charles Rycroft, suggested that aggression is more related to the traditional meaning of dynamism, assertiveness, and expansiveness as a positive drive. ^{xiii}

Death as Loss

Understandably “death and dying” has also been associated in modern Western psychology with the themes of loss and grief. Landmarks in grief literature were published during the two World Wars. Freud was understandably affected by the First World War and wrote his “Timely Reflections on War and Death” in 1915, his touching essay on “Transience” in 1916, and the article “Mourning and Melancholia” in 1917 in which he linked what he felt were the common “symptoms” of grief and depression. ^{xiv}

According to Freud, the grief process was the painful adjustment by way of “reality testing” to the loss of a loved one until the dead person was eventually felt to be alive as an inner reality. This may have been consoling in the long run for many people but Freud’s focus on the importance of the initial “reality-testing” was based on the belief that death is equivalent to extinction. The sense that the “loved object no longer exists” led Freud to assume that “all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachment to that object”, a notion which may have set a didactic tone for bereavement services and their understanding of what constitutes “mature grief” - or proper mourning - for the rest of the century. People may not have been consoled by the initial “severance” from their deceased loved ones that was implied and counselled in the process of correct mourning. ^{xv} An understanding of the spirit that underlies a person while alive and continues after their death may do more to help in facing the pain that accompanies the adjustment to loss.

The psychoanalyst, Melanie Klein, elaborated further the notion of what for her

constituted “the work” of mourning. Like Freud she emphasised the importance of the relationship between the inner and outer worlds of her patients and the process of transferring affectional ties from the “real” living person to the internalised sense of them. But she linked grief work to experiences of attachment and loss throughout life and the possibility that acute bereavement in adult life could trigger intense feelings that related to experiences in infancy. The capacity to grieve “successfully” depended on one’s previous ability to cope, for instance, with the ambivalence – the confusing feelings of love and hate towards the same person - felt in childhood towards one’s parents. Freud had already identified the “fort/da” game that he observed his grand son playing. ^{xvi}

Grief, Klein maintained, was apt to throw one back into earlier “positions” of paranoia and compulsive splitting that could range from normal transitional states to actual psychotic episodes, or even permanent psychological structures. This theorising was felt to be illuminating in the context of the massive and collective grief experienced in the first half of the twentieth century, reaching its intensest in the Second World War. The paper that was considered a watershed in the development of Melanie Klein’s thought, in which she outlined what she called “the depressive position” and its relation to manic-depressive states, was published in 1935, ^{xvii} two years after the accession to power of Hitler. Her article on mourning, which was a sequel to the 1935 article, was published in 1940. ^{xviii}

Klein was born and brought up in Vienna, moved to Budapest with her own family before the First World War, then on to Berlin in 1921, finally settling in London in 1926 where she remained for the rest of her life. One wonders whether the spirit of a wasted and traumatised middle Europe may have consciously or unconsciously inspired and driven much of her work, so single-mindedly did she explore the complex interplay, and balance, of both aggressive and reparative feelings in manic-

depressive and other disturbed states. Although she came to London some dozen years before Freud, her exploration of the psychotic processes in her young patients' minds parallels, perhaps, in the psychological world, as Julia Kristeva surmises, the work of another central European female Jewish refugee, Hannah Arendt, in her political analysis of the history of the European continent culminating in the 'delirium of the Nazis' and the Third Reich. ^{xix}

It is interesting to think how Klein's psychological insights may throw light on German history. As the conquered of the First World War, the Germans did not have an opportunity to mourn their dead as did the victors. As the historian of the Great War, John Keegan, points out they had no access to the bodies of the millions who died on foreign soil and when they attempted to raise a national memorial to their dead in 1924 - the British and French had buried and honoured their "unknown soldiers" in 1918 - there was a political outcry and a riot that lasted all day. So no national memorial was built and no unknown soldier was buried in the Berliner Dom. As Keegan writes:

