

Shame, Embarrassment, and Guilt

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1. SHAME-CULTURES AND GUILT-CULTURES

The distinction between shame-cultures and guilt-cultures is due to the anthropologist Ruth Benedict. Homeric Greece and republican Rome are prototypes of shame-cultures in the West. Ancient Israel is the prototype of a guilt-culture. The form of the dominant norms of a shame-culture determine what one ought *to be*. The most forceful motivation is the quest for honor and the avoidance of shame before one's peers. If one is as one ought to be, then one is truly noble. That does *not* mean that there are no prescriptions and prohibitions. The moral education of the youth in a shame-culture will involve a multitude of prescriptions determining how to conduct oneself.

The form of the dominant norms of a guilt-culture is the imperative or dominative tense ("thou shalt"), which determines what one is obligated *to do*. This is the typical form of the obligation-imposing laws of God. If one abides by the laws of God and does all that one must do or must refrain from doing, one is truly righteous. Transgressing the law of God is sin, and acknowledgment of sin is guilt before God and shame before one's peers. This does *not* mean that there are no ideal norms. The moral education of a guilt-culture will urge the ideals of *being* just, righteous, and God-fearing. The roots of guilt-cultures in the Christian West lie in the Old Testament. God sees into our hearts—for one is unavoidably and inevitably *exposed*, not to the eyes of one's peers, but to the sight of God. As the Psalmist wrote,

Whither shall I go from thy spirit?
 or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
 If I ascend up into heaven thou art there;
 if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there.
 If I take the wings of the morning
 and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea:
 Even there shall thy hand lead me,
 and thy right hand shall hold me. (*Psalms* 139: 7–10)

It is striking that the motto on Hieronymus Bosch's painting *Seven Deadly Sins and Four Last Things* is "Cave, cave, Deus videt" ("Beware, beware, God sees")

It is of paramount importance to realize that *both* guilt- and shame-cultures internalize the standards of behavior of the society, but they severally view and value human beings and their behavior from profoundly different viewpoints. A shame-culture focuses upon *status* within a peer group, on acting *as becomes* one's position, on gaining public esteem and winning honor. A guilt-culture focuses on acceptance of and compliance with authoritative norms, on fulfilling one's duties and obligations. The predominant motivations of the one are bound up with honor and avoidance of shame for failure to satisfy the demands of one's role, the other with conscience and the avoidance of guilt for transgression of the laws of God. Failure to live up to an honor code entails loss of face, ignominy, and ostracism—for the primary value is public esteem. *In extremis*, there is no redemption short of death. By contrast, in a guilt-culture there is room for remorse, repentance, atonement and expiation, and forgiveness. It is important to bear in mind that the notions of shame- and guilt-cultures are ideal types. Contemporary cultures, for the most part, can merely be said to be predominantly one or the other (Japanese and Chinese cultures are predominantly shame-cultures) or more or less one or the other (as Britain is more of a shame-culture than Germany). However, shame-cultures do still survive, as among the Pashtun warrior peoples in the tribal territories of north-west Pakistan, with their honor code of Pashtunwali.

Heroic societies with a closed aristocratic warrior class are typically shame-cultures. The standards of male behavior are determined by the honor code of the ruling aristocracy and their military retainers. This included prowess and valor in battle, hospitality to guests, exchange of munificent gifts with one's host, the zealous guarding of honor against slight or insult, and generosity in giving bounty to one's military retainers ("I am a river unto my people," the Bedu chieftain Auda abu Tayeh exclaims in Robert Bolt's screenplay for *Lawrence of Arabia*). To fall short in any of these dimensions is a reason for shame. Self-respect is a function of membership in the honor group and of recognized compliance with its code of behavior. Self-esteem is wholly dependent on public esteem, which is the imprimatur of individual worth. Failure to live up to the code of behavior implies loss of honor. Loss of honor implies loss of public esteem. Loss of public esteem implies loss of

self-esteem—as manifest in Hector’s reply to Andromache when she pleads that he stay within Troy and fight upon the walls, rather than fight Achilles in face to face combat:

All this weighs on my mind too, dear woman.
 But I would die of shame to face the men of Troy
 and the Trojan women trailing their long robes
 if I would shrink from battle now, a coward.
 Nor does the spirit urge me on that way.
 I’ve learned it all to well. To stand up bravely
 always to fight in the front ranks of Trojan soldiers
 winning my father great glory, glory for myself. (*Iliad*, Book vi, 522–29)

One is dishonored if one fails to live up to the code (of a hero in Homeric Greece, of chivalry in medieval Europe, of *bushido* in Shogunate Japan, of Pashtunwali among the Pashtuns). There is no moral space for individual conscience or private moral judgment that deviates from the code. The only remedy for dishonor in medieval Japan was for the samurai to commit *seppuku*. If a samurai’s leader died in battle and he failed to get himself killed too, he was fated to become a *ronin*, a masterless sword for hire. For to lose one’s status as a member of an honor group, implied loss of one’s very status *as a person*. One’s self-identity and self-respect were bound to one’s role and to its rights and duties. In Viking society, expulsion from an honor group as a consequence of dishonor meant that one became a *nothing*—a man without a name. The decline and gradual disappearance of warrior aristocracies in the ancient world was co-ordinate with the emergence of a conception of individual identity that was no longer wholly submerged in public esteem for valor, charisma, cunning in leadership, hospitality to guests, and generosity to dependents.

Despite the decline of military aristocracies, both pride and shame continued to be linked with honor in fourth-century Athens, although the concept of honor was significantly transformed, as is patent in Aristotle:

Megalopsuchia, then, is the best condition of character in relation to choice and exercise of honor and other honorable goods, and it is these rather than utilities that we assign as the sphere of the *megalopsuchos*.

(*Eudemian Ethics*, 1233a4–7)

Shame (*aidos*) should not be defined as a virtue; or it is more like a feeling than a state of character. It is defined, at any rate, as *a kind of fear of dishonor*, and produces an effect similar to that produced by fear of danger; for people who feel disgraced blush, and those who fear death turn pale.

(*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1128^b9–12; emphasis added)

The conception of honor and of what is honorable changed further with the collapse of the Greek city states and the rise of empires. In Hellenistic Greece,

with the rise of Stoicism and the defensive psychological “retreat into the inner citadel,” the domain of the private expanded and withdrawal into the private was legitimized. The possibility of a good and honorable life that was neither that of a warrior nor that of an active member of a ruling elite could be contemplated.

Less so for the ruling patrician class in republican Rome. Valor (*virtus*) in battle was the path to renown (*gloria*), and was rewarded with praise and recognition. This in turn, after ten years of military service, led to public office. Glory was familial and heritable, as is evident from the inscription on the tomb of Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio Hispanus:

By my character I increased the valorous deeds (*virtutes*) of my forebears. I have had children and emulated the exploits of my father. I sustained the praise of my ancestors, so that they rejoice that I was born to them. My office has ennobled my descendants.

