James Laing
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Making Sense of Shame

He groaned at his disgrace
Unfolding his ill-fame
And blood suffused his face
When he showed his mark of shame.
  (*Sir Gawain and The Green Knight*, p. 114)

§1. Introduction

Shame is naturally thought of as having two dimensions. On the one hand,

it is thought to be a value-oriented emotion which involves feeling oneself

to be shameful in some way, and therefore to fall short of some normative

standard. This standard could be moral, a fact emphasised by the common

claim that shame is a 'moral emotion', but it could also be aesthetic or

epistemic.[1] On the other hand, shame is commonly thought to be a 'social

emotion' which manifests our concern with our social relations, with

honour and 'ill-fame'.[2] This is reflected in the characteristic tendency of the

subject of shame to avoid eye contact and to defer to others, or to withdraw

from social interaction altogether.

I have two aims in this paper. The first is to show that the task of

understanding the relationship between these two dimensions of shame is

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[1] For the claim that shame is a 'moral emotion', see Taylor (1985, p. 54), Rawls (1999, p. 389), Wollheim (1999), Levinas (2003, p. 63) and Calhoun (2004).
[2] See Maibom (2010), Zahavi (2014), Tomasello (2019, p. 283) and O'Brien (2020, p. 553)

more challenging than it might have initially appeared. Beginning from the widespread assumption that shame is other-oriented insofar as it manifests our concern primarily with the way we appear to others, I argue that we face a challenge in understanding shame in a way that satisfactorily integrates its value-oriented and other-oriented dimensions. More specifically, I argue that an intuitive line of thought which takes seriously shame's value-oriented dimension leads naturally to 'The Self-Evaluation View', a view which I argue faces a serious challenge in accommodating shame's other-oriented dimension. This, in turn, can push us towards 'The Social Evaluation View', a view which faces the opposite challenge of accommodating the value-oriented dimension of shame. Finally I argue that an attempt to chart a middle-course between these two extremes which leaves in tact the assumption that shame manifests a concern primarily with the way we appear to others is unsatisfactory (§2).

The second aim of this paper is to suggest that this assumption is not mandatory. Instead, I outline an account of shame as manifesting our concern primarily to connect with others and only secondarily with the way we appear to others. On this basis, the other-oriented dimension of shame is elucidated in terms of a specific form of merited avoidance or rejection (§3). The resulting account, I contend, provides a more satisfying integration of the two dimensions of shame than either of the alternatives considered in §2.

§2. Shame and Approbation

2.1. On 'seeing oneself through another's eyes'

The subject of shame is sometimes described as seeing themselves 'through another's eyes' (e.g. Taylor 1985, p. 57). This metaphor suggests an encounter of the following form. Just as you might see yourself reflected in a mirror as you appear from another spatial perspective, so when you see another you might recognise, from the orientation of their gaze and the expression on their face, that they see you in a particular evaluative light, as you appear from their evaluative perspective.

This naturally suggests an understanding of the other-oriented dimension in terms of one's awareness of, and concern with, those evaluatively-laden psychological states of which one is the object. That is, with the way one appears to others, perceptually or doxastically, and more generally, one's reputation. Our susceptibility to shame, then, is the product of our nature as social creatures that want to be thought well of—to be held in 'approbation'—by others of our kind.

This form of interpersonal awareness might vary across a number of dimensions. For example, it might concern the way one is evaluated by an actual person who is present or an actual person who is not present. Alternatively, it might concern the way an actual person *would* evaluate one if they were fully apprised of the relevant facts. Finally, as Williams (1993, p. 82) observes, although there are experiences of shame which do not involve

an *actual* evaluator, many experiences of this sort will nevertheless involve an *imaginary* evaluator.

This is the most common way of interpreting the other-oriented dimension of shame in the philosophical literature, and it forms the basis for a suspicion that shame ought not to play an important role in adult ethical life. As Williams (1993, p. 77-8) observes, insofar as shame is thought to involve one's 'losing face' in the eyes of others, it is sometimes accused of being a superficial, heteronomous and narcissistic emotion. These three worries are interconnected. Shame is thought to be superficial insofar as it is concerned with the way one *appears* regardless of how one actually *is*. It is thought to be narcissistic insofar as it is to be fixated on one's social image rather than the putatively ethically relevant facts about the situation. And, finally, it is thought to be heteronomous insofar as it shifts our attention away from our own autonomous assessment of ourselves and what we ought to do to the appraisals and expectations of others.[3]

Each of these suspicions naturally leads to the thought that although shame might have a place in the ethical life of the young and immature, rendering them receptive to ethical instruction, it has no place in the life of a mature ethical agent (e.g. Calhoun 2004).[4] As Burnyeat (1980, p. 78) says, it is at best 'the semivirtue of the learner'.

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[3] See also Calhoun (2004, p. 128), Deonna, Rodogno & Teroni (2011, p. 35-6) and Harcourt (2016).

[4] The same thought is expressed, for different reasons, by Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics,* 1128b10).

