

Research Article

Guilt is Ethical, Shame is Aesthetic

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My hypothesis is that guilt pertains to the realm of ethics whereas shame pertains more to that of aesthetics. While guilt results from accusations of unlawful behavior, shame tends to be produced by pointing out how the transgressing individual “looks” within a certain social context. I show that a confusion of the ethical and aesthetic components has often given shame an unclear or even irrational outlook. Though the allusions that aim to make an individual feel ashamed do not necessarily have an ethical character, shame is generally seen as an ethical sanction. I analyze the ethicization of aesthetics as well as the aesthetization of ethics, both of which can be due to the confusion of guilt and shame. I ask for a “bracketing” or phenomenological reduction enabling us to look at the phenomenon of shame from the point of view of aesthetics that refrains from ethical judgements. In shame-guilt questions, it is useful to detach aesthetics from ethics: an infraction committed must induce guilt and it is often not necessary to aestheticize the act to induce shame. Not only the aestheticization of ethics should be avoided but also the ethicization of aesthetics. It is possible to view a person’s potentially “shameful” behavior irrespective of ethical questions.

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Introduction

While both ethics and aesthetics are “value philosophies,” only ethics concentrates on moral values. Aesthetics takes its name from the ancient Greek αἰσθητικός (*aisthētikós*), which signifies “outer appearance.” Though Plato and Aristotle already practiced philosophical aesthetics in the *Republic* and in the *Poetics* respectively, only in 1735 did Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten give the name of “aesthetics” to the science of “what is sensed and imagined.”^[1] I argue that guilt pertains to the realm of ethics whereas shame, though also ethical, pertains more to the realm of aesthetics. While guilt results from accusations of unlawful behavior, shame tends to be produced by pointing out how the transgressing individual

“looks” within a certain context. Of course, the limits between shame and guilt are fluid, and in parallel, the limits between ethics and aesthetics are fluid, too. The way one looks to others can have ethical consequences, and shame resulting from this “look” can remain ethical to some extent. Society or “the others” can be an ethical authority. It is even typical for shame to lead to conclusions about the person’s character. However, if, as Maibom explains, “people experience shame at the mere disapproval of others, shame is heteronomous and, as such, not directly relevant to what is morally wrong or impermissible.”^[2] I call this occurrence of shame “aesthetic.” Maibom shows that a corresponding line of thought has sometimes led to a wholesale “rejection of historical shame cultures as representing moral systems at all.”^[2] This is not the way I want to go. Nor do I hold that shame ought not play a role in morality. I simply believe that when considering shame, the ethical can – and often should – be separated from the aesthetic. To put it simply: somebody might be put to shame because of a default that is purely aesthetic (looks, taste, etc.). Because shame is regarded as an ethical sanction, the person can be submitted to ethical judgments as if s/he is guilty of something though in reality s/he is not; or the person can feel guilty though she has committed no ethical fault. In some cases, the ethical sanction might be justified to some extent. For example, kitsch has often been associated with ethical flaws: having a “kitsch taste” has been described as “unethical,” a theme that is particularly popular in aesthetic theory of the 1930s. For example, Hermann Broch traces the essence of kitsch to “the confusion of the ethical category with the aesthetic category.”^[3] However, even when aesthetics is seen in terms of ethics, an awareness of the difference between both remains essential. Broch argues that only a clear distinction between the two will make people realize the unethical status of kitsch.

Shame is a companion to guilt, as philosophers have found all through the history of philosophy. However, it is possible to feel shame without being guilty, and in such cases, shame must be evacuated from the realm of ethics and be recognized as aesthetic. We need a sort of Husserlian bracketing (*Einklammerung*) or phenomenological reduction of shame. It must be possible to strip away ethical connotations and assumptions made about an object and see shame as an aesthetic phenomenon. Maibom’s project in her article from ^[2] is to focus on shame “in relative independence of moral considerations.”^[3] I believe that this leads us to aesthetic considerations.

I first disentangle ethics and aesthetics in the history of Western philosophy and establish the idea of aesthetic shame. Next, I show that, though both have often been perceived as an entangled compound, aesthetics is disconnected from ethics. Attacks that aim to make a shamed subject feel embarrassed do not necessarily have an ethical character. I then demonstrate that history shows us both the

aesthetization of ethics and the ethicization of aesthetics. I explain the notion of honor as an ethico-aesthetic notion and show that any implementation of shame depends on a notion of either honor or respect/dignity. I continue demonstrating how shaming can be seen as an “artistic” process.

Aesthetic Shame

The idea of attributing aesthetic dimensions to shame is novel. The task is difficult because, as mentioned, ethics and aesthetics are interwoven. Zavaliy holds that “a pure type of either shame or guilt culture may never have existed in history and is rather a product of scholarly abstraction.”^[4] Though Western philosophy has tried to keep the ethical and the aesthetic apart (especially Kant), overlaps could never be denied. Aesthetics has ethical implications, and morality is not only based on rules but also on “forms of life” that are “aesthetically” enacted in society and judged by society. Peoples’ personal visions of themselves and of others represent a mix of the ethical and the aesthetic as they can contain symbols or “personal myths” and can be arranged in an aesthetically pleasing fashion by emphasizing coherence and rhetoric effectiveness. In other words, morality is not only a matter of rules and values but also of “looks.” Plato and Aristotle thought that ensuring that one *looks* good is part of living well; and Foucault argued that we have an ethical responsibility to make our lives works of art.^[5] When André Gide said that morality is for him “a branch of aesthetics,”^[6] he suggested that ethical phenomena are produced within, shown, and dependent on aesthetic contexts.¹ However correct these viewpoints may be, they can also contribute to the confusion of guilt and shame.

One might find the notion of aesthetics that I apply too broad because “watching” and “seeing” can concern many things. And when the aesthetics spectrum is broad, there is, again, the danger of encountering too many overlaps with ethics. However, this is just the problem that I am trying to tackle. Especially in our mediatized societies, aesthetics penetrates almost everything though often without being acknowledged as “merely” aesthetic. Ethical conclusions can be derived from aesthetic phenomena; and the conflation of shame with guilt is one such example.

The broad scope of my definition of “aesthetic” is supported by the discipline of aesthetics as it has always been practiced. Aesthetics is not only about art but includes lifestyles and “ways of doing,” for instance ways of behaving or walking. The aim of this article is thus not strictly theoretical and valid only within moral philosophy but also across the social sciences broadly construed. I show that the ethics-aesthetics distinction applied to guilt-shame can have practical implications at a social level or in concrete circumstances within shared social and political practices.

Despite the strong ethical components that shame obviously contains, and though it is experienced as an ethical emotion, the acts of shaming somebody and the act of declaring somebody guilty are not identical. I want to show that when Konstan states that “the borderline between modern shame and guilt seems to be fuzzier than one might imagine” (Konstan: 1045), to some extent, this concerns the borderline between aesthetics and ethics. Though it is impossible to disconnect shame from ethics – be it only because what others think of me plays a role in my moral decisions – within shame, ethics and aesthetics can be disentangled. To discern where, within shame, ethics begins and aesthetics ends, is more useful than simply confounding both.