Distinguished military service was a condition for public office. Tenure of high office enabled those of noble birth to serve Rome, to benefit its citizens, and to win prestige (*dignitas*) and authority (*auctoritas*). It was, from a functional point of view, a highly successful competitive honor code that served Rome well for three centuries, and also brought the republic to its internecine end.

In the late Roman imperial world, with the decline of the power of a ruling aristocracy, the development of a semi-professional bureaucracy, and the existence of professional armies, the conceptions of honor and of shame shift. A major role in this transformation was the rise and triumph of Christianity. This introduced a guilt-culture into Rome, where, in the social and military crises of the fourth and fifth centuries, it rapidly took root for a multitude of convergent reasons. A primary focus of shame in the emerging guilt-culture became sexuality and the body, and shame became forcefully riveted to the notion of sin. Female honor was firmly bound to chastity and marital fidelity. This preoccupation persisted through and beyond the Middle Ages concurrent with the re-emergence of the ethos of a warrior code after the fall of the West. This was gradually transmuted, by the genius of the Catholic church, into the Christian chivalric codes of the high Middle Ages. Here shame-culture and guilt-culture co-exist in considerable tension, torn between the secular authority of monarch and barons and the religious authority of papacy and priesthood.

The aristocratic/chivalric ethos of honor (ferociously caricatured by Cervantes) slowly declined with the rise of the bourgeoisie and was gradually replaced by that of the individual conscience answerable to God, given prominence in different ways by the various forms of Protestantism. That in turn became detachable from the notion of the inner voice of God and associated with the developing conception of moral autonomy and the inner voice of an autonomous conscience. The autonomous moral agent may feel ashamed of his deed if he has done something unworthy *in his own eyes* and before *the Tribunal of Reason*. He may still strive to conceal his offense from the

eyes of others, but even if successful will still feel ashamed of himself and feel guilty for his transgression of the moral law. The high point of rationalist articulation of this conception is Kantian ethics.

Residues of the aristocratic and military conception of honor persisted in the West, in increasingly degenerate form, into the twentieth century, brilliantly caricatured by Mark Twain (in *A Tramp Abroad*) in his description of the duelling fraternities in late nineteenth-century German universities.

2. SHAME: CONNECTIVE ANALYSIS

Roughly speaking, shame is an emotion of concealment. It is prototypically a social emotion. The primitive roots of the emotion of shame lie in the loss of face felt to be incurred by *being seen*, by others—primarily, but not only, by members of one’s peer group—when one is in an indecorous condition that should be concealed from public eyes; or when one is engaged in an activity that reveals one’s failure to attain standards of competence that others demand of one or one demands of oneself; or when one fails to live up to standards of the honor code of one’s peer group and that one accepts oneself (see list 1 below). Shame is linked to loss of honor, which may be due to one’s own behavior or to the behavior of someone who is bound to one by familial, marital, or tribal links. One may bring shame upon one’s house and one’s name, or upon one’s clan or tribe, by failing to live up to the honor code demanded of one. One’s wife may bring shame upon one by casting her eyes upon another; one’s children may bring shame upon one by their misdeeds and misconduct no less than they may bring honor to their parents by their heroic or noble deeds. One’s (unmarried) daughters are a magnet for shame and must be zealously guarded from the eyes of others—if they bring shame upon one, the only way to expunge the shame is to kill them. The result of shame is loss of honor. Exposure leads to humiliation by others and to loss of pride and self-esteem. One is made an object of contempt and ridicule. One becomes exposed to the taunts and insults of others. One may be subjected to a life of abject misery from which, *in extremis*, the only escape may be suicide or becoming an outcast.

The Germanic etymology of the English word “shame” suggests a connection with the idea of exposure and that of covering up. Its proto-Germanic root is **skamo*, from a possible pre-Germanic **skem*, derived from **kem*, meaning “to cover.” Rembrandt’s *Susana and the Elders* could therefore be said to be an archetypal representation of the primal feeling of shame. Strikingly, the Old English *scamu* and *sceomu* meant not only feelings of disgrace and confusion caused by shame and loss of self-esteem, but also private parts. The Latin for shame—*pudor*—is linked to *pudenda*, meaning *that of which one feels ashamed*, in effect, one’s genitals. The Greek for shame is *aidos*, derived from *aidoia*, meaning literally *that which inspires shame* (as well as

awe and reverence), and hence also signifying the genitals. The Hebrew for shame is *boosha* which is derived from the archaic Biblical word *mevoshim* (*Deut.* 25: 11), which means “that of which one is ashamed,” and hence signifying the genitals. The connection between shame and genital exposure that dominates the monotheistic theological tradition is articulated in *Genesis* 2.25 and 3.4-7:

And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat. And the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

It is noteworthy that the doctrine of the Fall and Original Sin are later Christian additions, due to Saint Paul (*Romans* 5: 12–21) and subsequently Irenaeus, but above all to Augustine in his anti-Pelagian writings. The probable *Ur-Genesis* tale is Promethean in character, describing the Rise of Man, who, contrary to the will of God, learned the difference between good and evil. Adam and Eve not only acquired the moral knowledge that is unique to mankind among the creatures of the Earth, they also learned to dress as befits a human being and not to expose their genitals as animals do.

Shame is a complex social emotion with multiple ramifications. So we must distinguish. We must distinguish between *self-produced shame* and *other-produced shame*, according to whether the source or reason for the shame originates with oneself or others. We must distinguish between *self-directed shame* and *other-directed shame*, according to whether one is ashamed of oneself or of another. We must distinguish between being ashamed *of* another and being ashamed *for* another. If one feels ashamed of another, one may or may not feel empathetic shame for the other—that depends on how much one loves them, and on the nature of their misdeed or misdemeanor. Biff, in Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, no doubt felt ashamed of his father Willy Loman, but perhaps also felt ashamed for him. By contrast, in *All My Sons*, Ed surely felt ashamed of his father Joe Keller for selling faulty aircraft engines to the U.S. Air Force, but did not feel ashamed for him.

Self-produced shame entails that one is ashamed *of oneself*. The sources of one’s shame are one’s deeds. Deeds which make one ashamed of oneself may be voluntary and intentional, or involuntary (accidental, done by mistake, or in ignorance). But one may have shame *brought upon one*, either by the deeds of members of one’s family, clan, or tribe (as is characteristic of a shame-culture), or by what is done to one by others and by what they force one to do. If one has shame brought upon one by what others have done to

one or by what they forced one to do, one may feel ashamed of oneself if one believes that one should have done more to resist the humiliation (even to the point of allowing oneself to be killed or to the point of inviting death). But if that is not so, then one may feel *shamed* (and *non-transitively ashamed*) without feeling ashamed of oneself. One feels ashamed in as much as shame has been brought upon one. Susannah evidently felt shamed by the ogling eyes of the elders, and felt ashamed for her nudity to be exposed to their salacious gaze. But she had no reason to be ashamed of herself (see Figure 1).