2.2. The Self-Evaluation View

These suspicions embody assumptions about shame which can be contested. In particular, they make it overwhelmingly natural to respond by emphasising the value-oriented dimension of shame. A natural way to do this is to defend the idea that shame is a form of adverse self-evaluation which involves something like the thought that one falls short of some value or standard (e.g. Rawls 1999, p. 387-391; Taylor 1985; Bartky 1990). Shame, so envisaged, involves thinking or feeling oneself to *be* a particular way and therefore need not necessarily involve the kind of concern with the way one appears to others which is the basis of the charges mentioned above.

This way of thinking about shame can seem plausible if we consider the following line of thought. We might think that in order for the other's evaluation of me to make me feel ashamed of myself, as opposed to merely making me feel upset, it must make me feel myself to be shameful in some way. But this would be to in some sense take myself to have some negatively valenced property which makes appropriate my feeling of shame and the other's negative evaluation. Taking myself to have such a property, however, arguably involves the incorporation of the other's evaluation of me into my own self-conception, and therefore involves me evaluating myself in precisely the way the other evaluates me (Taylor 1985, p. 57-9; Bartky 1990, p. 85). Thus, Taylor suggests, Sartre's voyeur feels ashamed upon being

caught in the act of peeping through a keyhole because he recognises that he *is* the vulgar person he is seen to be (Sartre 2018, p. 308, p. 357-8).

2.3. Self-Evaluation and the Other-Oriented Dimension of Shame

This account enables one to respond to the normative critique of shame suggested in §2.1 by denying that shame manifests an undue concern with the way one appears to another. The reason for this is that this account envisages shame in such a way that the way one appears to another plays at most a causal and epistemic role in the experience of shame, causing one's experience or providing evidential grounds for the relevant self-evaluation. Shame, as such, is not inherently concerned with the way one appears to others. What place, then, is there for the other-oriented dimension of shame in this account?

One option would be to insist that the specific form of self-evaluation necessarily involves the thought that one is seen by another in a particular kind of way. The problem with this strategy, however, is that it seems to be perfectly possible to feel ashamed of oneself when one is alone, without thinking or imagining oneself to be seen in a particular way by another. In this vein, O'Hear (1976-1977, p. 77) suggests that 'it is quite possible to think of people, such as writers or craftsmen, with high standards of their own, feeling shame just because they have let themselves down (not

produced a masterpiece), without thinking of them imagining other craftsmen inspecting and condemning their work.'[5]

Taylor pursues a different course, claiming that awareness of the way one appears to others, whether actual or imaginary, is not an essential component of shame. However, the idea the idea that shame is inherently other-involving can be explained away, insofar as the idea that one is seen is a useful metaphorical device for describing 'the shift in the agent's viewpoint *vis-à-vis* himself.' That is, the shift in the agent's viewpoint from their immersed first person perspective to that of a detached observer, seeing themselves from the latter perspective as being inferior to how they assumed themselves to be from the former perspective (Taylor 1985, p. 66).

However, this suggestion fails to do justice to the natural thought that shame is other-oriented. To see why, let's consider Nathaniel Hawthorne's exploration of shame in *The Scarlet Letter*. This novel recounts the aftermath of an affair between Hester Prynne and a man whose identity is unknown to the public but who we discover to be the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale. While Arthur is beloved by his parishioners, Hester is persecuted by them. Day by day she is subjected to a routine of shaming-punishments, most notably being made to wear the scarlet letter as a badge of her shame.

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[5] cf. Taylor (1985, p. 58ff) and Deonna, Rodogno & Teroni (2011, p. 145-152). Few insist on the strong claim that shame necessarily involves the conscious thought or imagination of another who plays the role of an observer. This view is sometimes attributed to Williams, for example by Deonna, Rodogno and Teroni (2011, p. 32-3). However, his claim is weaker than this:

> *Even if* shame and its motivations always involve in some way or other an idea of the gaze of another, it is important that *for many of its operations* the imagined gaze of an imagined other will do. (Williams 1993, p. 82, emphasis added)

Insofar as Hester seldom contests the evaluations of the parishioners, her shame might initially seem amenable to The Self-Evaluation View. It is also plausible that she is sometimes subject to the shift in perspective Taylor describes. She goes about her life, immersed in her charitable activities and might even, for a short time, forget about her 'shameful past', only to be reminded of it when another's gaze forces her to imagine how she appears from a detached perspective. What is unconvincing, however, is the idea that this exhausts the other-oriented dimension of shame. Consider, for instance, the following passage:

> Another peculiar torture was felt in the gaze of a new eye. When strangers looked curiously at the scarlet letter — and none ever failed to do so, — they branded it afresh into Hester's soul… But then again, an accustomed eye likewise had its own anguish to inflict. 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 callous; it seemed, on the contrary, to grow more sensitive with each daily torture. (Hawthorne 2007, p. 69)

Two points can be made in connection with this example.

First, on Taylor's interpretation, we should think of the other's gaze as inducing shame in Hester by causing her to take an observer's perspective on herself. But the salient object of Hester's attention in this example is not

herself, as seen from the other's third person perspective. Rather, the explicit object of her attention is the other's shame-inducing gaze. Her consciousness of herself transparent in the sense that it consists in her attending, not to herself from an observer's perspective, but to those reactions of others which she experiences as directed 'at me', as inducing or intensifying her shame.