The agony of a lost war continued to divide Germany, as it would until the coming of Hitler nine years later. Soon after his assumption of the Chancellorship, Nazi writers began to represent Hitler, 'the unknown corporal', as a living embodiment of 'the unknown soldier' Weimar Germany had failed as a state to honour. It was not long before Hitler, in his speeches as *Fuehrer* of the German nation began to refer to himself as "the unknown soldier of the world war". He was sowing the seed that would reap another four million German corpses. ^{xx}

So, in this reading, Corporal Hitler, whose personal life was, as we know, a deeply troubled and unbalanced one, became the un-buried, un-mourned, unknown soldier raised by a powerful national transference, fuelled by repressed grief, into the omnipotent Fuehrer. Thus Melanie Klein's understanding of how un-mourned grief can be one of the unconscious origins of untrammelled, totalitarian destructive aggression, which, of course, eventually consumes itself.

Learning Dying

To practice death is to practice freedom. Montaigne

Despite, or because of, what Geoffrey Gorer called “the pornography of death”,^{xxi} there was no sense of death as something which also reached beyond the experience of fear, aggression, and grief. We no longer considered what it might have to teach us about the meaning of life.

Two hundred thousand people die everyday on this planet – one and a half million a week, seventy million a year - and more are born, yet the two great mysteries of life remain birth and death. Birth is when we “appear”, death when we “disappear”. Life is what we do between these two initiations. Its meaning derives from the sense we make of our beginnings and our endings. For instance, most people find the birth of children a life-changing experience but, somehow, we have lost the sense of death as an equally transforming event.

If dying is an art, then how we die should be of great importance to us. How we think and talk about death may be the most important thing for us to relearn in the twenty-first century. In her book *Death Talk* the systemic psychotherapist Glenda Fredman wrote about the moment she put aside her professional psychological theories of how people should die, started to listen to the actual experience of her patients and their families, and learnt from them the infinite resilience, resourcefulness and potential for transformation – across all races and cultures – that people can manifest in the face of death.^{xxii}

Gautama Buddha taught - as the first “noble truth” - the importance of being mindful of impermanence, ageing, and death. Rather than think of death as something that happens only at the end of a person’s life, Buddhists make it a form of daily awareness. Knowledge of mortality sharpens our sense of life and leaves us more prepared for the event of death, however, and whenever, it may come. Stephen Batchelor, for instance, in *Buddhism Without Beliefs*, recommends we contemplate the question: “Since death alone is certain and the time of death

uncertain, what should I do?” Meditation on our essential transience, Batchelor insists, is not a morbid exercise but when contemplated as a daily practice enhances the quality of life and reduces our fear of death. ^{xxiii}

Montaigne also thought “death” has something to teach us, though it is a lesson that we tend to neglect. Like the Buddhists, he also knew that “from the moment we are born death awaits us”, though it is uncertain when it will come. For the ancients philosophising was, in Montaigne’s words, “learning how to die” and, in so doing, losing our fear of it. He opens his famous essay:

Cicero says that philosophising is nothing other than getting ready to die. That is because study and contemplation draw our souls somewhat outside ourselves, keeping them occupied away from the body, a state which both resembles death and which forms a kind of apprenticeship for it; or perhaps it is because all the wisdom and argument in the world eventually come down to one conclusion; which is to teach us not to be afraid of dying. ^{xxiv}

In the twentieth century we seemed to stop thinking about the meaning of death. Perhaps we were just too numbed by the casual and frequent violence which now surrounds it.

Montaigne and the Stoics

One cannot look directly at the sun or at death. La Rochefoucauld

Montaigne took a different view from La Rochefoucauld. You may not be able to look directly at the sun but death is another matter and he cited Cicero’s view that “philosophising is nothing other than getting ready to die”. While Lucretius described people in denial - “they walk forwards with their heads turned backwards” - Montaigne reasoned that wise argument directs us not to be afraid of dying.