We must further distinguish between *feeling shame* and *feeling ashamed*. The former implies the latter, but not vice versa. One feels self-directed shame if one realizes that one has done something *shameful*, something that is a stain on one’s character and hence on one’s self-esteem. However, in the case of what I shall call *stigmatic shame* one may feel ashamed without feeling shame. For one may feel ashamed not at what one has done that brings shame upon one, but at one’s natural features and deficiencies—one’s ugliness or facial deformities, one’s physical deformities and consequent limited abilities. This is *natural shame*. One may feel ashamed at one’s *social status*, for example at being an illegitimate child, or at being born into an inferior caste or class. One may feel ashamed of these, but feel no shame, unless others mock and ridicule one. But one may also feel ashamed of what one has done, without feeling shame. An elderly person in a “senior moment” may do something foolish or forgetful, and feel ashamed, without feeling shame. This is more than mere regret. It involves recognition of one’s dwindling powers, of the fact that one can no longer rely on them as one used to, and of the fact that one is going to be a less reliable person. In that case, self-esteem may be damaged. Nevertheless, the deed of which one is ashamed in such a case need not affect one’s self-respect. It is not something for which one would or should blush with shame—indeed, one may laugh at oneself. By contrast, to feel shame can be no laughing matter. Even in the case of serious misdemeanors, a person may feel ashamed without feeling real shame if the standard of conduct that has been violated has not itself been wholly accepted and internalized. In such cases, the agent may acknowledge guilt for their offense, but feel no shame. This is nicely exemplified in Effi’s reflections on her past adultery with Major Crampas in Fontane’s novel *Effi Briest*:

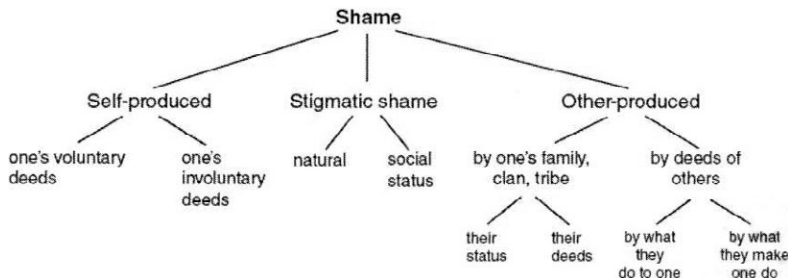


Figure 1. The Roots of Shame.

What does weigh down on me is ... fear, mortal fear, and the constant dread that it will eventually come out after all. And then, apart from fear ... shame. I'm ashamed of myself. But just as I don't feel true remorse, I don't feel true shame. I just feel ashamed because of the eternal lies and deception; I always took pride in the fact that I couldn't lie and didn't need to lie; lying's so contemptible, and now I've had to lie all the time, to him and to the whole wide world, little lies and big lies, and Rumschüttel noticed and shrugged his shoulders; who knows what he thinks of me, certainly not very highly. Yes, I'm tormented by fear and shame at my deception. But shame at my guilt, that's something I *don't* feel, or not real shame, or not enough.

The noun "shame" is Janus-faced. It may signify the painful emotion one feels when one is aware of being, or of having been seen to be, doing something ridiculous, indecorous, or dishonorable, when one is humbled by what one acknowledges to be warranted criticism, or when one reflects on one's misdeed. It may, however, signify the disgrace and ignominy constituted by what one has done or failed to do—which is *shameful*, or the humiliation to which one has been subjected—which *brings shame upon one*. It is in this sense that someone vile may be "stained with a thousand shames." It does not follow that he feels shame or feels ashamed. Despite the fact that his deeds were shameful in the extreme, Tito Melema in George Eliot's *Romola* feels none—any more than did some of the more odious Roman emperors or the great dictators of the twentieth century. Actions may be judged shameful by an agent who is actually applauded by his audience (as George Orwell was in "Killing an Elephant"). Someone may perform an action that *she* thinks to be meritorious, which is in fact shameful (Emma Woodhouse's meddling in the lives of others, in Jane Austen's *Emma*).

The verb "to shame" has active and passive uses. *To shame another* is to expose his disgrace to public view; *to be shamed* is to be publicly humiliated. To inflict shame on another, or to bring shame upon one's family, clan, tribe, or country by one's ignominy and disgrace doubtless makes them feel shame and feel ashamed of one, but the shame one brings upon them is not the shame they feel, but its reason—for what one has done is a shame and dishonor to them.

Shame may be felt for a moment (a sudden pang of shame). It may be felt for a more prolonged period of time, as when one is exposed to the contempt of others (for example, when being humiliated in the stocks, or shamed by a teacher in front of the class). But one may also feel the episodic emotion when lying sleepless in the small hours of the morning, writhing in shame at the thought of what one did or of how one was exposed to the eyes of others. Shame may also be a persistent emotion without genuine duration. For one may remain ashamed of the sins and misdemeanors of one's youth for the rest of one's days (as Saint Augustine confesses himself to have been) (see Figure 2).

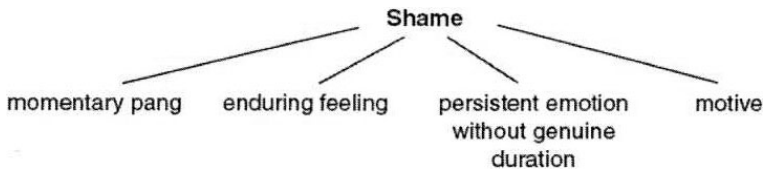


Figure 2. Different Forms of Shame: Temporality and Motivation.

Whereas pride is a character trait, shame, as Aristotle pointed out, is not—although being shameless (as Messalina and Theodora reportedly were) may be. However, like pride, shame too is a motive. For one may do various things *out of shame*, for example, withdraw from society to avoid the humiliation of the censorious looks and remarks of others (as does Louis Trevelyan in Trollope’s *He Knew He Was Right*), or, *in extremis*, commit suicide because the searing shame is intolerable (as does the Reverend Alfred Davidson, after fornicating with Sadie Thompson, in Somerset Maugham’s “Rain”). Just as honor and glory are powerful incentives to action, so too shame (not the feeling but the shame one might bring upon oneself) is a powerful disincentive. For the loss of honor may be unbearable. Just as feeling proud is the emotional upshot of meritorious achievement, so feeling shame is the emotional upshot of dishonorable, shameful, or indecorous behaviour, either one’s own or another’s with whom one’s sense of identity is interwoven.