Second, if the putatively other-oriented dimension of shame is merely incidental to the experience of shame, what would explain the fact that the characteristic expressions of shame, such as the desire to avoid eye contact and social interaction, and the desire that others forget about one's shameful revelations, are other-directed? It is true that it might be easier to regulate one's shame by trying to forget about it and that these acts of avoidance could be thought of as a means of facilitating this. The problem with this suggestion, however, is that it treats so much of what is essential to Hester's shame as merely incidental. If Hester would like others to forget about her shameful past, it is clear that her reason for doing so would be so as to enable her to establish a more desirable place in her community. Consider the following passage:

> In her intercourse with the society… there was nothing that made
> her feel as if she belonged to it. Every gesture, every word, and
> even the silence of those with whom she came in contact implied
> and often expressed that she was banished, and as much alone as

if she inhabited another sphere... The poor, as we have already said, whom she sought out to be the objects of her bounty, often reviled the hand that was stretched forth 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 that alchemy of quiet malice, by which women can concoct a subtle poison from ordinary trifles; and sometimes, also, by a coarser expression, that fell upon the sufferer's defenceless breast like a rough blow upon an ulcerated wound. (Hawthorne 2007, p. 67-68)

This passage suggests that Hester's shame is other-oriented insofar as it's concerned with interpersonal rejection. When others look at the scarlet letter, she is conscious of their gaze as expressing their rejection of her, their desire to distance themselves from her. No wonder, then, that shame might therefore lead one to avoid social contact altogether. Often it is less painful to avoid interaction altogether than to put oneself out there only to be rejected.

The Self-Evaluation View might seek to accommodate these cases by suggesting that Hester adversely evaluates herself for being rejected. This proposal falls short of capturing the inherently other-oriented dimension of shame, however, since although it treats rejection as the grounds for this particular experience of shame, it shies away from the claim that shame is

inherently concerned with social rejection. This view allows that shame can be felt on other grounds, and when it is, it lacks an other-oriented dimension.

If this is right, then The Self-Evaluation View faces a challenge in explaining the natural idea that shame is inherently other-oriented, and therefore in explaining the natural thought that it is an emotion that is peculiar to self-conscious social animals like us. For all that has been said, shame, as it is understood by The Self-Evaluation View, might be possessed by an utterly asocial value-oriented agent, one which is utterly indifferent to eye contact and interpersonal interaction, and which is concerned with the way it is evaluated by others simply as a source of evidence for its own autonomous self-evaluation.

2.4. The Social-Evaluation View

These considerations might lead us to rethink our initial concession that shame necessarily involves adverse self-evaluation. Instead, we might suggest that shame is an experience of adverse social evaluation; that is, an experience of being adversely evaluated by others, whether actual or imaginary (Calhoun 2004; Maibom 2010). A view of this sort faces two challenges, each of which is connected to the considerations that initially led us towards The Self-Evaluation View.

First, though this account allows that shame is oriented to value insofar as it is oriented to the evaluations characteristic of others in our community,

when we are ashamed of ourselves, we feel ourselves *to be*, as opposed to merely *appearing* to be, shameful. In §2.2 this led us to find attractive the idea that shame involves the incorporation of the other's perspective, and from there to The Self-Evaluation View. The Social-Evaluation View, by contrast, denies that shame requires any form of self-evaluation. In doing so, it incurs the obligation to explain the phenomena which led us to say that feeling ashamed of oneself is importantly unlike being upset by the other's opinion of one insofar as it involves feeling oneself *to be* shameful. This is 'The Explanatory Challenge'.

Second, this account rejects the idea shame is an autonomous response to the way one *is*. But this is what enabled The Self-Evaluation View to defend shame against the charge that it is a superficial, narcissistic and heteronomous emotion that has no place in the life of a mature ethical agent. The Social-Evaluation View therefore owes us a response to these charges. We can call this 'The Normative Challenge'.

2.5. The Social-Evaluation View and the Value-Oriented Dimension of Shame

Calhoun (2004) provides an interesting response to The Normative Challenge and, in the course of doing so, can be interpreted as providing the resources for a potential response to The Explanatory Challenge.

According to Calhoun, it is a sign of 'moral maturity' to feel shame in response to another's disapproval, even when we think their disapproval is mistaken. The reason for this is that we have good reason to give 'practical

weight' the evaluations of others when these evaluations reflect a view of us which is representative of the opinions of our co-participants in some moral practice. These evaluations ought to be given practical weight because they define 'who one is' within this shared moral practice. This view is summarised in the following paragraph:

> Shaming criticisms work by impressing upon the person that she has disappointed not just one individual's expectations but what some "we" expected of her… The power to shame is a function of our sharing a moral practice with the shamer and recognizing that the shamer's opinion expresses a representative viewpoint within that practice. The shamer's opinion tells us who we are for any number of co-participants within a social practice of morality that we take ourselves to be a part of. Shaming criticisms have, in this sense, practical weight. (Calhoun 2004, p. 140-1)

We can agree with Calhoun that a mature moral agent, insofar as they seek to live a life with others in their community, will give weight to the opinions of others. This will have as a consequence that they will be vulnerable to feel upset, displeased and uncomfortable when others try to shame them by expressing disapproval of them, regardless of whether they feel this criticism to be appropriate. This does not entail, however, that it is appropriate for an agent to feel ashamed of themselves in response to

disapproval regardless of whether they take this disapproval to be appropriate. And, in fact, we have good reason to resist that idea. For what it is to feel ashamed of oneself is to feel oneself to *be* shameful, and if the subject takes this disapproval to be inappropriate, they will deny that they *are* shameful in the relevant respect. They will take themselves to have nothing to be ashamed of and conclude, correctly, that any such feeling of shame would be appropriate in this instance.