If learning how to die was the purpose of ancient philosophy, it has been forgotten, or ignored by modern analytic philosophers, who, themselves, might seem to have

their heads turned backwards. As two contemporary philosophers point out: “For the most part death appears as a subject for contemporary philosophical discussion only at the margins - say, in the context of bioethics where technical definitions of death (for example, “brain death”) have become important in the negotiation of several legal and ethical issues.”^{xxv} It was the early Wittgenstein who, perhaps unwittingly, provided the logical positivists with a rationalisation for their ignoring and denial of death, when he suggested that the one death you could not experience is your own - “we do not live to experience death”.^{xxvi} If you do, so the argument runs, you either won’t know about it or you obviously haven’t died!

Socrates, who was not afraid of dying, counselled against “the unexamined life”. The examined life, of course, included a steady awareness of one’s mortality. Death was not to be feared, assuming we had attempted to lead a good life and the contemplation of death, as a part of “the examination of life”, was more likely to lead to the “good” (or virtuous) life. In this respect the Zen Buddhist, exhorted his students to concentrate on the Chinese character for “death” – *si*. This was a way of “learning, or guarding, death”. Like Heidegger’s notion of death as “an ever present possibility”, learning death - or learning dying - was being mindful of its closeness. This was not morbid preoccupation but learning from death “by entering into its way of being, its falling away at every moment, and thereby coming to ‘live having let go of life’”.^{xxvii} One’s vital energy, rather than diminishing, increases with death consciousness. One is more alive for being aware of the ever-present possibility of death.

This belief was Montaigne’s. “Practicing death” is, according to him, depriving it of its greatest advantage over us – its strangeness. He felt, like the ancient Stoics, that we should be prepared for it, always have it in mind.

We do not know where death awaits us: so let us wait for it everywhere
A man who has learned how to die has unlearned how to be a slave.
Knowing how to die gives us freedom from subjection and constraint.

When death does appear he wants to be ready for it: “As far as we possibly can we

must always have our boots on, ready to go". Yet he doesn't preoccupy himself with the thought of death: "I want Death to find me planting my cabbages, neither worrying about it nor the unfinished gardening".^{xxviii} And later when "Nature" speaks to us through him to declare "Your death is a part of the order of the universe; it is a part of the life of the world", Montaigne gives her perhaps some of his most famous lines:

Shall I change, just for you, this beautiful interwoven structure! Death is one of the attributes you were created with; death is a part of you; you are running away from yourself; this being which you enjoy is equally divided between death and life. From the day you were born your path leads to death as well as life.^{xxix}

For Montaigne learning how to die meant learning how to live. Not only does it prepare a person for the unexpected but it teaches about the absolute contingency and impermanence of life – "our first hour gave us life and began to devour it". What is fearful about death is not the impermanence of life but our refusal to acknowledge the impermanence - "I truly believe that what frightens us more than death are those terrifying grimaces and preparations with which we surround it". Perhaps we fear the loss of - and mourn for - what we have never had in the first place – a permanent self.

Death as teacher

We wot that our parents do but bear us unto death. A strange thing, that.
Julian of Norwich

Thrasymachos: Tell me briefly, what shall I be after my death? Be clear and precise.

Philaethes: Everything and nothing.

Thras: That is what I expected. You solve the problem by contradiction.

Schopenhauer: *The Indestructibility of Our True Being by Death*

One way of learning how to die is to consult with the spirit of death itself, as Tolstoy did. The *Katha Upanishad*, the classic sacred Indian text about death, dramatises the dialogue between a teenage boy, Nachiketa, and Yama, the God of death. ^{xxx} Nachiteka has observed how his father sacrifices everything, including his cows, as offerings to gain religious merit and asks him “To whom will you offer me?” His father does not understand the question but Nachiteka persists in asking and, in anger, his father eventually replies: “To death I give you”. ^{xxxi} As Michael Nagler, in his commentary to the Easwaren translation, notes: “Birth is but the beginning of a trajectory to death; for all their love, parents cannot halt it and in a sense have ‘given us to death’ merely by giving us birth”.