Feeling shame, like feeling pride, lies at the center of a ramifying cluster of emotions and emotional attitudes. Shame bears a kinship to embarrassment (see below). The expression “embarrassment,” “like” “shame” can signify either an emotion (“He squirmed//She blushed//with embarrassment”) or the internal accusative of the emotion (“It will be a terrible embarrassment if they find out”). Embarrassment bears a kinship to shyness, which is both an emotion and a character trait. All three emotions involve self-attention. Shame is linked not to *being humble* (which, far from being incompatible with, is a complement of, proper pride), but to *being humbled*, on the one hand, and to *being humiliated*, on the other. Parallel to feeling proud, feeling shame too is internally related to self-respect and self-esteem. To have acted shamefully and to realize one has so acted implies loss of self-esteem. For one has not lived up to the standards that one recognizes and accepts. To feel shame is to suffer a blow to one’s self-respect, for one’s feeling of shame implies that one realizes that one is of less worth as a human being than one thought one was, typically both in the eyes of others and in one’s own.

To humble a person is to reduce his self-esteem, to show him to be less meritorious than he believed himself to be. One may feel humbled, and so ashamed of oneself, without feeling humiliated. To humble a person in public, however, is to shame *and* to humiliate him. For it demonstrates to onlookers that he is worth less than he was thought to be, that he merits less respect than he was wont to be given. To humiliate a person in public is to strike a blow at his self-respect. This is commonly done by depriving him of dignity. It is to present a person as an object of the emotional

attitudes of contempt and scorn. Such deprivation of dignity is often institutionalized, for example by the humiliating ceremonial stripping of military rank (for example, Captain Dreyfus, after being found guilty of treason, wonderfully described by Robert Harris in *An Officer and a Spy*), or by forcing humiliating costume upon the victim (as was done by the Spanish inquisition, and in Nazi concentration camps), by displaying the person to public gaze in shameful circumstances (in a cage, pillory, or stocks) and exposing them to degrading treatment (being spat upon, pelted with refuse, urinated on). It is to subject a person in public to ridicule, derision, and mockery intended to reduce his public esteem and, if successful, to reduce his self-respect too.

One may be humiliated by what other people do to one, by what they force one to do, or by circumstances of life and what they force one to do (to beg, prostitute oneself, sell oneself into slavery). Extreme humiliation that is forced upon one characteristically deprives a person of dignity and self-respect—unless, like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn or Primo Levi, one has the strength of character and will power to “retreat into the inner citadel” and to rise above the suffering and indignity inflicted upon one. One may also feel humiliated by having to reveal one’s natural or acquired physical defects to public gaze (severe facial scarring, loss of limbs) and one’s natural disabilities (Philip Carey in Maugham’s *Of Human Bondage* suffers agonies of humiliation before others by his inability [due to his club-foot] to walk without limping or to run), or one’s acquired ones (Jake Barnes’s humiliating impotence resulting from a war wound in Hemingway’s *The Sun also Rises*). One may also feel humiliated by realizing how badly one has behaved, irrespective of public exposure. Jane Austen portrays such a case in describing Elizabeth Bennet’s rude awakening:

She grew absolutely ashamed of herself. – Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd.

“How despicably I have acted!”, she cried. – “I, who have prided myself on my discernment! – I, who have valued myself on my abilities! Who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister and gratified my vanity in useless or blameable distrust. – How humiliating is this discovery! – Yet how just a humiliation! Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly.” (*Pride and Prejudice*, vol. ii, chap. xiii)

While proper pride and self-respect are virtuous, and arrogance and conceit are vices, shame is neither a virtue nor a vice. To be sure, it is right that one should feel ashamed of one’s misdeeds—“He that hath no shame hath no conscience.” It is better that one should feel shame rather than be shameless, for the shameless show contempt for accepted standards of behavior and honor, and often even flaunt their disregard (like Nastassya Filopovna in Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot*). Nevertheless, feelings of shame too can be excessive.

For being overwhelmed by shame can lead to mortification (as in the case of the Reverend Robert Colley in Golding's *Rites of Passage*, who literally dies of shame) and to suicide (Ajax, in Sophocles' eponymous play; Jocasta, in his *Oedipus Rex*). One should feel shame with regard to the right objects (shameful deeds), on the right occasion, and to the right extent. For feelings of shame and of being shamed are powerful derivative *disincentives*, curbing one's unruly and improper impulses, and restraining one's devious and immoral deeds. On the other hand, to dwell on one's misdemeanors, to brood over one's sins, to wallow in one's shame (like the unnamed protagonist in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*) produces despondency, morbidity, self-loathing, and self-flagellating guilt (see Figure 3).

Shame, functionally conceived, is a powerful and often terrible form of social control. It induces conformity to social norms and strengthens social identity. In Puritan New England in the seventeenth century an adulteress was forced to wear a large scarlet letter A upon the front of her dress, the experience of which is brilliantly depicted in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*:

The poor ... whom [Hester Prynne, thus condemned] sought out to be the objects of her bounty, often reviled the hand that was stretched out to succor them. Dames of elevated rank, likewise, whose doors she entered in the way of her occupation, were accustomed to distil drops of bitterness into her heart, sometimes through alchemy of quiet malice, by which women can concoct a subtle poison from ordinary trifles; and sometimes by a coarser expression, that fell upon the sufferer's defenceless breast like a rough blow upon an ulcerated wound....

When strangers looked curiously at the scarlet letter—and none ever failed to do so—they branded it afresh into Hester's soul; so that oftentimes, she could scarcely refrain, yet always did refrain, from covering the symbol with her hand. But then, again, an accustomed eye had likewise its own anguish to inflict. Its cool stare of familiarity was intolerable. From first to last, in short, Hester Prynne had always this dreadful agony in feeling a human eye upon the token: the spot never grew

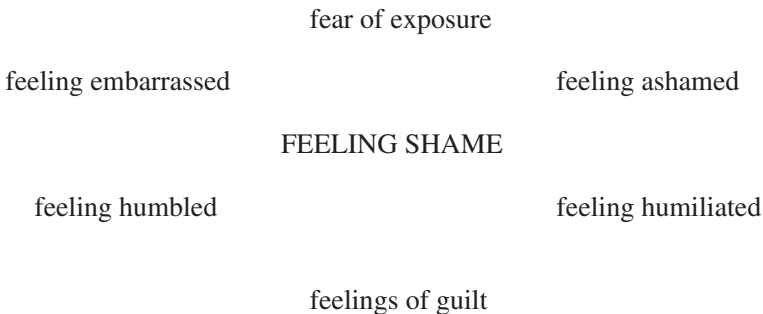


Figure 3. The Web of Shame.

callous; it seemed, on the contrary, to grow more sensitive with daily torture. (chap. 5)

The use of the pillory in England as a punishment for crimes (until 1837) likewise involved deliberately shaming and humiliating the offender. In this way, the emotion of shame, coupled with ostracism, especially in closed societies, is harnessed as a means of expression of social solidarity in response to deviance from social norms. “Naming and shaming” is still a potent but dangerous disincentive. It encourages bigotry, intolerance, and persecution of minorities.