One response that could be made on behalf of Calhoun would be to say that there is a sense in which a subject can take themselves to be a shameful person, even if they disagree with the other's disapproval. Recall that Calhoun suggests that we can appropriately feel ashamed of ourselves in response to the shaming-criticism of another because this criticism is expressive of the representative viewpoint of our moral practice, and therefore 'tells us who we are for any number of co-participants' (Calhoun 2004, p. 140-1). It might be suggested that, in such a case, being aware of oneself as adversely evaluated from a representative standpoint makes one aware not merely of how one *appears* to others, but also with the shameful person one *is* in one's social world.

There are at least three problems with Calhoun's account, so understood. The first is that, without further argument, it can appear to consist in a merely verbal manoeuvre. To say this is 'the shameful person one is for these others' is just to say that one appears to be a shameful person to these

people.[6] It therefore brings us no closer to capturing the value-oriented dimension of shame. When we feel ashamed of ourselves we do not think of ourselves as merely appearing to be a shameful person to others. This, after all, is something we might respond to by merely feeling upset. Rather, as I have emphasised, when we feel ashamed of ourselves we feel ourselves to *be* shameful in some respect.

The second problem is posed by the phenomenon of 'secret shame'. To illustrate this difficulty, we can return to *The Scarlet Letter*. The case of Arthur Dimmesdale contrasts with that of Hester Prynne. Whereas Hester's shame is felt before the public gaze, Arthur's shame is suffered in private; whereas she suffers ill-fame, he enjoys public approbation. His shame is nevertheless, deeply other-oriented, as can be seen in the following speech he addresses to Hester:

> Happy are you, Hester, that wear the scarlet letter openly upon your bosom! Mine burns in secret! Thou little knowest what a relief it is, after the torment of a seven years' cheat, to look into an eye that recognizes me for what I am! Had I one friend... to whom when sickened with the praises of all other men, I could daily betake myself and be known as the vilest of all sinners, methinks my soul might keep itself alive thereby. Even thus much

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6 See Deonna, Rodogno and Teroni (2011, p. 37-8) for a similar charge.

of truth would save me! But now it is all falsehood! — all
emptiness! — all death! (Hawthorne 2007, p. 150)

Although Arthur is revered by his community, he feels alienated from it
insofar as his inclusion is based on an understanding of him as admirable,
an understanding he cannot share thinking himself, as he does, the 'vilest of
sinners'.

Calhoun's account faces a challenge in satisfactorily characterising
Arthur's shame. After all, from the actual representative viewpoint of his
community (the viewpoint which determines 'who he is' in this moral
practice), he is regarded as a saintlike figure and a boon to the community.
Moreover, it would be a distortion of the example to claim that Arthur's
shame can be understood as being a shame felt in anticipation of the person
he will become once his part in the affair is revealed. His shame is not
future-oriented in this way: he feels himself to *be* shameful, to *be* the vilest
of sinners, and not merely to fear *future* exposure. Nor can Calhoun
understand Arthur as imagining being seen by an observer who sees him as
he sees himself, because this would at best determine 'who he is' in some
imaginary moral practice and not 'who he is' in his actual moral practice. By
the lights of Calhoun's view, this will at best make sense of an imaginary
feeling of shame rather than Arthur's actual feeling of shame. Finally,
Calhoun cannot avoid this difficulty by claiming that Arthur sees that he *is*
this shameful person, in the sense that this is how he would be seen by

others in his community if his secret were to be exposed. After all, at the end of the novel Arthur does reveal himself to his community. And just as this community interprets Hester's charitable deeds in a way which confirms their preconception of her as a sinner, so they interpret his revelations in a way that confirms their preconception of him as a saint. It is in this connection that Hawthorne writes of the 'stubborn fidelity with which a man's friends —and especially a clergyman's— will sometimes uphold his character, when proofs, clear as the mid-day sunshine on the scarlet letter, establish him a false and sin-stained creature of the dust' (Hawthorne 2007, p. 201).

The final problem concerns the phenomenon of higher-order shame. In Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the narrator writes 'I am not ashamed of my grandparents for having been slaves. I am only ashamed of myself for having at one time been ashamed' (Ellison 1953, p. 15). Calhoun seems to be committed to understanding the narrator's past feeling of shame (of the fact his grandparents were slaves) as appropriate insofar as the belief that being the grandson of slaves is shameful reflects the representative view of his moral practice. But this puts pressure on the more plausible thought that his higher-order shame is appropriate. Assuming that he remains within the same moral practice, and that the representative views of this practice have not changed, it is either appropriate to feel ashamed of one's grandparents for having been slaves, in which case his higher-order shame of having once been ashamed of this is inappropriate; or, it is inappropriate to feel ashamed

of one's grandparents for having been slaves, in which case is appropriate for one to feel higher-order shame in having once felt this.