Nachiketa understands this paradox better than his father and, realising this, he decides to go to question Yama, the Lord of death, himself. When he arrives at Yama’s abode the god is not there and Nachiketa has to wait three days before he returns. To compensate for this “inhospitality” Yama promises to grant Nachiketa three boons. Whatever he requests, Yama will give him. Nachiketa asks firstly for his own father’s anger to be appeased. This is granted. Then he asks Yama to teach him instruction in the fire sacrifice, which Yama also grants. Nachiketa’s third boon is not so simple. He wants to know :

When a person dies, there arises this doubt:
“He still exists,” say some; “he does not,”
Say others. I want you to teach me the truth.
This is my third boon.

Yama demurs at this request, for “this doubt haunted even the gods of old; for the secret of death is hard to know”. He asks Nachiteka to choose some other boon and release him from his promise. But Nachiketa will not be dissuaded, for “there is no boon equal to this”. Yama offers him all the pleasures that life can give – herds of cattle, elephants and horses, gold and vast land, beautiful women, and to live as long as he desires. But for Nachiteka these are all fleeting pleasures:

Never can mortals

Be made happy by wealth. How can we be
Desirous of wealth when we see your face
And know we cannot live while you are here?.....

Dispel this doubt of mine, O king of death:
Does a person live after death or does he not?
Nachiketa asks for no other boon
Than the secret of this great mystery.

When Yama sees that Nachiketa is serious in his wish to understand the secret of death he agrees to teach him and expounds the nature of the immortal Self, as distinct from the mortal self. This Self is, he explains, the experience of oneself which goes beyond conventional limitations, beyond notions of existence or non-existence, beyond birth and death, beyond time and space. It is a truth "hidden in the heart of every creature", but which cannot be experienced through the senses alone. Nor can it come through scholarship and logic. The intellect cannot reveal it, for the Self is beyond duality and can only be experienced by those who know they are neither simply the body nor the mind but "the immemorial Self, the divine principle of existence". You cannot "know" the Self, only realise that you are the Self.

Although experience of this timeless Self is, as Nachiketa believes, the greatest boon one can enjoy, it is also the most difficult to realise. While it is "greater than the greatest" it is also "subtler than the subtlest". Its sheer ineffability leads us to doubt its existence:

The supreme Self is beyond name and form,
Beyond the senses, inexhaustible,
Without beginning, without end, beyond
Time, space, and causality, eternal,
Immutable.

While the true contemplative life can make great demands on a person, when a

person realises the Self, according to the *Katha Upanishad* “there is nothing else to be known” and “all the knots that strangle the heart are loosened”. The Self is beyond birth and death, beyond suffering: “Those who realise the Self are forever free from the jaws of death” for “the all-knowing Self was never born, nor will it die”. This is the knowledge that Nachiketa seeks. It is a truth that all the world’s great contemplative traditions echo.

Notes

ⁱ A.N. Wilson, *Tolstoy* London: Penguin 1988. P 250. Tolstoy did try to write a story about it at the time but this was never published as he had not seemed to be able to make psychological sense of his experience then. Wilson suggests, however, that, within the unpublished story, entitled *Memoirs of a Madman*, were two themes which continued to recur in Tolstoy’s life, arising as they did from the waking nightmare at Arzamas. What afflicted him that night was a fearful sense of dislocation in which the peace and harmony he had discovered through composing the grand narrative of *War and Peace* was dissipated. He found himself facing two contradictory horrors. Firstly the madman in the story finds he cannot get away from himself:

I am always with myself. I am my own torturer. Here I am, the whole of me.... it is myself I am so tired of, and whom I find intolerable and a torture. I want to fall asleep and forget myself but I can’t. I can’t get away from myself.

Secondly, although oblivion is to be longed for, he is haunted by a worse fear, the dread of death. Wilson suggests that at the centre of his story was an hallucinatory experience which stayed with Tolstoy over the following years:

‘But what folly is this?’ I told myself. ‘Why am I depressed? What am I frightened of?’

‘Of me,’ answered the voice of Death. ‘I am here’.

Hence the night at Arzamas had confronted Tolstoy with the frightening and inescapable fact of death.