The somatic and behavioral manifestations of shame are common to feeling embarrassed and to feeling shy as well. The boundaries between these three emotions are blurred. Shyness can slip into embarrassment when one is made the object of attention. Embarrassment readily slides into feeling ashamed (when caught farting, for example) if the grounds of embarrassment impact upon one’s self-esteem. Characteristic of all three emotions is blushing, which, according to Darwin, is a uniquely human non-voluntary response. Remarkably, it is not only a non-voluntary reaction, but the self-conscious wish to restrain it actually exacerbates it. Such blushing is normally accompanied by a degree of emotional perturbation, a sense of discomfort, and a wish “to disappear” or “to sink into the ground.” The characteristic behavioral accompaniments are eye-contact avoidance, either by deliberately averting one’s gaze (especially in the case of feeling shame or embarrassment), or by casting one’s eyes down (especially when feeling shy in company). In all three cases, one’s movements are prone to be awkward and nervous. One’s vocal reactions may involve stammering. Often hands will be put up to the face to conceal a blush or to cover the eyes. Such behavioral responses are the characteristic criteria for these three kinds of occurrent emotions, the differentiation of which depends upon additional behavioral criteria, upon the context and antecedent history of the episode, and upon the object and intention of the emotion.

Embarrassment is distinguished from feeling shame in so far as it is *essentially* an audience-involving emotion. One cannot feel embarrassed in solitude. Feeling embarrassed is logically tied to a specific social occasion. So it has no duration beyond the time at which it is felt. Moreover, embarrassment, for the most part, is bound up with what used to be called “small morals” (see Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. xi)—inadvertent or, worse, ignorant failure to conform to etiquette and social mores—whereas shame stretches far beyond the compass of small morals. However, the two emotions commonly overlap and blur. The grounds for embarrassment, like the grounds for feeling ashamed, are commonly (but not uniformly) also reasons for others’ ridicule, sneers, derision, and smiles of superiority. But the responses to shameful behavior may be far more serious than manifestations of social snobbery: they include the expression, by one’s peers, of disdain, scorn, contempt, and abhorrence for failure to live up to the accepted standards of behavior demanded of anyone with one’s social standing (class, profession,

gender, age). One may be embarrassed at spilling a glass of wine over one's hostess's tablecloth, at committing a linguistic infelicity, at having forgotten the name of an acquaintance. One may be both embarrassed and ashamed at not knowing something anyone in *these* social circles is expected to know, or at showing incompetence when competence is expected (Phineas Finn, in Trollope's eponymous novel, at his first speech in the House), or at dropping a particularly bad clanger. But to be caught lying, stealing, molesting a child, raping a woman, exhibiting cowardice, is not *embarrassing*.

Because of the temporal constraints on feeling embarrassed, it may give way after the event to feeling ashamed. If one commits a truly embarrassing *faux pas* at a dinner party, one may later lie in bed feeling deeply ashamed at the exposure of one's ignorance, clumsiness, or indelicacy. But one cannot blush with embarrassment after the event. So recollection of embarrassment can be painful but not embarrassing. Table 1 enumerates some of the characteristic grounds for feeling embarrassed and compares embarrassment with shame with respect to them.

In some cultures, embarrassment may be manifest by embarrassed smiles, nervous laughter or, especially among women, by giggling. These are socially sanctioned forms of an *embarrassment-shield*. On some occasions, embarrassment may lead to a display of anger at the observer or at the person who is exposing one. Like feeling shame but unlike feeling shy, feeling embarrassed can readily slide into feeling humiliated if, for example, one is made the object of taunting, mockery and ridicule.

It is a moot point whether one can be vicariously embarrassed by the behavior of others with whom one's sense of identity is *not* bound up. Certainly

Table 1. Comparison of Embarrassment and Shame with Respect to Grounds of Embarrassment

	Embarrassment	Shame
Inadvertent or ignorant breaches of rules of "small morals"	✓	x
Being seen performing natural bodily functions; seeing another performing natural bodily functions	✓	x
Exposure of one's naked body or parts of one's body that convention requires keeping concealed in the circumstances	✓	✓
Exposure of one's ignorance in circumstances where knowledge is expected	✓	✓
Exposure of one's incompetence at tasks the ready performance of which is expected	✓	✓
Being seen eavesdropping, snooping, or deliberately observing something one should not observe	✓	✓
Being subjected to harsh criticism or being given a dressing-down in public	✓	✓
Having trivial aspects of one's private life revealed to others in one's presence	✓	x
Overhearing oneself being unfavorably or over-favorably discussed by others	✓	x
Not being drawn into the circle of others when wishing or longing to be	✓	x

one may be embarrassed to witness things that should be private, for example, husband and wife criticizing each other too vigorously in public, or revealing things to others which should be kept private. One may be embarrassed inadvertently to witness others performing private functions (sexual or lavatorial). More pertinently, one may, as it were, cringe at the embarrassing deeds of others—at their manifestation of lack of *savoir faire*, or their embarrassing ignorance, or their inept behavior. Curiously, one may react thus when watching a film or television, where one's discomfort is at *what* one witnesses, not at one's *witnessing* it. Nevertheless, one cannot blush with embarrassment at the conduct exhibited, nor wish, as it were, to "sink into the ground" with embarrassment, even though one may deliberately cease looking at the "cringe-making" scene. It is curious that English, unlike Spanish (*vergüenzajenea*), should, such argot apart, lack a word for this distinctive reaction.

Let us return to shame. How are the object-accusatives of shame circumscribed? Of whom and what can one be ashamed? Here pride and shame are homologous—one can be ashamed of oneself, of other people, and of institutions with whom one's sense of identity is bound up. To have a father who is a traitor, a mother who is a whore, a son who is a worthless drunk are grounds for shame, despite the fact that one bears no responsibility for the shameful condition. One may be ashamed of them, and ashamed of one's relation to them. One may feel ashamed of the behavior of the institutions with which one is appropriately associated or the behavior of one's country (if one's sense of identity is bound up with it). One can be embarrassed by, and ashamed of, the behavior of a member of one's family if one is present, watching them behaving indecorously in public. Elizabeth positively cringes at her mother's behavior when Mrs. Bennet is talking to Bingley about Darcy:

"Aye—that is because you have the right disposition. But that gentleman," looking at Darcy, "seemed to think the country was nothing at all."

"Indeed, Mama, you are quite mistaken," said Elizabeth blushing for her mother. "You quite mistook Mr Darcy. He only meant that there were not such a variety of people to be met with in the country as in town, which you must acknowledge to be true."

"Certainly, my dear, nobody said there were; but as to not meeting with many people in this neighbourhood, I believe there are few neighbourhoods larger. I know we dine with four and twenty families."

Nothing but concern for Elizabeth could enable Bingley to keep his countenance.

... the general pause which ensued made Elizabeth tremble lest her mother should be exposing herself again. (*Pride and Prejudice*, vol. I, chap. ix)

And again, she whispers to her mother:

"For heavens sake, madam, speak lower. – What advantage can it be for you to offend Mr Darcy? – You will never recommend yourself to his friend by doing so."