A more plausible interpretation of this kind of case is available if we retain the idea that feeling ashamed of oneself involves feeling oneself to be shameful, and therefore to fall short of some normative standard. The narrator can then be understood as telling us that when he used to be ashamed of himself for having grandparents who were once slaves, he used to feel to be shameful even though he now realises it is not. He has come to see that the only shameful thing about his earlier condition was his feeling of shame regarding the fact his grandparents were once slaves.

2.6. The Challenge

We seem to face a dilemma. On the one hand, we might try and accommodate the value-oriented dimension of shame by defending a version of The Self-Evaluation View, only to fail to do justice to the other-oriented dimension of shame. Or we might begin from the assumption that shame is an other-oriented emotion, only to face a challenge in explaining the value-oriented dimension of shame. It is natural at this stage to try and find a middle way.

One clearly unsatisfying way of attempting do this would be to distinguish two species of shame, 'moral shame' and 'social shame', and to suggest that 'The Self-Evaluation View' is true of the former and 'The Social-Evaluation View' is true of the latter. The problem with this

suggestion is that paradigmatic cases of shame are *both* value-oriented and other-oriented.

A more promising middle way has it that shame constitutively involves the judgement that the (actual or imaginary) other's adverse evaluation of one is merited. Unlike The Self-Evaluation View, this suggestion acknowledges that shame is inherently other-oriented and, unlike The Social-Evaluation View considered earlier, insists that the relevant adverse social-evaluation is felt to be merited, thereby acknowledging the value-oriented dimension of shame.

Although this account can seem to blunt the suspicion of inherent heteronomy insofar as the subject is concerned with only those of the other's evaluations which seem to the subject to be appropriate, this account envisages shame in a way that is nevertheless open to the charges of narcissism and heteronomy.

This can be brought out by a parallel with Williams's (1985) discussion of the description under which a virtuous agent performs virtuous deeds. Generally, we think that someone who possesses a virtue, say benevolence, does not perform a benevolent act 'because it's the virtuous thing to do ' or 'because that's what a benevolent person would do'. Rather, it is natural to think that the person who is genuinely virtuous chooses certain courses of action under other descriptions, such as that it is 'the thing to do' (McDowell 1970, p. 332) or because 'she needs it' (Williams 1985, p. 11). As Williams observes,

> thinking about your possible states in terms of the virtues…is not distinctively to think about the terms in which you could or should think about your actions: it is rather to think about the way in which others might describe on comment on the way in which you think about your actions, and if that represents the essential content of your deliberations, it really does seem a misdirection of the ethical attention (Williams 1985, p. 12).

A similar charge would apply to the feeling of shame as it is envisaged by the account we are considering. Insofar as it manifests a concern not with what one has done or the person one has shown oneself to be but with one's public image it seems to involve a kind of misdirection of one's ethical attention. Moreover, insofar as this concern with one's public image plays a role in governing one's action and ethical thinking, one will fail to rely on one's own autonomous response to the ethically relevant characteristics of the situation. This, in turn, suggests that the present strategy does not altogether avoid the charge of problematic heteronomy, even if the relevant failure is less extreme than the failure of autonomy entailed by the standard social-evaluation view.

In the absence of a normatively satisfying middle way, we might feel inclined to reject the starting assumption that careful attention to the phenomenology of shame seems to have both of these starting

assumptions. For example, some who emphasise the idea that shame is a 'moral emotion' reject the idea that it is a 'social emotion' (e.g. Deonna, Rodogno & Teroni 2011). By contrast, others who emphasise the idea that shame is a 'social emotion' reject the idea that it is a 'moral emotion' (e.g. Velleman 2001).

The burden of proof, however, is on these authors to show that the two-dimensional characterisation of shame I have offered is inaccurate. After all, the idea that shame has value-oriented and other-oriented dimensions is implicit in our ordinary thought and talk about shame, it is reflected in the characteristic behavioural expressions of shame, and it is implicit in the classic definitions of shame that have been offered throughout the history of philosophy.[7] The problem with the arguments that are actually offered, moreover, is they have tended to rest on the assumption that the only ways of understanding the value-oriented and other-oriented dimensions of shame are those we have considered so far.[8] However, as I will now argue, there is an alternative way of thinking about shame which promises to provide a more satisfying integration of shame's two dimensions.

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[7] See Plato (*Laws*, *464e ff),* Aristotle (Rhetoric,1383b15), Descartes (*The Passions of the Soul*, §66) and Spinoza*, (Ethics*, III, p. 58, Definitions of the Emotions, 31).

[8] For example, Deonna, Rodogno, & Teroni (2011) assume that the only way of understanding the other-oriented dimension of shame is along the lines described in §2.1. On the other hand, Velleman's rejection of the value-oriented dimension of shame only targets what he calls 'standard philosophical analyses of shame', namely the kind of position considered in §§2.2-2.5.