Emotion researchers like Maibom might tell us that there is very little difference between shame and guilt with regard to the focus on self rather than actions or with regard to the relevance of responsibility versus character. People feel both at the same time. Further, both guilt and shame can be irrational. [7] While this is true, it matters little for my argument. In this article I do not so much address the *feelings* of guilt and shame but rather the fact of being declared guilty (being accused) and the act of being shamed. On an emotional level, guilt and shame might not be very different; but *accusing* somebody and *shaming* somebody remain two distinct actions, which becomes most obvious in those cases that I examine in the first place: *unwarranted* accusations and *unwarranted* shaming. The distinction between ethics and aesthetics is helpful here. Though I refer to the *experiences* of guilt and shame, I do not address feelings but rather cognitive stances such as imagination and knowledge.

Guilt and Shame in Ethics

The guilt-shame opposition was popularized by the anthropologist Ruth Benedict in her *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, a book published immediately after World War II, and whose main purpose was to define American culture as a “guilt culture” and Japanese culture as a “shame culture.” Like ethics and aesthetics, guilt and shame can be blended and appear as a compound. However, though there are many overlaps (as especially emotion research has shown), both are distinct experiences that differ in terms of cognition and motivation. Shame concerns the shamed person’s relationship with others or with society as a whole, which means that one feels shame when one is inadequate *in front of others*. Maibom suggests that the subject who feels shame “feels that she falls in the regard of others; she feels watched and exposed. [...] Central to shame is the idea of being observed or watched by others.” [2] Since this “falling” does not need to have anything to do with ethical guilt, it makes sense to attribute shame to aesthetics. Shame experiences are due to “being watched” whereas “being guilty”

responds to a more formal ethical system that is less directly (and only more abstractly) linked to society or to “the others.” From this I derive my distinction between aesthetic shame and ethical guilt. I am not viewing this “more formal ethical system” as a sort of deontology (virtue ethicists, neo-Thomists, and consequentialists would rightfully disagree), but I merely say that “feeling guilty” responds to a more formal ethics than the one that emerges from being merely “watched.”

Shame concerns the surface, as is clarified by the concept of “saving face” as the avoidance of shame. Williams refers to the notion of “losing face” as a proof that shame “stands for appearance against reality and the outer versus the inner,” which means that “its values are superficial.”^[8] Once the surface is clean, the person can emerge more or less successfully from a potentially embarrassing situation. However, they do not necessarily emerge as ethical winners. Again, we observe a disconnection of ethics and aesthetics.

The attacks that aim to make the shamed subject feel embarrassed do not necessarily have an ethical character. They can also concern the person’s looks or appearance. One can be ridiculed for wearing the “wrong” clothes or for having an unfavorable body shape, which bears no link to ethics.² Even more, since shame is a sanction imposed for not living up to the expectations of others, it can be considered *mostly* aesthetic simply because the others can presumably only see the appearance of my actions and not their moral content (my motivations and reasons). Even the fact of being “shameless” does not necessarily point to a moral mistake: it could merely be a matter of style that the others do not accept. However, when the “merely aesthetic” character of the shame sanction is denied, shame is ethicized. Though the aesthetically shamed person is guilty of nothing, she will be submitted to an ethical experience that resembles guilt. Often she will be submitted to a “virtual guilt” based on an “as if.” She *could* have done something wrong because she looks wrong. Having been accused can ruin the “image” and the reputation, which lawyer Alan Dershowitz’s book *Guilt by Accusation* ^[9], very well analyzes when searching for such patterns in #MeToo “trials.” Dershowitz shows that though a person who has been declared innocent can still be “portrayed” as *possibly* guilty. The word “portrayed” is telling as it indicates that the accusations have become “aesthetic.”³

Generally, shame is seen as an ethical sanction, which is, of course, not erroneous. According to Agnes Heller “the shame-affect [is] a moral feeling par excellence”^[10] and is “inborn in every healthy human being.”^[10] Philosophers from Aristotle to Max Scheler^[11] as well as psychologists^{[12][13][14]} held similar views. Shame depends on the link between the self and others. Williams explains that for the Greeks, shame helped one “rebuild the self”: “Only shame can do that, because it embodies conceptions of what

one is and of how one is related to others.”^[8] The feeling of shame is not produced by a fact or a situation but by the interpretation that others give to facts and situations. Shame is not a matter of merely individual judgment, but it is always, even if only indirectly, enabled by society. (Even the peculiar case of self-shaming is, as I will explain below, dependent on “imagined” others.) The self depends on society, and shame establishes a link between both. Accordingly, Sartre found that shame is a mediating power: “Shame is the feeling of an original fall (...) because I have fallen into the world in the midst of things and that I need the mediation of the Other in order to be what I am.”^[15] All this can be depicted as positive as it connects the individual with society.^{[8][16]} But it can be negative when the “aesthetic” components (things that people see or imagine) become ethical instances creating the specter of a virtual guilt that has, in reality, no ethical substance.

Williams argues that shame is an emotion and a practical experience much “thicker” than is usually assumed by moral philosophers and moralists. In other words, shame can have more ethical value than guilt. However, paradoxically, one reason for this is that shame is aesthetic. Guilt can more easily be shrugged off than shame; it can be played down through revised interpretations and judgments. By contrast, as shame is mostly due to the judgments of others who heard or saw or even – as will be shown below – *imagined* us doing something bad, shame cannot be easily controlled, which can make shame situations more traumatizing. Shame is in the eye of the beholder, which means that the shamed person can remain guilty not because she *is* guilty but because she *looks* guilty.⁴ Being seen or unseen reduces the feeling of shame even after having been shamed. Aristotle describes in the *Rhetoric*^[17] the case of criminals (the companions of Antiphon the poet) who were covering their faces as they were escorted toward the place of execution. Aristotle concludes that “we feel more shame when we are likely to be continually seen, and go about under the eyes of, those who know of our disgrace” (*Rhet.* 1385a7–9). Similarly, Sophocles’ character Deianeira claims that: “For in darkness even if what you do is shameful (*aiskra*), you will never be put to shame (*aiskune*).”⁵

Shame is more difficult to bear also because it can be much more diffuse and ungraspable than those claims that lead to clear accusations. The social dynamics of shame are more organic and less linear than those of guilt. In online shaming, shame is even more diffuse as one often does not know who the people are who deliver comments. Shame can be *unheimlich* and nightmarish. In contrast, the question of guilt simply asks whether one *is* guilty or not. Though guilt is also imposed by society, it remains a matter of individual conscience: theoretically, the accused person can judge their own guilt on a personal basis,

independently of society's judgments. This is not possible with shame. When we try to shrug off shame, we can be called "shameless," which might be even more difficult to bear.