ⁱⁱ Leo Tolstoy *The Death of Ivan Illych* Translated by Anthony Briggs. London: Penguin Red Classic, 2006, (1886) sections 6 & 7, p 61 - 73.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wilson, op. cit. p 366. Phillippe Aries also discusses Tolstoy’s story and, particularly, the silence that separated him from his family and caused Ivan Illych great anguish alongside the physical pain he was experiencing. For Aries this story is a great psychological exploration of the consequences of the modern denial of death - the ‘vital lie’ that Becker wrote about.

iv Phillippe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*, translated from the French by Helen Weaver. Oxford University Press, 1981, p xvi.

v Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*, New York: The Free Press, 1973. Free Press paperback 1997.

vi For instance, Aries described how medical practice, particularly in hospitals, had come to focus exclusively on keeping people alive, whatever the consequences for the quality of life in their last days. The death of a patient is too often regarded as a failure in medical terms and a silence can fall on those who are dying. It is not uncommon that no one talks to them about their dying, and mourning can be actually discouraged. Patients can go to their death without even a recognition that they are dying.

vii See the work of Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey in *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, Oxford: Berg, 2001 and the chapter by Jenny Hockey 'Contemporary cultures of memorialisation: blending social inventiveness and conformity?' in S. Conway *Governing Death and Loss: empowerment, involvement and participation*. Oxford University Press, 2011 (forthcoming).

viii I refer to some of the literature later in this chapter, but see Lily Pincus, *Death and the Family. The Importance of Mourning*, London: Faber and Faber, 1974. Pincus' described many interesting examples of her work with families who have suffered bereavement.

ix Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, foreword by C. Murray Parkes, London: Tavistock Publications, 1970.

x 'On Fear', Montaigne 1991 op.cit

xi Jason Burke, *Al- Qaeda. The True Story of Radical Islam*, London: Penguin, 2004.

xii John Gray, *Al Qaeda and What it is to be Modern*. London: Faber and Faber, 2003

xiii See Charles Rycroft, *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* London: Penguin, 2nd Edition, 1995. Entry on 'Aggression'.

xiv See Sigmund Freud in *Murder, Mourning, and Melancholia* translated by Shaun Whiteside with an Introduction by Maud Ellmann. General editor, Adam Phillips. London: Penguin Classics, 2005. Maud Ellmann has commented on some of the connections between these three in her introductory essay. This psychological trio might be said in some ways to sum up the twentieth century. It is not so surprising that bereavement and aggression so focused our minds. 'Mourning and Melancholia' was published as *Trauer und Melancholia* in 1917. The German 'Trauer' is also translatable as 'sadness' and 'grief'.

Interestingly Ellmann adds another 'M' to the trio - 'the Mother' who is absent from Freud's writings. Curiously, Freud never refers to his own mother in his work, conspicuous as she is in her absence. But so is the mother from his theory. For Ellmann this is tantamount to the 'murder' of the mother! It was left, perhaps, to Melanie Klein to resurrect her.

xv The quote here is from the Standard Edition of Freud translated by Strachey. The whole passage reads:

In what, now, does the work which mourning performs consist? I do not think there is anything far-fetched in presenting it in the following way. Reality testing shows that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachment to that object. This demand arouses understandable opposition -

It is interesting to compare Strachey's translation with Shaun Whiteside's in the 2005 Penguin Modern Classic:

So what is the work that mourning performs? I do not think I am stretching a point if I present it in the following manner: reality-testing has revealed that the beloved object no longer exists, and demand that the libido as a whole sever its bonds with that object. An understandable tendency arises to counter this -

It seems that, however you translate it, 'reality-testing' is the work and detachment, or severance, from the loved person is the desired aim! Did the trauma of the war years not provide enough grief without insisting on cutting the bonds of affection with the lost ones also? One wonders whether the possible irony was intended in Freud's unfinished last sentence.

xvi See the last section of Chapter 5 in this book.