§3. Shame, Avoidance and Rejection

3.1. An Alternative Approach

The difficulties we have encountered can be avoided if we reject the standard interpretation of other-oriented dimension of shame. Rather than thinking of shame as manifesting a concern primarily with the way we appear to others, I suggest that the other-oriented dimension can be understood as manifesting our natural desire for interpersonal connection (§3.2). Then, on this basis, I will argue that it is plausible to understand the other-oriented dimension of shame primarily in terms of the notion of merited avoidance (or, in the extreme case, rejection) of a specific form of interpersonal connection (§3.3).

3.2. Interpersonal Connection

Human sociality is distinctive in the way it is pervaded by a special form of communicative interaction. From infancy onwards we seek to communicate, in a broad but perfectly appropriate sense of the word, through eye contact, joint attention and, at a later stage of development, conversation. As many have observed, we seek to interact in these ways, not merely for the sake of 'the maximally effective exchange of information' and 'such general purposes as influencing or directing the actions of others' (Grice 1989, p. 28), but also, crucially, in order to *connect* with them.[9]

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[9] See, for example, Tronick (2005), Cockburn (2014), Taylor (2016) and Eilan (Forthcoming)

Although this notion of connection is a familiar one, it has received little in the way of philosophical scrutiny. Since a desire for interpersonal connection underlies the account of shame I will defend, it is important to understand in more detail what it is. In order to do so, it is useful to take a step back and consider what it is like to be in the presence of another human being, conscious that one is the object of their attention. In situations of this sort, one is conscious of the other's attention as having an immediate impact on one's activity and emotional comportment.

First, the other's act of attending to one is experienced as having an immediate impact on one's activity insofar as it necessitates a communicative response on one's part. If they are looking at one, for example, one might acknowledge their gaze with a wave or a smile, one might ask them who they're looking at or initiate a conversation. A response is necessitated since, even if one avoids their gaze, this will itself be a way of registering their presence, a communicative response which takes effort. This response will provoke a communicative response from the other, in turn, even if their response is similarly avoidant, in which case a mutually awkward silence will ensue (compare Korsgaard 1996, p. 140). As a consequence, both individuals become mutually oriented in their activity.

Second being attended to in this way also has an emotional impact. Even on this austere description, it might evoke a feeling of self-consciousness, aggression or excitement. If we describe the case in more detail, paying careful attention to the other's facial expression and their general

demeanour towards one, for example if they are relating to one in a way expressive of aggression, this is liable to make one feel afraid; a friendly gaze might evoke a response of friendliness in return, and so forth. But even coldness, in this context, is not the absence of a response; it is not, as Cavell (1969, p. 264) puts it, an 'emotional blank'.

We can understand the notion of interpersonal connection against this background. When we try to *connect* with another, we are attempting to interact with them in the affectively-charged manner delineated above, and to do so in such a way that constitutes pleasant and harmonious form of emotional attunement. We might achieve connection in a variety of different ways, from the mutual expression of interest in some object, topic or goal, to the shared immersion in one another characteristic of mutual attraction. In this vein Eilan (Forthcoming, p. 14) writes of 'communication-as-connection' as a basic psychological phenomenon which can be established though a variety of joint activities such as by sharing a joke, dancing, playing music together, chanting, joint reminiscence, in addition to the activities already mentioned. Although much more needs to be said to elaborate and explain the notion of interpersonal connection, the following points will suffice for present purposes.

First, interpersonal connection can take relatively deep or superficial forms, depending on the manner in which each subject is affected by the other and the extent to which this reaction is visible to the other. At one end of the spectrum, we might think of the connection between two lovers

making eye contact or two friends engaged in a deep and meaningful conversation. At the other, we might think of the friendly and sincere interactions between two strangers on a train.

Second, for interpersonal connection to be achieved, it must be the case that both (a) the responses of each person to the other are genuine expressions of the way the other affects them and (b) that each is open to the other, attentive to the communicative acts the other is directing towards them. According to (a), cases in which either individual is not expressing their genuine reaction to the other will not count as cases of interpersonal connection because they are not emotionally in tune. One person is masking their emotional reaction through pretense and, by doing so, preventing the other from making genuine affective contact with them. Similarly (b) precludes cases in which either party is inattentive to the other, as when one person is distracted or deep in thought. To the extent that either party is 'miles away', it is difficult to make affective contact with them in the way characteristic of interpersonal connection. It also precludes cases in which one fails to see the other as they are, instead seeing them though the lens of some preconception, bias or stereotype.

Finally, it takes two to connect. A is connected with B at level Z if and only if B is connected with A at level Z. So if A is hallucinating or otherwise mistakenly takes B to be connecting with them at this level when

they aren't, this means they aren't in fact connecting with one another. All we have here is the 'mere appearance' of connection.[10]

With this general understanding of interpersonal connection in place, we can understand the other-oriented dimension of shame as manifesting our desire primarily for interpersonal connection, and only secondarily a desire to appear in a positive light to others. To say our desire to appear well is secondary, in this way, is to suggest that we want to appear well for the sake of interpersonal connection, since the way the way we appear to another, and particularly the evaluative light under which we appear to them, can enable or preclude interpersonal connection.