In addition, guilt can be atoned for through punishment whereas shame can persist even when the guilt has been "paid off." Shame is therefore indeed morally deep but, paradoxically, not because of moral concerns but because of aesthetic concerns: because of what is seen and how it is seen. It might even be due to what has been imagined; according to Baumgarten, aesthetics is the science of "what is sensed and imagined." As a result, the experience of shame is often "an intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging."^[18]

Shame can become ethical in the sense of virtue ethics. Though shame is mostly subjective and concerns mainly a person's "surface" or appearance, observations of shame can lead to radical ethical judgments of the person's character. Strangely, more than guilt, shame seems to concern what one "is" and not only what one has done. In Brown's study, 215 American participating women "contrasted shame with guilt, which they defined or described as a feeling that results from behaving in a flawed or bad way rather than a flawed or bad self." Brown concludes that the guilt versus shame distinction is supported by an "I did/said/believed something bad" versus "I am bad" paradigm.^[18] Though shame is due to the subjectivity of others and much less to objective moral standards, shame will be related to a person's character. This is peculiar because society at large is perhaps not qualified to judge a person's character. Would guilt, as it responds to more objective standards, not be a more reliable instance when drawing conclusions about a person's character? But that's the way it works. I can have committed an ethical mistake though I may still have a good character; but when my reputation is ruined, society might infer bad character traits from this failure. Already for Benedikt, shame cultures focus on the person as the locus of moral failing. The shamed person is supposed to feel bad *as a person*.

Shame and Aesthetics in Greece

Arguments from the realm of aesthetics differ from those in ethics. Art cannot be judged on a rational basis; we cannot make someone like modern art for rational reasons. Art is not about good and bad, not even about "good" aesthetic qualities such as unity, balance, or pleasurable-ness. A work can have all these qualities and still not be a great work. Art escapes our judgment, and so does shame. Ungraspable coincidences foil any attempt to describe art in terms of moral or aesthetic necessities.

Aristotle first mentions shame (*aidōs*, αἰδώς) in the *Nicomachean Ethics* at the end of an introduction to moral virtues.⁶ In the *Rhetoric* he describes shame as “a kind of pain and trouble” (*Rhet.* 1383b15) and recognizes (1128b32-33) that “shame may arise from circumstances beyond one’s control [whereas guilt] is commonly taken to presuppose moral responsibility.”^[19] Both shame and guilt may be caused by unfortunate coincidences, but when guilt is traced to coincidences for which I have no responsibility, the result is normally an alleviation or cancellation of guilt. It works differently with shame. Like art, shame remains ungraspable. Correspondingly, Benedict points to the failure to foresee unforeseeable contingencies as a source of shame.^[20] The problem is, as I explained, that though the mishap may have arisen from circumstances that are beyond my control, I can still be held “aesthetically” responsible. Being a coward is perhaps not my fault, it is due to the coincidences of my education, but why did I not take better care to hide my cowardice? Why did I not take better care of my public image, care about “looking bad” in a situation where, morally speaking, I did nothing wrong but still came out with a tainted reputation. People who are more cowardly than I can mock me simply because they took efficient “aesthetic” precautions to hide their flaws. I could have foreseen the possibility of unfortunate coincidences and not simply relied on my ethical innocence. Contingencies are beyond our control, but the handling of contingencies is – at least partly – up to us. Here the shame business becomes a matter of art.

There is another aspect that makes shame aesthetic in a Greek context. Plato introduces in the *Laws* (646e4) the distinction between simple fear (φόβος) and *aidōs* or *aiskune* (αἰσχύνη),⁷ the latter of which have both been translated as shame. *Aidōs* is the fear of receiving a bad reputation, which Plato sees as a positive emotion to be fostered in citizens.⁸ Shame, which is originally good or bad only depending on the context (being ashamed of things that one does not need to be ashamed of *should* be seen as bad), becomes a virtue. It is simply “good” to be ashamed, even when one is not ashamed of something concrete. Shame corresponds here to modesty⁹ that has been introduced above, and as modesty, it is promoted as a value. One cannot be modest *of* something. Modesty is simply preventive shame. It is Spinoza’s *verecundia*, which is a possible anticipation of shame. Modesty signifies being guilty – in a virtual state – of things that did not happen but *could* happen. All this shows how much shame is aesthetic. One must anticipate and imagine embarrassing events and maintain a modest image of oneself. Thomas Aquinas said that shame refers to the future because it is the apprehension of a future accusation or future reproach (*convitium vel opprobrium futurum*) whereas fear refers to the past.^[21]

The double meaning of ‘shame’ as both disgrace and modesty has caused many problems in English writings.¹⁰ A certain inferential pattern emerges from this confusion. A person who is not modest comes close to disgrace, which means that they are potentially or virtually disgraced because they lack shame (modesty). I am shamed not for what I have done but for what I *could* do or could have done. *Scham* and *pudeur* concern the aesthetic (what is imagined), but when they are forcefully attached to disgrace (for which English uses the same word) they *are* ethical. As I mentioned above, I can do bad things, but as long as I am modest enough to veil them, there will be no shaming.

My obligation to look good and to create an image of modesty is thus always a moral obligation. Normally, if I neglect the obligation to create a modest image, I should be held only “aesthetically responsible.” But since the imperative to be “aesthetically modest” is launched as an ethical appeal, the accusations become ethical as though I really had done something bad.

In Greece, the concept of *aiskune* has probably contained the idea of guilt all along. Konstan believes that Greeks and Romans “did not have distinct terms for what we call shame and guilt,” and that Greek shame “had a somewhat wider extension so as to include some (or all) of the modern notion of guilt.”^[19] Ancient shame “may have occupied a portion of the psychological spectrum now colonized by guilt.”^[19] According to Williams, the Greeks had no direct equivalent for our word ‘guilt’,¹¹ and Lamb affirms that a term “like ‘shame morality’ is not a morality-referring term, but a confusion.”^[22] More precisely, it is a confusion of aesthetics (the arrangement of surfaces and probabilities) and ethics. Ideally, the latter should only deal with mistakes that have really happened and not with imagined or possible events.