Nothing that she could say, however, had any influence. Her mother would talk of her views in the same intelligible tone. Elizabeth blushed and blushed again with shame and vexation. (Ibid., Vol. i, chap. xviii)

One can *feel shamed* by the disgrace of members of one's family in virtue of one's relationship to them. Furthermore, one can *share* the shame and humiliation of another. So, for example, Mrs. Bulstrode, in *Middlemarch*, having found out about her husband's sordid past and its public revelation, resolves to share his humiliation:

He had married her with that bad past life hidden behind him and she had no faith left to protest his innocence of the worst that was imputed to him. Her honest ostentatious nature made the sharing of a merited dishonour as bitter as it could be to any mortal.

But this imperfectly-taught woman, whose phrases and habits were an odd patchwork, had a loyal spirit within her. The man whose prosperity she had shared through nearly half a life, and who had unvaryingly cherished her—now that punishment had befallen him it was not possible to her in any sense to forsake him. ... She knew, when she locked her door, that she should unlock it ready to go down to her unhappy husband and espouse his sorrow, and say of his guilt, I will mourn and not reproach. But she needed time to gather up her strength; she needed to sob out her farewell to all the gladness and pride of her life. ... She had begun a new life in which she embraced humiliation.

(*Middlemarch*, chap. 74)

How are the intentional accusatives of shame to be circumscribed? Shame again runs parallel to pride. As there is natural pride in one's natural endowments, so too there is natural shame in ugliness, physical deformities of visage and physique, in being undersized, in suffering from weak health and consequently having limited physical prowess. A part of the motivation behind Richard III's wickedness in Shakespeare's play lies in his bitterness and shame over his deformities (*Richard III*, I: i). Many objects of natural shame are *comparative* disadvantages. If no human being could run, no shame would be felt by children who cannot run. In the Land of the Hunchbacks, the straight-backed man would be an object of ridicule.

There can be similar responsibility-independent shame in being born out of wedlock, a member of a despised race or caste, of a disgraced family, as well as sexual shame in impotence, frigidity, or homosexuality. As there is pride in one's lineage, so too, in a class-conscious society, there may be shame in one's humble origins if one encounters disdain and contumely as one tries to gain access to the higher orders. In such cases, the person who is ashamed of some characteristic for which he bears no responsibility is responding to the ridicule, contempt, and aversion of others. To be ashamed of such a quality (as opposed to feeling only resentment and indignation) involves concurring with the judgment that it is shameful. So one feels oneself disgraced in the eyes of those who treat one with contempt, undermine one's self-respect,

and erode one's self-confidence. When one is subjected to mockery and ridicule, to humiliation and derision, it is tempting to respond with the thought that *it is not one's fault*, that one is not responsible for such natural misfortunes and disabilities, or for membership of such despised classes.

Although this is true, it is not the correct response. As Arnold Isenberg pointed out, the right response, difficult though it may be for one to accept it in the face of public opinion, is: "It is no disgrace!" One may be proud of one's good health, but it does not follow that one should be ashamed of one's ill-health. One may take pride in the beauty and grace of one's youth, but that does not imply that one should be ashamed of the decrepitude of age. That bigots treat one with contempt does not mean that being a Jew, black, lesbian, and so on is a reason for feeling ashamed. What is needed is the rejection of the standards by which one is wrongly disgraced, and *which one implicitly accepts in feeling ashamed*. One must strive for a proper set of values, and a balanced view of human merit. This will not ease one's resentment or make one any the less ill at ease in the company of those who accept and enforce a false set of values. It may not prevent one wishing that one did not have such-and-such a characteristic or that one had not been born into such-and-such a group. But it will prevent one from feeling ashamed and assist one in finding one's proper balance in a bigoted and prejudiced world.

One may also feel ashamed of one's vices, one's unsavoury habits and pronenesses, one's ignorance, lack of *savoir faire*, one's mien and manner, incompetence, accent or form of speech. These are remediable, and one's shame may be a spur to improve oneself relative to the standard by reference to which one finds oneself wanting. One may be ashamed of one's expressive behavior—one one may be embarrassed to have laughed too loudly or inappropriately, or ashamed of having broken down in tears. One may be ashamed of one's acts and omissions, of one's voluntary deeds and of what one voluntarily lets happen to one.

Feeling shame and feeling ashamed are unpleasant. Would we not live happier lives without such negative feelings, as we should surely live happier lives if we were not susceptible to feelings of hatred, envy, jealousy, rage, or terror? We often try to treat people who have succumbed to such negative feelings as these, attempting to change their outlook upon life, their moral expectations, their self-control, and their exercise of reason. Should we similarly endeavor to eradicate feelings of shame, to mitigate their effects upon self-esteem and self-respect? The phenomenon of *misplaced* feelings of shame is familiar—especially in cases of natural shame—and we should certainly strive to ameliorate the effects of such emotion. But, in general, feelings of shame are a corollary of having, and having internalized, standards of moral and social behavior. Indeed, a criterion for someone's having accepted such norms and ideals of conduct, of knowing what one ought to do and what one ought to strive to be, is that they feel ashamed (and often guilty) when they fail to conform to these norms and fall short of these ideals. To endeavor to eradicate our susceptibility to feeling ashamed of ourselves (and feeling

guilty at our misdemeanors) would be tantamount to endeavoring to eradicate the norms and values that are constitutive of a good life.

3. GUILT: CONNECTIVE ANALYSIS

Guilt is a cousin to shame. Unlike shame, which is linked primarily to (but is detachable from) public disapprobation, to falling below what one's status requires, and hence to loss of self-esteem and self-respect, the core idea of guilt is normative, bound up with the transgression of obligation-imposing rules (linked in ancient Jewish and later monotheistic cultures with the laws and commands of God). Failure to comply with an obligation-imposing rule is to *be guilty* of breaking the rule. If one acknowledges the obligation and has internalized the rule, one will, other things being equal, *feel guilty* for one's commission or omission. If the deed was heinous, one may be overwhelmed by *feelings of guilt*. However, beyond the primal normative idea of guilt there are forms of guilt that are non-normative but linked to what one ought to be, rather than to what one ought to do (*Seinsollen* rather than *Tunsollen* in von Hartmann's terminology). The behavioral demands upon an agent are circumstance-specific and tied to polymorphous descriptions of behavior. One may feel guilty for letting someone down (one ought to be faithful) or for inadvertently offending someone by a thoughtless remark or insensitive joke (one ought to be sensitive to the feelings of others). One may feel guilty for failure to stand up for a maligned friend, or for exposing one's family to risk. In such cases, the specific action or omission is not readily subsumable under an obligation-imposing rule, but is a moral requirement specified by the injurious consequences of one's deed or omission, or by the intrinsic qualities of what one did or failed to do and its incompatibility with one's valued relationships to others.