The other's positive appraisal will enable connection when it is expressed in a face to face interaction, making possible the kind of pleasant and harmonious emotional attunement constitutive of interpersonal connection. On the other hand, their negative appraisal, whether it be expressed by hate, anger or pity, can preclude connection in at least two ways. First, if the negative evaluation is expressed in the interaction, it will preclude connection by bringing about a disharmonious form of emotional attunement.[11] Alternatively, if they hide their actual emotional response and 'put a face on' this will preclude connection insofar as it will result, at best, in the mere appearance of connection. Positive appraisals too can sometimes preclude interpersonal connection. For example, one might feel

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[10] Compare, for example, Campbell (2005, p. 289) on joint attention.

[11] Tronick (2005) calls this 'disconnection'. This name is unfortunate insofar as the notion of disconnection is ambiguous between the cessation of connection and the kind of emotional discord he has in mind.

unable to connect with another if one takes their good opinion of one to be inappropriate, based on their ignorance, or on one's deception of them. As we will see, this last point is crucial in understanding the case of Arthur Dimmesdale.[12]

3.3. *Avoidance, Rejection and Shamefulness*

With this in place, we can understand shame as manifesting our natural desire primarily for interpersonal connection. As social animals, we characteristically desire interpersonal connection. However, as distinctively value-oriented social animals, we desire appropriate interpersonal connection and therefore want to be the kind of person that merits the other's acceptance.

On this basis, we can understand shame as follows. When we feel ashamed of ourselves, we feel ourselves to be shameful in some regard. This can be understood to involve the experience of feeling oneself to merit avoidance or, in the extreme case, rejection, on the part of the other. The relevant forms of avoidance or rejection can be specified with reference to the notion of interpersonal connection. For example, it can be said to involve feeling oneself to have some property which merits avoidance (or rejection) by the other of any effort on one's own part to connect with them in some specific way.[13] The qualification to specific

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[12] I am grateful to Cheshire Calhoun for helping me to be clearer about this (as well as much of the material in §3.3).

[13] Shamefulness might therefore be understood as a 'response-dependent' property in the manner of Wiggins (1987) and McDowell (1985).

forms of connection is important, because some properties might only be felt to merit avoidance from (or rejection of) specific forms of interpersonal connection. For example, one might feel ashamed of one's body, experiencing it as rendering one appropriately-avoidable for sexual interaction, but not for other forms of interpersonal connection. If one's shortcoming is felt to be sufficiently egregious, however, it might be experienced as making appropriate a more global form of avoidance.

Consider how a child might come to apprehend certain things as being shameful. They will do so by first becoming acquainted with this form of avoidance or rejection by being subjected to it themselves (by being ignored, kept at a distance or sent out of the room when they misbehave, being teased by their peers, etc.), by observing others who are subjected to this avoidance or rejection, and by being told stories or anecdotes in which certain kinds of people are avoided or shunned for certain sorts of reasons. As they gradually internalise the standards and norms of their culture, they will come to recognise that certain things constitute not simply causes, but also reasons, for avoidance and rejection. These responses and standards, becoming internalised, will form a part of the subject's ethical self-understanding, their conception of themselves as a certain kind of person with certain kinds of commitments. This will involve forming the capacity to apprehend and respond to certain properties and acts as being shameful.[14]

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[14] For an empirically informed account of human ethical development, see Tomasello (2019).

This account is able to acknowledge both the value-oriented and other-oriented dimensions of shame. When one feels ashamed of oneself, one feels oneself to merit social avoidance or rejection by others. This sense of rejection is foregrounded by Hawthorne when writes of Hester Prynne that: 'Every gesture, every word, and even the silence of those with whom she came in contact, implied, and often expressed, that she was banished' (Hawthorne 2007, p. 68). Her scarlet letter is intended to signal to all with whom she comes into contact that she should be shunned, that she is an outcast. When Hester feels shame upon being 'banished' by others, she experiences herself as meriting their avoidance or rejection, and the painful emotional experience she undergoes in response to this can be understood as a manifestation of her desire for connection with others.

On the other hand, this account is able to do justice to the secret shame of Arthur Dimmesdale. Arthur feels himself to be shameful, though nobody knows he is the father of Hester's child. This is because he takes himself to merit rejection. The apparent episodes of connection he seems to achieve with his parishioners are only *merely* apparent, based on his wilful deception of them and, later, on their wilful blindness to his revealed character. For Arthur it is 'all falsehood! — all emptiness!' (Hawthorne 2007, p. 150). Arthur's shame, like Hester's, can therefore be understood as a manifestation of his desire for interpersonal connection. However, in this instance, the reason his interactions with others do not take the harmonious form constitutive of connection is because, feeling himself to merit their

avoidance and rejection, he is unable to accept their approbation or their social overtures; they are felt by him to rest on their ignorance of his true character, to the 'front' he puts on rather than the person he considers himself to be.

Furthermore, this account is well positioned to accommodate cases of shame which are felt in solitude. Robinson Crusoe might continue to feel shame, even in moments where he is acutely conscious of the fact that there is nobody around to engage and connect with. If he does, this will be because, as a value-oriented social creature, he continues to desire appropriate interpersonal connection, and therefore to be an appropriate partner for this kind of connection. His shameful deeds and features will continue to pain him in the characteristic manner of shame since they are felt to render him an appropriate object of avoidance and rejection.