The Ethicization of Aesthetics

When a person is put to shame for some sort of failing, this failing is often not the transgression of a rule but, in a more informal fashion, the transgression of what has been expected by others. More typically than guilt, shame concerns the breach of social etiquette, often leading not to shame but to embarrassment. Embarrassment is a sort of “light” shame, and its analysis can illustrate what I mean by aesthetics and ethics in shame contexts. The embarrassed person has not committed a strong ethical mistake, otherwise she would probably be accused in a more formal fashion. Embarrassment is a sort of shame that remains predominantly aesthetic. Dan Zahavi states that shame signifies a global decrease of self-esteem or self-respect and a painful awareness of personal flaws and deficiencies and insists that

this is not the case for embarrassment.^[23] This supports my claim that embarrassment is a “lighter” version of shame. However, sometimes the embarrassed person is supposed to act *as if* s/he is guilty: she should be ashamed. Then we have an ethicization of embarrassment, which marks a shift from embarrassment to shame. The same can apply to humiliation and recalcitrant or unfitting collective experiences that Krista Thomason analyzes in *Naked* ^[24]. Embarrassment is aesthetic and less ethical. It does not automatically relate to a feeling of guilt (nor does shame), but guilt can be loaded upon the embarrassed person through an ethicization of embarrassment. Then the person can experience “the global decrease of self-esteem or self-respect” that Zahavi describes. Another example: Some people feel embarrassed (and not ashamed) in the presence of high-ranking individuals. They have done nothing wrong, but they feel that the aesthetic picture is wrong: they do not fit here. This feeling of embarrassment can easily morph into a feeling of guilt: ‘I should not have come here’, ‘I am blind to social requirements’...

Contrary to guilt, shame does not only occur as a result of transgressions: it can even be seen as a natural condition. I am not saying that shame is a natural condition, but merely point to the fact that it has often been seen as such. The topic is clearly related to aesthetics, which becomes most obvious in the phenomenon of modesty. The veiling of women in Islam is typically cited as being “that which covers sexual shame,”^[25] which suggests that being ashamed is construed as an inborn instinct.¹² The primarily aesthetic act of covering oneself is ethicized by linking it to ethical conditions. These conditions are anchored in nature. Women are naturally ashamed.

This pattern is not limited to Islamic culture. Heller’s and Erikson’s concepts of shame as being inborn in every healthy human being have been mentioned above.¹³ Kant, in his writings on aesthetics from the precritical period, considers shame or modesty (*Schamhaftigkeit*) as a built-in mechanism of nature leading to self-restraint.^[26] Even Adam and Eve’s shame is “quasi-natural.” Strictly speaking, it comes from the fruit – knowledge – as the biblical narrative describes mankind’s position between the divine and the animal. Shame becomes a mediating power between knowledge and instincts. However, since all humans are equipped with it, it can be seen as quasi-natural.

In many cultures, women are supposed to have more of this inborn instinct. Interestingly, when this is the case, though modesty is an aesthetic action, it is supposed to be an *ethical* instinct. Sarah Kofman lengthily explains that Rousseau considers, in his *Emile or on Education*^[27], that a “veil of shame”^[28] has been created by nature and that shame is a natural phenomenon. One must live up not only to *social* expectations, but also to natural ones – or perhaps rather to those that society deems natural. To enforce

this, vestimentary codes or codes of behavior and appearance that are purely aesthetic, are enforced. Since aesthetics finds itself based on nature, it becomes a matter of ethics. However, we can argue that in the end, shame remains more aesthetic than ever: a woman is expected to *look* ashamed. Who cares about what she is really doing? The modest appearance is sufficient.

Shame is a behavior code and thus very much linked to aesthetics. But when it is virtuous to be ashamed, then aesthetics has been ethicized; and even more so when it is virtuous to be ashamed *just for the sake of being ashamed*. For guilt, this same requirement would be found irrational.¹⁴

Guilt and shame can be inscribed into Plato's fundamental ontological system that has shaped much of Western thought. In the *Republic*,¹⁵ Plato differentiates between perceptible and intelligible phenomena, and explains how the ever-changing realm of physical objects (particulars) is separate from the invisible and eternal universals, that is, from ideas or "forms." The latter we perceive through reason (*noesis*) or – with regard to mathematical objects and abstract ideas – through intellect (*dianoia*). Physical objects, as opposed to reason-based ideas, can be cognized through opinion (*doxa*) or practical reason (*phronesis*). Within this logic, guilt is real because perceived by reason, while shame is what happens in the concrete world of objects and persons; it is due to opinion and trust; or it is due to imagination and thus an appearance. Once again, guilt can be backed by reasonable structures such as laws, while shame is based on what is seen or imagined.

As a result, shame can *appear* real even when no real guilt exists. Reason identifies guilt in the form of necessary, abstract concepts whereas shame is perceived in the form of concrete appearances that can be contingent. One can be "reasonably" guilty, but as long as this guilt is hidden, one can still be recognized as honorable by the community because the community judges "only" the surface. Vice versa, one can be dishonored even though one is innocent.

Furthermore, Plato ethicizes shame when he attempts to use the feelings of shame, honor, and glory to reinforce juridical norms. Dan Lyons has shown that Plato moralizes norms of honor and glory and attempts to harness the powerful feelings of shame and glory in the service the norms of justice (see his "Plato's Attempt to Moralize Shame"). According to Lyons, Greeks in Plato's Athens were obsessed with beauty in action and vigor in rivalry.^[29] Aesthetics triumphed over ethics. However, often it was an ethicized form of aesthetics. One result is that shame became an ethical value similar to "the good."

Later philosophers like Rousseau developed this scheme. At the beginning of Book V of his *Emile*, Rousseau enumerates virtues like timidity, modesty, and shame. Sarah Kofman comments that "chastity,

silence, retreat (...) seems to be the sad share of respectable women.”^[28] It is the confusion of ethics and aesthetics that enables such standards. It is both beautiful and good to be silent or modest; but those who lose respect because they are not silent or modest must feel ashamed for ethical reasons rather than aesthetic ones.

So far, all points in this section have addressed the ethicization of aesthetics. But the inverse case is also possible: there is the aestheticization of ethics. Abstract guilt is often not found sufficient, and a guilty individual must then also be shamed. One desires the aesthetic event of shaming. Underperformers or bad students can be seen as inadequate or ridiculous. From a purely ethical point of view, it would be enough to give them bad grades, but when the ethical problem becomes aestheticized, one depicts them as lazy and undisciplined. Punishment, which should only be functional, acquires concrete aesthetic dimensions. When the ethical mistake is retold by using concrete descriptions, it becomes aesthetic. The strong mediatization of public and private events in modern societies leads to more such aestheticizations. The media constantly needs stories containing concrete characters. A guilty person cannot simply be “abstractly” guilty but must also be declared inadequate or ridiculous. It is true that this procedure can sometimes instill the right behavior just because it is aesthetic, as Thomason argues.^[24] However, in other cases, the aestheticization serves no purpose other than that of shaming for the sake of shaming.