xvii Melanie Klein, 'A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States' (1935) in *The Selected Melanie Klein* Edited by Juliet Mitchell. London: Penguin, 1986. The 'depressive position' related to the stage in infant development when the child realises it has feelings both of love and hate for the same person. If the ambivalence is managed successfully then love and hate can be integrated and the child can move beyond the 'depressive' or sad state. If not, then the child is apt to remain in the depressive state. Even if a child has reached a healthy integration of ambivalent feelings this is a 'position' which can be re-experienced at any time in life, set off, for instance, by severe grief.

xviii Melanie Klein 'Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States (1940)' in Mitchell, 1986, *ibid.*

- xi Julia Kristeva *Melanie Klein*, translated by Ross Guberman, New York, Columbia University Press, 2001. P 16.
- xx John Keegan *The First World War*, London: Hutchinson, 1998. P 6.
- xxi Geoffrey Gorer, *Death, Grief and Mourning*, Cresset, 1965. Gorer made the point that the natural processes of corruption and decay had become disgusting to us and any preoccupation with these processes were regarded as morbid and unhealthy. He concluded that 'the ugly facts are relentlessly hidden; the art of the embalmers is an art of complete denial'. P 172.
- xxii Glenda Fredman, *Death Talk. Conversations with Children and Families* London: Karnac, 1997.
- xxiii Stephen Batchelor, *Buddhism Without Beliefs. A Contemporary Guide to Awakening*. London: Bloomsbury, 1997. See the chapter 'Death', pp 28-33.
- xxiv Michel de Montaigne, 'To Philosophise is to Learn How to Die' in *The Complete Essays*, translated by M.A. Screech, London: Penguin 1991. P 89
- xxv Jeff Malpas and Robert C. Solomon (Editors) *Death and Philosophy* London: Routledge, 1998. See 'Introduction' by Malpas and Solomon, p 1.
- xxvi Ludwig Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Translated by D.F. Pears & B.F. McGuiness. London: Routledge, 1974, 1922. P 72.
- xxvii Graham Parkes, 'Death and Detachment' in Jeff Malpas and Robert C Solomon (Eds), *Death and Philosophy* London: Routledge, 1998 pp 93-94.
- xxviii Montaigne op.cit. p 99
- xxix Ibid. p 103

^{xxx} *The Upanishads* are the great sacred scriptures of India, philosophical distillations of the timeless wisdom of the *Vedas*, and written down a little before 600 BCE, although they were thought to be composed and chanted long before that. Introduced into Europe in the late eighteenth century through a Latin translation, they influenced the Romantics and were particularly prized by Schopenhauer. There are many translations into European languages, but they struggle to do justice to the original Sanskrit. W.B Yeats joined with Shree Purohit Swami to produce a poetic and memorable edition in 1937.

In his introduction to that edition Yeats describes his frustration at the quality of the available English translations. For some forty years his friend George Russell (A.E.) had quoted him passages from the Upanishads and for forty years Yeats had said to himself - 'some day I will find out if he knows what he is talking about'. They were 'dear friends' and Yeats asked Russell to recommend him various translations but, when Yeats read them the pedantic, scholarly English left him 'incredulous':

'Could latinised words, hyphenated words; could polyglot phrases, sedentary distortions of unnatural English: - "However many Gods in These, All-Knower, adversely slay desires of a person" - could muddles, muddled by "Lo! Verily" and "Forsooth", represent what grass farmers sang thousands of years ago, what their descendants sing today?'

Yeats is describing what many people still experience today when they read an inadequate translation. Sadly Russell died before his own version was published but this version and Yeats own final opinion of the quality of *The Upanishads* are a recommendation to anyone today to reconsider these remarkable texts. As he also wrote in his introduction:

'Whatever the date, those forest Sages began everything; no fundamental problem of philosophy, nothing that has disturbed the schools to controversy, escaped their notice.'

Though Yeats and Shree Purohit Swamis' rendering is to be recommended, I quote here from a more contemporary translation.

^{xxxi} *The Upanishads* translated with a general introduction by Eknath Easwaran and chapter introductions by Michael N. Nagler. London: Penguin Arkana, 1988. See 'Death as Teacher: *Katha Upanishad*'. P 79.