Before moving on it is worth noting that nothing I have said entails that, if one feels ashamed of some aspect of oneself, then either (a) one actually expects others to avoid one in the relevant way or (b) one thinks it would be inappropriate for them not to avoid or reject us in that specific way. Consider a case of shame where the putatively shameful property is not some serious normative violation that would result in or justify outright abandonment but some relatively minor shortcoming. This might be the poor quality of one's clothing, the shape of one's nose, or the fact one has one arm significantly shorter than the other. Being ashamed of these things,

I suggest, involves feeling them to merit avoidance of a specific kind of interpersonal connection.

However, this does not entail (a) one expects others to *actually* avoid one upon becoming aware of the relevant property. The reason for this is simply that we often have reason to expect others not to do what we take them to have good reason to do. Even if we think they have good reason to avoid or reject us, for example, we might nevertheless expect that their friendship, love or affection for us will motivate them to look past these things.

More importantly, (b) is false. It is reasonable to think that although taking a property to be shameful involves taking it to be such as to render avoidance or rejection appropriate, this does not entail taking it to render any particular instance interpersonal connection inappropriate, all things considered. One reason for this is that even if we think that it would be *appropriate* for them to avoid us, this does not obviously commit us to thinking that it would be *inappropriate* for them *not* to avoid us in this case. This inference might be rejected by someone who insists that the relevant reason to avoid *in this particular case* is 'non-insistent' rather than 'insistent'. While the presence of either type of reason renders a certain response appropriate, it might be said, only the presence of an insistent reason renders the absence of that response inappropriate. As Kolodny (2003, p. 163) suggests, 'insistent reasons require a response, whereas non-insistent

reasons leave it optional'.[15] However, even those who are reluctant to endorse the idea of a non-insistent ought to reject (b). After all, although the relevant property is such as to make connection inappropriate, this might be outweighed by a variety of other factors which leave the other with an all-things-considered reason to connect with one.

3.4. Is Shame an Immature Emotion?

In §2.1 we saw that thinking of the other-oriented dimension of shame in terms of a desire to be seen in a certain way by others naturally leads to the worry that shame is a superficial, narcissistic and heteronomous emotion. In different ways, the accounts considered in §2 failed to assuage these worries. However, if we think of shame as manifesting our concern primarily for interpersonal connection these issues dissipate.

This is most apparent in connection with the charges of superficiality and narcissism. Shame, so far from being a superficial emotion, is understood on this account as manifesting a concern with one of the richest forms of human experience. For the same reason, if shame is understood in this way it is not open to the charge of being an inherently narcissistic emotion. When we feel shame our attention is not typically focused on

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[15] Note that by claiming that in some cases the reason to avoid or reject can be non-insistent, we do not commit to the claim that shamefulness *only ever* provides non-insistent reasons for avoidance or rejection. Rather, it is open for us to allow that the relevant reason might be insistent or non-insistent depending on the nature and seriousness of the relevant normative shortcoming, as well as other factors of the situation. Moreover it may be that there are no codifiable rules or general principles that can be applied to determine which kind of reason is present in a particular case (compare McDowell's 1970 observations on the uncodifiability of adult moral outlooks).

ourselves; rather, it is focused primarily on those others with whom we desire to connect, by whom we feel it would be appropriate for us to be avoided or rejected, and by whom we are perhaps currently being avoided or rejected. Even insofar as we have a desire to be the kind of person who is worthy of interpersonal connection, the reason for this is that we want to connect with others and not because we have a narcissistic fixation on our public image.

Similarly, although our need for connection and vulnerability to rejection constitutes a form of dependence on others, this dependence does not constitute an obviously problematic failure of autonomy. In particular, insofar as this account emphasises that idea that feeling ashamed of something involves feeling it to be appropriate grounds for avoidance or rejection, it is compatible with the thought that one's feeling of shame can be shaped by one's own, autonomous, judgement as to what merits such avoidance or rejection. It therefore does not present shame as necessarily involving the uncritical assimilation of another person's conception of one.[16]

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[16] Even the fact that one suffers from 'recalcitrant' shame does not necessarily entail the accusation that one irrational or heteronomous person. For example, I might feel ashamed of my body-type after being subject to the ridicule of others, even though I know that this is not *really* shameful and that the others' norms reflect toxic and outdated beauty standards. In feeling recalcitrant shame, I have arguably fallen short of the ideals of rationality and autonomy. However, all this entails is that I am not *ideally* rational or autonomous; it does not entail that I am thereby blameworthy or criticisable. Moreover, this is straightforwardly compatible with the allowance that I'm at least as rational and autonomous as any ordinary person can be reasonably expected to be, and perhaps more so. This undermines a complaint made in different ways by Calhoun (2004, p. 136-7) and O'Brien (2020, p. 550-553), which some might be tempted to make against the account outlined here.

§4. Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to establish two general claims. First, I have argued that understanding the relationship between the value-oriented and other-oriented dimensions of shame constitutes a serious philosophical challenge. And, second, I have argued that thinking of the other-oriented dimension of shame in terms of the notions of interpersonal connection and merited avoidance and rejection provides a more promising line of response to this challenge than any of the accounts considered in §2. Although there is much more to be said in elaboration of the notion of interpersonal connection on which my account of shame rests, I hope that the attractiveness of this account will encourage us in the belief that this work is worthwhile.[17]

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