Honor and Dignity

Why does shame have so much ethical value when it is most often only about what the others see or believe to have seen, and not about what has really been done and been objectively evaluated in terms of guilt? One reason is that shame has to do with honor, which is an ethico-aesthetic notion. Traditionally, shame cultures are based on concepts of pride and honor, which means, once again, that they do not merely address what is right and wrong in terms of rules but more likely how a person *appears* in certain situations. It has been shown above that from this appearance conclusions can be derived concerning the person’s character. Is the person able to maintain a proud and honorable image? Such evaluations can be totally detached from ethical judgments of guilt. Somebody might have been acquitted of an accusation but still be submitted to shame because the mere fact of having been accused *should* make them feel ashamed. Cases of victims of sexual abuse who are not guilty but are submitted to shame are known to everybody. Why *should* they be ashamed? Simply because they “look” bad. Though shame is here aesthetic (it is not about bad actions or bad intentions), it will still be formulated as an ethical statement. I mentioned above Dershowitz’s analyses of #MeToo trials, which show that though a person who has

been declared innocent can still be “portrayed” as *possibly* guilty. The problem is that having been declared innocent will not necessarily make the person *look* better in aesthetic terms. Next, people might even conclude that she has a bad character. All this has been explained above, but it now becomes clear how much this is linked to dignity and honor. “Aesthetic” shame can have an entirely autonomous existence as one can be put to shame for something for which one has had very limited or no responsibility, or even for something one has not done at all, and this can only be explained with reference to honor and dignity. People can be put to shame for the coincidence of being born into poverty or into illegitimacy. The latter are indeed classical reasons why individuals have been submitted to shame. Zavaliy reminds us that in Aeschylus, *aidos* (but not *aiskune*) “has an important additional lexical layer. Somewhat unexpectedly, it also refers to a positive feature, usually rendered as ‘respect’, ‘reverence’, or ‘dignity’.”^[4] We can feel ashamed because of the acts of others or of close relatives, most typically. Though there is no logical link between, for example, a father’s virtue and his son’s shameful deed, a blemish can darken the father’s existence. Heller speaks of liability instead of responsibility,^[10] but in many cases there is not even liability.

It is aesthetic because it concerns the person’s appearance in society, an appearance that is independent of ethical acts. Guilt is here more like virtual guilt: it is potential and can be *seen* as a potentiality, but not more. It is “in force” (which is the original meaning of virtual). When I am ashamed of the immoral actions of my country or of my employer, it is clear that I neither support these actions nor am I responsible nor liable for them; but others can *imagine* that I *could* identify with these actions. Society draws a certain picture of me within social contexts. I am neither responsible nor liable for the actions that others performed before I was born; but these actions can stick to my reputation in the form of a fault that is aesthetic. I must “aesthetically” – and not necessarily ethically – identify with my country. My country’s bad actions are supposed to make me feel embarrassed. This is related to honor, which is an ethical notion, which, as becomes clear, very much stretches into the realm of aesthetics. In the case of the country, aesthetic shame can easily be transformed into ethical guilt: “All Germans are *guilty* of the holocaust,” is an opinion that is often seriously held. However, contemporary Germans can only be ashamed or embarrassed because of the historical image that have inherited; they cannot feel guilty. Nor does the shame that they feel denote their character. Ethicization of shame means here that their guilt can more easily be imagined.

Brown states that the experience of shame is often painful because we believe we are “unworthy of acceptance and belonging.”^[18] In other words, we have no dignity (in French one says that we are not

“digne,” which means worthy. Obviously, being unworthy (“indigne”) has an ethical foundation. However, one needs to distinguish between feeling unworthy and feeling that one *looks* unworthy. Only the aesthetic experience of being aware of how one looks leads to shame. I can believe that I am not ethically unworthy but still be embarrassed because of my unworthy aesthetic aspect. I can feel shame simply by thinking that I *look* unworthy. I know that I am not guilty, but I can be embarrassed because everybody sees me as guilty. I cannot feel guilty as I walk through customs with nothing to declare only because I think that I look as if I have. And if I feel shame or embarrassment, ethical evidence about my innocence would not necessarily diminish my shame. Feeling a lack of dignity (feeling “indigne”) is generally disconnected from ethical considerations and comes close to the feeling of embarrassment that has been described above: the feeling that I do not fit here. However, no matter whether it is embarrassment of shame, both are due to what I imagine about how the others see me, and this is the reason why it should be called aesthetic.

The same can be said about honor. For Spinoza, the opposite of shame is honor, by which he wants to show how much shame is dependent on external causes.^[30] Shame is dishonor. One might argue that honor does not merely concern maintaining an honorable image, but that honor is also about being worthy of honor even if one has no honorable image. However, I can still feel shame of not being honored if others think that I deserve the honor. Shame does not disappear only because I provide an ethical justification. Again, it has an autonomous “aesthetic” existence.

Shame and Dignity in Modern Societies

It is often believed that in contemporary Western societies, shame as an ethical indicator has been suppressed or even abandoned. Thomas Scheff^[31] states that “over the last 200 years in the history of modern societies, shame virtually disappeared [and] the denial of shame has been institutionalized in Western societies.”^[32] The reasoning follows Benedict’s argument that traditional societies are shame cultures and that modern societies are guilt cultures. One reason is that shame cultures seem to flourish less well in urban societies where it is easier to hide, to change one’s social status, or even one’s name. Shame is more present in small communities.^[10] It has also been said that shame is “insufficiently studied, because in our civilization it is so early and easily absorbed by guilt,”^[12] or that it is “not uncommonly thought that there is no interesting distinction.”^[22] These assumptions are justified to the extent that shame is often linked to the notion of honor, which modernity has indeed increasingly neglected as a code of conduct. Rigid shame/honor standards appear outdated in societies that question

and negotiate moral norms on 'reasonable' bases. In meritocracies, "honor culture" is instinctively linked to aristocratic values, exaggerated hierarchies, dueling, or even more violent value systems such as honor killings. Modernity insists on the rights of the individual, equality, and democracy. For Peter Berger, honor is therefore as antiquated as chastity.^[33]

Since shame is experienced when one's honor has been lost, one might have expected it to have also become an obsolete notion by now. However, this is not the case. Norbert Elias (1939) suggests that any civilizing process advances the threshold for shame. If shame is such an essential parameter for civilizational progress, it is unlikely that it would disappear in modernity along with honor culture.

As a matter of fact, honor has been replaced with dignity. Modern political and social movements, be it that of civil rights or gay rights, base their claims on the dignity of the human being. The shift from honor to dignity is an achievement of the Enlightenment and has mainly been formulated by Kant, especially in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* and his final major work in moral philosophy, *The Metaphysics of Morals*^[34]. While honor is linked to social standing and could be claimed by the nobility, dignity is intrinsic to the human self and independent of social institutions. As humans have dignity, they deserve not necessarily honors but always respect.