In certain circumstances, one's violation of an obligation-imposing rule may be justified by a weightier consideration that overrides the obligation. In such a case, one broke the rule but was not wrong to do so. So one need feel neither guilt nor remorse, although one may feel bitter regret. Alternatively, one may be excused for one's misdeed by the absence of one or another of the mental conditions of moral responsibility. In such cases, what one did was wrong, but there was no negligence and it was not one's fault. So, again, other things being equal, one need feel no guilt. However, other things may not be equal. Just as in law, where there are laws of strict liability for which absence of the mental conditions of criminal responsibility does not excuse (does not defeat liability), so too in the morality of both guilt- and shame-cultures there are circumstances in which absence of the mental conditions for liability carry no weight. It is, however, striking that while our laws of strict liability are, on the whole, confined to relatively minor offenses (traffic offenses, making changes in one's passport, selling adulterated milk), strict liability in social mores, customary law, and morality is characteristic of the most serious offences and violation of the gravest social taboos (e. g. murdering members of one's family, incest [Oedipus]). So, one may be liable to

feelings of guilt or of shame irrespective of whether one could help what one did or of whether one knew what one was doing. We shall investigate this below.

If the *conceptual iconography* of feeling ashamed is *the eye of others*, that of feeling guilty is *the voice of conscience*. The focal point of *being shamed* is the esteem of others and its loss. The focal point of *feeling ashamed of oneself* is self- and peer group—esteem, and self-respect and its loss. But the focal point of *feeling guilty* is the deed done, the transgression of an obligation-imposing rule—the commandment of God, customary law, the moral law—or the failure to satisfy a serious moral requirement determined by the specificities of the occasion. There is no “feeling guilty of oneself.” The searchlight of guilt shines *on what one has done*, and only obliquely on one’s public standing and the judgments of others (see Table 2).

Feeling guilt is the emotion linked to a person’s acknowledgment of the validity of an obligation-imposing rule or of a moral requirement (how one ought to be), to acknowledgment of transgression, and to acceptance of responsibility and liability. For this one is answerable above all to God or one’s conscience. Contrary to what is sometimes claimed, the obligation-imposing rule and the moral requirement *need not* concern prohibitions on harming others. Feelings of guilt are not restricted to violating *other-regarding* obligation-imposing rules or failing to satisfy moral requirements. One may feel guilty for wasting one’s talents, or for wasting one’s time—which may harm one, but need not harm others. One may feel guilty for one’s wicked, malicious, or sordid thoughts and wishes, as well as for one’s base desires. No harm to

Table 2. Differences between Feelings of Shame and Feelings of Guilt

Shame	Guilt
One can be ashamed of oneself or ashamed of another appropriately associated with oneself	Restricted to oneself—one cannot feel guilty for another
The scope of shame extends far further than one’s deeds and omissions	The scope of guilt is limited to one’s deeds and omissions
Feelings of shame are not defeasible by absence of <i>mens rea</i>	Save in extreme cases, feelings of guilt are defeasible by absence of <i>mens rea</i>
Fear of shame is a powerful disincentive	Fear of feeling guilty is not a disincentive, save in degenerate cases ¹
<i>In extremis</i> shame can be expunged only by extreme action demonstrating that one possesses the character trait one was shamed for not having regret	Can be atoned by admission and confession, expiation, reparation or retributive punishment, remorse
Characteristic consequence of having brought shame upon oneself or of being shamed is loss of public esteem, leading to loss of self-esteem	Characteristic consequence of feeling guilty is the desire to atone for the deed done and “restore the balance” one has disrupted

¹A degenerate case here is one in which one has abandoned a previously accepted standard of conduct (e.g., the dietary laws of a religion) but continues to comply with them simply because of an ingrained sense of unease. Here the residue of guilt provides a reason for compliance with a norm, even though the norm itself does not.

others is thereby caused, but for all that, these are potent sources of feelings of guilt.

Nevertheless, guilt feelings are for the most part linked to (moral) responsibility for *a deed*. Responsibility for one's deed is linked to liability. Liability, in a guilt-culture, is linked to remorse, atonement and expiation, which may take the form of suffering retribution or endeavoring reparation for one's misdeed. Remorse and expiation are needed to enable those who feel guilty to relieve themselves of the burden of guilt and to live with themselves again. Retribution makes the offender "pay" for his offense in the currency of suffering. Reparation discharges the guilt by repairing the wrong done or compensating for it in so far as possible. Metaphorically speaking, this "restores the balance." The Day of Atonement in Jewish practice and confession in Catholic practice, coupled with remorse and a retributive penance authoritatively imposed, are powerful devices for discharging feelings of guilt.

Of course, one may feel shame as well as guilt even in the most puritanical of cultures, such as Salem, Massachusetts in 1692—guilt for one's deed, shame in one's own eyes and the eyes of others. John Proctor, in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, Act IV, is racked with guilt at his adultery, feels no shame for engaging in witchcraft since he is innocent of the offense of which he is accused, but is willing, under pressure, to confess to it to save his life. What he cannot bear is to have his confession displayed in public for all to see his shame at buying his life with a lie, while others, equally innocent of witchcraft, go to their deaths with integrity.

Proctor: I have confessed myself! Is there no good penitence but it be public? God does not need my name nailed upon the church! God sees my name; God knows how black my sins are! It is enough!

Danforth: Mr. Proctor—

Proctor: ... I am John Proctor! You will not use me! It is no part of salvation that you should use me!

Danforth: I do not wish to—

Proctor: I have three children—how may I teach them to walk like men in the world, and I sold my friends?

Danforth: You have not sold your friends—

Proctor: Beguile me not! I blacken all of them when this is nailed to the church the very day they hang for silence!

Danforth: Mr. Proctor, I must have good and legal proof that you—

Proctor: You are the high court, your word is good enough! Tell them I confessed myself; say Proctor broke his knees and wept like a woman; say what you will, but my name cannot—

Danforth, with suspicion: It is the same, is it not? If I report it or you sign to it?

Proctor, he knows it is insane: No, it is not the same! What others say and what I sign to is not the same!

Danforth: Why? Do you mean to deny this confession when you are free?

Proctor: I mean to deny nothing!

Danforth: Then explain to me, Mr. Proctor, why you will not let—

Proctor, with a cry of his whole soul: Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!

We noted above that one may feel shame for the deeds of one's fathers and one may feel ashamed of them. Equally, one may feel shame for the actions of one's children, who may bring shame upon one. Moreover, one may feel ashamed for them. But one cannot feel *vicarious guilt* for their offences. One may regret the wrongs they have done, but one cannot feel remorse for them.