The loss of respect can cause shame. Since the Enlightenment, dignity and respect are autonomous human values closely associated with an abstract idea of freedom; however, though they are supposed to be independent of social institutions, in reality, they remain, like honor, linked to social contexts. Therefore, shame subsists. Already, Kant endorsed humiliation as a mode of discipline within moral systems based on respect, which makes it difficult for some critics to use his ethics for an efficient defense of human rights.^[35]

Any implementation of shame depends on a notion of either honor or respect/dignity. The contemporary shaming of human rights violators or sexual predators aims to deprive transgressors of their dignity. The internet foments shame culture as criminals can now be more visibly and durably stigmatized. Dignity remains important in youth-cultural contexts where it seems to have adopted the form of "coolness" and one can be shamed for being "uncool." Obviously, online shaming, which has become a social problem, works with shame and not with guilt. Internet users publicly expose ("call out") offenders who have committed a social transgression for which they often cannot be punished in terms of guilt or the law, and instead attempt to make the assumed offender look less respectable. Phenomena such as body shaming have become amplified through the internet. Shaming thrives in respect/dignity cultures.

The survival of the aesthetic notion of shame is surprising, because initially, the fight against honor was meant to be a fight of ethics against aesthetics. Berger^[33] explains that modernity sees honor as akin to a shield, that is, as something that functions much like a mask that hides the true self. The “honorable” but fake and hypocrite aristocrat must be unmasked, and underneath we find the real human being who in fact has no honor (though is still endowed with dignity, as all persons are deemed to be). However, in the end, despite the deconstruction of honor, aspects of honor’s aesthetic value survive in its antonym, which is shame.

Respect and Self-Shame

The contrary of guilt is innocence whereas feeling ashamed can be seen as the contrary of feeling pride.¹⁶ What interests me is that the loss of both innocence and pride can lead to a loss of respect. When respect is lost because of guilt, it can relatively easily be retrieved by proving the person’s innocence. In contrast, reestablishing lost pride does not bring back respect. The shamed individual may once again feel pride, but as long as society considers that they *should* be ashamed, respect will not be restored. Society requires a coherent pattern of recognition that surmounts all suspicions and grey areas. Reestablishing respect is not a matter of logic and rules but more akin to the painting of a portrait upon which the shamed individual must appear virtuous. This portrait is necessarily complex as it reflects both their present and past. Aquinas ascribed ethical value to doing, and aesthetic value to making,^[36] which means that shame is not something that is done (like an ethical or unethical action), but that is *made*, like a work of art. The erasure of shame and the re-establishment of respect are *made* in the same way.

By contrast, guilt is a matter of knowledge: mostly, knowledge of what has been *done*. It is true that guilt is also a feeling (*pathos*) and that there is even a kind of “moral emotion.” O’Hear finds that when guilt is central in a culture, people can “come to think of guilt itself as an emotion.”^[37] However, even as a feeling, guilt remains strongly dependent on conscious knowledge.¹⁷

Shame is not always linked to concrete and real facts, even in cases where the *feelings* of shame are very real and concrete. The facts might be merely imagined, but shame is a *real* social experience. Again, this constellation brings shame closer to an aesthetic experience. Though the misbehavior is not real, shame will be produced just as feelings are produced through works of art, which contrasts with the experience of guilt: one can feel guilty for something one has done though nobody has *seen* it; and one will feel guilty *only* when one has *really* done it. I might be accused by others, but in the end, it is only before myself that

I will feel guilty or innocent. Misbehavior that nobody has seen can only inspire feelings of guilt and not of shame.

This section might appear like a digression because it addresses the complex phenomenon of self-shame or private shame, which is only tangentially related to the topics that have been discussed so far. However, it is necessary to explain self-shame because its existence *seems* to contradict my claim that shame is only possible in front of others. It is not true. I will also show that self-shame supports my claim that shame is aesthetic.

Typically, shame appears when a misconduct has been noticed by others and *because* it has been noticed. As such, it is practically impossible to feel shame in front of oneself. What then is self-shame? Self-shame is an artificially constructed sentiment based on an “as if” produced by imagining how others *would* have reacted had they seen the act, which brings it, once again, closer to an aesthetic production. Maibom concurs that the audience can be an imagined one.^[2] In Western culture, shame (and not even only self-shame) has always contained an element of *imaginatio*. According to Konstan, “shame for Aristotle (and I would say for Greeks in the classical period generally) results from imagining particular acts or events, whether committed or intended – for example, doing someone an injustice or failing to help another when it is in one’s power to do so.”^[19] I can be ashamed of my thoughts or my intentions, but even this too, is possible only when I imagine the shame that I would feel *if* somebody knew my thoughts and intentions. It is a simplification to believe that shame cultures are always oriented towards external recognition and external display. Margaret Mead distinguishes in her *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples*^[38] between societies where people are “internally” controlled and those where the control is “external.” In reality, both shame and guilt are internal and external. Many authors point to the “internal” standards of behavior that are linked to honor. Similarly, shame can be interiorized to the point that it resembles guilt. Tangney and Dearing speak of “solitary shame” which is about as prevalent as “solitary guilt.”^[39]

The later Greeks distinguished a “shame that expressed inner personal conviction” from a “shame that merely followed public opinion.”^[8] Kant describes the self-contempt (*Selbstverachtung*) of wrongdoers who experience “inner abhorrence” (innere Abscheu) in response to their own transgressions.^[40] ^[41] However, the “internal” feeling of shame is always related to something external, even when this external is only imagined. Benedict talks about the embarrassment created by what a person “requires of himself,” which can lead to a lack of self-respect, which in turn results in “self-shaming.”^[20] This “self-

respect” is always the respect of others: “‘You must respect yourself’ is constantly on parents’ lips in admonishing their adolescent children, and it refers to observing proprieties and living up to other people’s expectation.”^[20] In Benedict’s Japan, children are “drastically trained” to perceive themselves in the light of what people will say, to the point that childhood is remembered as “an easier life when they did not know shame.”^[20] “Self-respect” (*jicho*) might be the basis of virtue, but “if there were no society one would not need to respect oneself.”^[20] Self-respect is rather a feeling of guilt turned into shame. It means that the gaze of others has been interiorized and is constantly imagined. Self-shame without imagining what “others would say” is impossible.¹⁸

Most societies force people to seek respect, which is a way to instill self-shame. Rejecting society’s respect requirements is difficult. Apart from rebellion, one can only go into (inner or outer) emigration. “Forced respect” is a means to enforce rules, which in many societies applies to women. Leaving the shame-imposing society behind and entering a new context will automatically cancel the feelings of embarrassment. Japanese prisoners of war who felt shame (*haji*) to the point of no longer considering returning to their home country, lost all feelings of shame once they had decided to collaborate with the Americans and “turn the page.” On the one hand, “the shame of surrender was burned deeply into the consciousness of the Japanese.”¹⁹ On the other hand, once “their life as Japanese was ended” they became better than model prisoners. Old Army hands and long-time extreme nationalists located ammunition dumps, carefully explained the disposition of Japanese forces, wrote our propaganda, and flew with our bombing pilots to guide them to military targets. It was as if they had turned over a new page; what was written on the new page was the opposite of what was written on the old, but they spoke the lines with the same faithfulness.²⁰

The obligations towards their country made sense only within that culture and were left behind when they emigrated. This shows that honor was merely a matter of what can be called “aesthetic” judgments: judgments emitted by others about what one was supposed to look like. The judgments had been interiorized at some point but had nonetheless remained only external. Once these “aesthetic” standards had changed, self-respect was reestablished.²¹

By contrast, ethical standards would have perdured. Feelings of guilt, which depend on ethics, are much more universal (in the Kantian sense) than feelings of shame. My guilt at not paying back my debts will not disappear when I move to another country. But I will not feel ashamed in my new country for things that were only shameful in the old one. In the worst case, those who are afflicted by shame will kill

themselves, which makes them, most radically, unseen. This option has frequently been considered in Japan, both traditional and modern. In the case of suicide, the lost honor can be reestablished not so much because death is deemed to be a punishment capable of redeeming honor, but rather because the person has chosen to leave the social context – the aesthetic picture – in the most radical fashion. Vindication is another way to reestablish honor because it alters the social constellations in a way that shame no longer applies. These options are “aesthetic” because they do not contribute to ethical improvement. They merely correct the picture that society desires to have of itself.

The Power of Aesthetics

Aesthetics deals with images whereas ethics judges what has really happened or what can happen. Ethics talks about how facts and events ought be, whereas aesthetics judges the appearance of facts and events. Furthermore, aesthetics deals with contingencies whereas ethics mostly deals with norms that represent necessities. For ethics, the “ought” is a necessity. It is true that ethics presupposes a context of *voluntary action* and, hence, also contingency; but its aim is to reduce this contingency by applying an “ought.” As it reckons with contingent constellations (being seen and interpreted in a certain way) instead of with necessary ethical structures (norms) the shame business comes closer to an aesthetic activity. Artists too must deal with contingencies as they are part of aesthetic expressions. A work of art cannot be produced along the necessary rules of science or ethics, but the process of artistic creation is always playful to some extent as it deals with unpredictable constellations. Nor can the value of a work of art be established along necessary lines.

Both the act of shaming somebody and the overcoming or preventing of shame resemble “artistic” processes. One deals neither with hard facts nor with rules but with allusions and possibilities. Further, being submitted to shame generally works through derision, sarcasm, ridicule, mockery, and laughter, expressions that are also used when reacting negatively to art. In contrast, “mockery and laughter are not allowed in the courtroom,” as reminds us Lamb.²² Sussman calls derision, of which shaming mainly consists, “quasi-aesthetic” responses to human action.^[42]

When teaching philosophical aesthetics, I attempt to arouse my students’ awareness of the importance of aesthetics in comparison with ethics by asking them to spontaneously react to two different scenarios. Which of the following two nightmares is more unpleasant? Nightmare 1: You enter a room and people are whispering that you have done something unethical. Nightmare 2: You enter a room and people are laughing behind your back because you made a mistake and dressed weird. Regularly, a higher number of

students admit that being mocked because of clothes is the more unpleasant experience though, generally, ethics is held in high esteem in modern societies, whereas aesthetics is deemed to be “only” about surface. Though many students might still claim that ethics is more important than aesthetics, emotionally, they find the shame situation caused by a sartorial mistake more nightmarish. Why is this so? Why would one rather be resented and hated than despised and ridiculed? Social instincts working against exclusion may play a role. When punished because of guilt, one can still remain within the group, whereas shame leads to exclusion. There is another reason, which makes the entire phenomenon very modern: hate does not destroy dignity, while shame does. Being hated can even increase one’s dignity. An act is shameful because it denotes an embarrassing loss of control, and loss of control is “uncool.” Zahavi correctly notes that though victims of sexual abuse are not guilty, they are easily submitted to shame because they can be accused of having lost control of a situation.^[23] The loss of control is shameful. For Bergson, in his analysis of laughter, the loss of control is one of the main indicators of the ridiculous. Having a tic or of not being aware that one’s outfit is inappropriate is ridiculous; and it is the more so when someone obviously *wants* to control the situation but fails; for instance, when somebody dramatically stumbles during an otherwise meticulously staged public performance. The situation moves from pride to shame and ridicule. For Bergson, a character is comic when there is “some aspect of his person to which he is unaware, one side of his nature which he overlooks; on that account alone does he make us laugh.”^[43] In contrast, guilt can be attributed to carefully planned actions that succeeded and even look aesthetically perfect. The person had taken a risk, did not succeed, and was found guilty. That being said, when the guilt is discovered too easily, the individual might still look ridiculous because they did not control the situation properly. In online shaming one loses control entirely because the accusers are diffuse, which reinforces the impression of ridicule. As one is submitted to the objectifying gaze of others, one becomes a “thing” unable to control itself.

Conclusion

In principle, when shaming somebody, one uses aesthetic features for ethical purposes; but paradoxically, as has been shown, as an aesthetic phenomenon, shame can have a stronger and more enduring impact than ethical guilt, which can lead to the false conclusion that shame is not aesthetic but predominantly ethical. The power and persistence of shame in ethical matters is surprising because, though the good and the beautiful share, in the Platonic canon, the same essence or “forms,” aesthetics is concerned with the nature and appreciation of beauty. Though moral ideals can have a resemblance to aesthetic ideals,

the purpose of aesthetics is not to talk about ethics, but rather about how phenomena appear within various contexts. Normally, one would expect ethics to have a stronger impact on moral conduct than aesthetics. Nonetheless, when it comes to shame, aesthetics is often more “ethically important” than ethics. The feeling of guilt is something one carries within, it can be individual and independent of others. In contrast, shame is submitted to the above intricacies of aesthetic philosophies.

Intellectual history shows that with regard to guilt and shame, ethics and aesthetics tended to be confused instead of being clearly distinguished. Though they will always remain linked, a more consistent identification of ethical and aesthetical procedures in shame/guilt questions is useful, especially in mediatized contemporary societies. I hope to have shown that in shame/guilt problems, aesthetics can be detached from ethics. One mistake is to ethicize shame. Further, it happens that an infraction that should induce only guilt is aestheticized in order to induce shame. This can happen for educational reasons or for mischievous reasons. Both procedures become problematic when we find it difficult to consider a person’s potentially “shameful” behavior irrespective of ethical questions; or a person’s unethical behavior irrespective of aesthetic questions. Sometimes, when mistakes are merely aesthetic, ethical judgments should be suspended, much as the ancient skeptics suspended judgments. Sometimes we need, with regard to shame, a phenomenological reduction. Many rules that need to be followed in cultures are not necessarily ethical. Often, they are linked to traditions and customs and merely guarantee the smooth functioning of society. Punishment for infractions is necessary, but it can be done without turning the rules into ethical ones. For example, somebody who violates traffic regulations interrupts the reasonable flow of traffic and must be sanctioned. But it is not necessary to employ ethical arguments. Traffic can metaphorically stand for culture, customs, and traditions. Many traffic regulations might have been based on ethical values to begin with, but constantly reminding oneself of these ethical origins and implications represents an ethicization of aesthetics. Eventually, viewing society through ethics can lead to a culture in which even imagined acts will be judged ethically. The disentanglement of ethics and aesthetics prevents such mistakes.