It is noteworthy that the limits of guilt *and* of shame do not coincide with the conditions of *mens rea*. Oedipus did everything he could to avoid the dreaded fate the gods had ordained, but nevertheless unwittingly killed Laius his father (who was threatening his life) and unknowingly fell in love with, married, and had children by, Jocasta his mother. His shame was so great that he stabbed out his eyes with Jocasta's broaches. But surely, one may remonstrate, Oedipus was not responsible for his deeds. Why then did he feel such shame? Is it that he was merely *causally responsible*, and that this is both necessary and sufficient for shame? I think not. First, although he may be said to have brought about (caused) the death of his father by stabbing Laius, he did not bring about *his killing* of his father—this was a voluntary deed under his full control. Furthermore, he did not *bring it about* that he slept with his mother—he slept with her, although he can be said to have brought it about that she was with child. For we do not bring about our own actions. So we have more than mere causal responsibility—which one bears if, in being knocked over, one falls against another person causing him injury. Secondly, in doing what he did, Oedipus satisfied the requirements of *capacity-responsibility*; that is, he possessed the requisite two-way powers to act or refrain from acting over a wide sphere of competence, was in full command of his faculties, and was a rational agent sensitive to reasons for acting, feeling, and thinking, and able to deliberate and form intentions. In addition, he satisfied the conditions of *act-responsibility*. That is, he not only possessed the requisite generic abilities, but was also able to exercise them on the occasion in question. Nevertheless, he did not know, and in the circumstances could not have known, that Laius was his father and Jocasta his mother. Normally non-culpable ignorance exculpates. Nevertheless, Oedipus felt utter horror and infinite shame. Irremovable stigma was attached to him. He had *polluted* Thebes and was condemned to leave the city.

Strikingly, feelings of guilt in our culture may also be felt despite absence of intent, malice, recklessness, or negligence. If a person, driving with utmost care, unavoidably runs over and kills a small child who suddenly darted across the road, he will, in all probability suffer terrible feelings of guilt for the rest of his days. Is this irrational? Even in cases in which he knows full well that

there was nothing he could have done to prevent the accident? Should he then feel no guilt? Should he shrug his shoulders regretfully, and say “What bad luck!”?

Are the blurred boundaries of rationality *crossed* in cases of *survivor-guilt*? This was felt by many survivors of the Nazi holocaust, and is sometimes felt by soldiers who have survived against the odds while their comrades fell (as in the trenches of the Great War). Here guilt is felt not for something one has done, no matter whether intentionally or unintentionally; nor is it for something one allowed to be done to one. It is felt simply for surviving, where others (who were one’s people or one’s comrades) died. It is an expression of solidarity with those who went through the valley of death with one and who perished. Is it rational? Perhaps here Reason itself must be silent—it can go so far, but no farther.

Deep differences between feeling shame and feeling guilt are evident when we turn to examine the forms of response to these reactive feelings. For regret—even bitter regret—belongs to shame, whereas remorse fits guilt. Deep shame that one has brought upon oneself can be expunged (in a shame-culture) only by heroic death. Not to act as befits someone of one’s standing is to suffer a blow to one’s self-esteem and self-respect. What one has done cannot be undone—and, in a shame-culture, one cannot remove the stain. Hence Ajax’s agonized cry when he discovers that he has run amok and slaughtered cattle instead of his enemies, thus making himself a laughing stock and losing all honor:

Look at me! Me, the brave hero! The one who never trembles with fear in battle! Never afraid of enemies! Look at what I have done! I have killed these helpless animals, poor beasts that have never hurt anyone!

Look at me!

Is there anyone more shameful than me? Is there anyone who’s suffered a greater insult?

....

Darkness! You are my light! Hades’ misery! You are my greatest hope! Take me! Take me, Hades, and let me live within your darkest halls! Here, I am no longer fit to seek the help of gods or mortals. Here, Zeus’ daughter, that mighty goddess Athena, tortures me mercilessly.

Where can I find refuge. Where can I go and live?

If all my glorious past is gone, my friends, gone like those slaughtered animals, and all I’ll be remembered for is having so mindlessly chosen to slaughter these innocent beasts, then let the whole army raise their swords and strike me dead!

Sophocles, *Ajax*, 365–68, 395–400 (trans. G. Theodoris)

Aristodemus could wipe out his shame for not having died in battle with his three hundred fellow Spartans at Thermopylae only by suicidal valor at Plataea.

This should not be so alien to us as it may seem. Harry Faversham, in A. E. W. Mason's popular 1902 novel *The Four Feathers*, can expiate shame and public shaming (by being given white feathers) only by acts of extreme heroism.

By contrast, feelings of guilt, if accompanied by remorse and repentance, may be annulled by atonement and reparation to the victim (if possible), forgiveness from the victim (if possible), and, in a religious guilt-culture, forgiveness from God.

It is important to note that shame and guilt are not exclusive emotions. One can feel shame and guilt simultaneously for the same offense. One feels ashamed of oneself, has brought shame upon oneself, and one feels guilty for what one has done.

How are regret and remorse related? The objects of regret, unlike those of remorse, are not limited to one's deeds—one may regret the passing of one's youth or the death of a friend. To regret something is to judge the object of regret as unfortunate, a mistake or a necessary evil. If one is ashamed of what one did, one regrets doing it—wishes one had not done it. But feelings of regret for one's deeds are compatible with thinking that what one did was right, and not shameful at all. One may have chosen the lesser of two evils. One may then regret what one did, but insist that given similar circumstances, one would do the same again. One may also regret lost opportunities, and acknowledge that one was wrong not to seize Fortune by her forelock.

Remorse, by contrast, does imply wishing one could undo what one has done, and does imply wanting to restore the *status quo ante*. Failing that possibility, one must seek atonement in deeds. One cannot feel remorse and continue to think that one was justified in doing what one did. Agamemnon may have felt bitter regret for the sacrifice of Iphigenia, but no remorse, since he viewed it as a necessary evil. Claudius, in *Hamlet*, is guilt-ridden, but cannot feel remorse and cannot repent, for he cannot bring himself to abandon the throne and his queen.

O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven,
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
A brother's murder. Pray can I not;
Though inclination be as sharp as will,
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
And like a man to double business bound,
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
And both neglect.

...

But O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? "Forgive me my foul murder?"
That cannot be, since I am still possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition and my queen.
May one be pardon'd and retain the offence?

Macbeth, after murdering Duncan, is horrified by his own deed and regrets the murder (“Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst”¹! [Macbeth, II, 3]). Nevertheless, he feels no remorse or shame. Instead, he changes his conception of himself, and therewith the grounds of his self-esteem and self-respect, and plunges ever deeper into blood in order to maintain his throne (“Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill” [III, 3]). Genuine remorse, therefore, is linked to motivation in a manner in which regret is not. In Judeo-Christian ethics, sin and guilt may be atoned for. The sin may be forgiven, and the guilt expunged. This gives formidable power to synagogue and church in the control of individual lives. But guilt, remorse, and atonement also find a place in rationalist ethics that has severed the links between the requirements of morality and divine command. The burden is carried by the conscience of the individual.¹

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