Footnotes

¹ Muelder Eaton brings up an extreme example of such overlaps when suggesting that even inappropriate acts like incest between consenting adults are reprehensible on an aesthetic rather than on an ethical basis^[36]

² Maibom wants to link these non-ethical items to guilt, saying that we can “feel guilty about overeating, not setting aside more time for cooking for the people invited for dinner, not calling a friend who is feeling down, watching a television show instead of reading a good book, and so on”^[7]. However, these failures *are* ethical because they are inscribed into a personal ethics (work ethics). The examples do not prove that non-ethical failures can induce guilt.

³ See Dershowitz: “For some an accusation of sexual guilt is so horrible that it must be true, regardless of the evidence.” “Persistent claims of total innocence make me sound guilty” (from the introduction). The accused person is aesthetically associated with guilt.

⁴ I can try to shrug off shame by saying that I do not identify with the community that has imposed the shame upon me. That I do not care what they say. Williams^[8] believes that the others’ opinion can matter to me only when it reflects my own. Self-shame definitely depends on such an internalization of the community’s opinion. Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice*^[44], suggests that self-shame is only possible when the individual has accepted and interiorized the shaming audience’s values. These philosophers are only partially right. We can imagine, today with the internet, to be ostracized by the entire world community. Would it be useful to declare that I don’t identify with their opinion? Even if I don’t, I can still be ashamed. The others’ opinions matter, even when they are not my opinions and when I do not belong to their community.

⁵ ^[45], quoted in ^[4]

⁶ *Aidōs* was the Greek goddess of shame, modesty, respect, and humility. Aristotle gives contradicting accounts of whether shame should be considered a virtue or not. In *NE* 4.9 he provides arguments for why *aidōs* is not a virtue. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle uses the term *aiskune* and not *aidōs* possibly because the former connotes shame proper and not both shame and reverence (see more in note 48). For Spinoza, shame is not a virtue since “virtue is man’s essence or nature” (*Ethics* IV, Definition VIII, 191). According to Zavalij^[4], αἰδώς enjoyed temporal priority over αἰσχύνη.

⁷ Sometimes transliterated as *aischyne*.

⁸ The fear of bad reputation was also important for the Stoics, and Chrysippus links it to *aiskune*^[46]. See note 5.

⁹ Jowett translates *aidōs* in the *Protagoras* (332G) as “reverence.”

¹⁰ See [32]. German and French have separate words. The difference between *aidōs* and *aiskune* is reflected by the distinction between ‘disgrace’ and ‘modesty’, ‘honte’ and ‘pudeur’, ‘Schande’ and ‘Scham’. *Aidōs* can mean both modesty and disgrace while *aiskune* means shame proper (disgrace). Spinoza distinguishes between *verecundia*, which is shame proper and *pudor* (see *Ethics* Part III, Definition of Emotions, xxx), and which carries with itself sadness. Spinoza understands *pudor* as exaggerated shyness whereas Aquinas uses *verecundia* for shame. The distinction between *aidōs* and *aiskune* becomes important for the Stoics. *Aiskune* is a sort of fear, which is pathological whereas *aidōs* is shame in the sense of *pudeur* and seen as positive (see [47]).

¹¹ [8]. Williams suggests that Homeric shame culture was later replaced by guilt. “Some think that this process had gone a long way by the time of Plato or even the tragedians. Others see all Greek culture as governed by notions that are nearer to shame than to a full notion of moral guilt, with its implications of freedom and autonomy; they believe that moral guilt was attained only by the modern consciousness” [8].

¹² In Arab cultures, the identification of femininity with shame and masculinity with honor is common and revolves around the generic Arab term ‘*ird*, which is connected with “female chastity and continence” [48]. The link with shame is provided by the fact that ‘*ird* is always linked to sexuality and the codes of its repression (cf. [49]). Patai presents the entire Arab world as a shame culture.

¹³ To be precise, Heller thinks that the *capacity* for shame is an anthropological universal (see her *General Ethics*, Ch. 1).

¹⁴ It is true that similar patterns can occur with regard to guilt, but there they will usually have strong religious connotations, which is why they have become less important in modern societies. Many religions have an internalized conviction of sin, and some maintain a continuous feeling of guilt among their believers, thus creating a guilt complex. They link this feeling to fear and punishment that can occur in this life or another. Here guilt is no longer concrete and real but rather adopts the diffuse character normally reserved for shame. The aim of guilt cultures – just like that of shame cultures – is to control the population’s moral behavior. To reinforce this aspect, guilt – just like shame – can be seen as “natural” in a way similar to what has been described above regarding shame. However, unlike shame, this kind of metaphysical guilt is highly abstract. It *must* be abstract because a concrete punishment by God is not always available (and has become less so in modern times). Guilt is abstract and therefore less aesthetic, whereas shame is always more concrete and maintains an aesthetic dimension because it is linked to the “look” of the person within social contexts.

¹⁵ *Allegory of the Cave*, book VII: 514a–517a.

¹⁶ One could obviously think of other contraries of feeling shame (as mentioned, for Spinoza, the opposite of shame is honor). However, since the eighteenth century, pride and shame are firmly established antagonistic notions. In Antiquity, shame could be opposed to anger. In modernity, as David Hume has shown, pride replaces anger (see ^[50]).

¹⁷ Religious patterns mentioned in note 5 or strange phenomena like “survivor guilt” are exceptions.

¹⁸ O’Hear puts forward “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” ^[37]. I still hold that these artists can feel shame *only* by imagining what others *would* say. A person might even think: ‘how good that I had told nobody about my ambitions, because I would be really ashamed if somebody knew’. Furthermore, failing to attain the standards that I have set out for myself represents a missing out on my duty, which inspires guilt rather than shame. The duty felt has become a rule that should not be transgressed. Erich Fromm speaks of a guilt feeling in the form of an authoritarian conscience that makes a person feel “guilt toward himself [...] for not living up to his own expectations of him-self” ^[51]. This is a self-accusation leading to guilt and not shame. The five points that Zahavi lists as instances of self-shame^[23] are, in my opinion, all due to either guilt or an act of imagining a social situation where shame *would* occur.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

²¹ Williams mentions someone who feels shame at the letter he has mailed and “the shame is lightened, but only to some degree, when it turns out that the letter was never delivered” ^[8]. Why only to some degree? Because the nightmare of the first scenario remains in the person’s imagination.

²² ^[22] One might argue that guilt can be followed by derision, sarcasm, ridicule, mockery, and laughter, too. However, the derision is then not meant to establish or reinforce guilt but rather to aestheticize guilt and transform it into shame suggesting: ‘You are not only guilty but also ridiculous.’

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