

The Descent of Shame¹

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Abstract: Shame is a painful emotion concerned with failure to live up to certain standards, norms, or ideals. The subject feels that she falls in the regard of others; she feels watched and exposed. As a result, she feels bad about the person that she is. The most popular view of shame is that someone only feels ashamed if she fails to live up to standards, norms, or ideals that she, herself, accepts. In this paper, I provide support for a different view, according to which shame is about failure to live up to *public* expectations. Such a view of shame has difficulties explaining why an audience is central to shame, why shame concerns the self as a whole, and the social rank of someone affects their ability to shame others. These features, I argue, are best explained by reference to the descent of shame in the emotion connected with submission in nonhuman animals. The function of submission—to appease relevant social others—also throws light on the sort of emotion that shame is. From the point of view of other people, a subject who experiences shame at her own failing is someone who is committed to living together with others in a socially sanctioned way. The argument is not that we must understand the nature of shame in terms of what it evolved for, but that its heritage is important to understanding the emotion that shame has become.

We are told that we live in a guilt culture. Other people—in distant times and lands—live in shame cultures (Benedict 1934). Whereas our morality is focused on moral wrongdoing, shame cultures focus on the person as the locus of moral failing. Thus, in our culture, guilt is the primary attitude towards our own moral shortcomings; shame is the dominant self-directed moral emotion in these other cultures. Nevertheless, shame plays an

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important role in how Westerners evaluate the moral standing of themselves and their actions.

Philosophers debate about the moral standing of shame. Since the opinion of others looms large in shame, the worry is that it is a heteronomous emotion (Williams 1993, Calhoun 2004, Isenberg 1980). It is not that the opinion of others should carry no weight. Rather, their opinion matters *to the extent that* it reflects what morality demands. What is authoritative to the moral agent is not the disapproval of others *as such*, but morality. If, however, 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. This line of thought sometimes leads to a wholesale rejection of historical shame cultures as representing moral systems at all (Dodds 1951, but see Williams 1993 for a defense), or to the more modest idea that shame *ought not* play a role in morality (Isenberg 1980, Kekes 1988).

Shame is sometimes characterized as a more autonomous emotion. This tends to be the strategy of those who think shame plays, and ought to play, an important part in morality. Agents feel ashamed, one claim goes, only when they fail to meet standards or norms that they, themselves, accept (Rawls 1973, Taylor 1985, Kekes 1988). Alternatively, it is sometimes argued that the norms and standards are part of a package, which the agent accepts as a whole (O'Hear 1977), or that the agent, in some sense, *chooses* which people can shame her (Williams 1993). Cheshire Calhoun forms part of a smaller group of philosophers and psychologists, who approach shame very differently. Instead of construing it as an autonomous emotion, they accept its apparent heteronomy, but argue that it is actually a positive feature. Calhoun (2004), e.g., thinks the opinions of others should be regarded as representative viewpoints in a common moral practice, which serves to focus the agent's attention on what the moral norms of the community actually are.

Determining the degree to which shame depends on the mere disapproval of others is central to figuring out what role it plays, or ought to play, in morality. One must be wary of fixing the nature of shame from the direction of ethical theory. This paper,

therefore, will focus more or less exclusively on what sort of emotion shame is, in relative independence of moral considerations. As such, it constitutes, at best, groundwork for the morality of shame. I argue that shame is, indeed, heteronomous. It is a profoundly social emotion uniquely sensitive to the opinion of social others. This conclusion is supported by the shame of people who are suppressed, have been abused, or have survived genocide. However, current theories of shame that acknowledge its heteronomous nature fail to explain many of its other important features. For instance, they do not provide good accounts of why, in shame, social rank matters, why an audience is central, and why the focus is on the global self, rather than on one's actions.

I look to the descent of shame for an explanation of some of the more puzzling features of shame (along the lines of Darwin 1872/1998). Some very interesting accounts of shame have been proposed in this vein. Dacher Keltner and colleagues (Keltner et al. 1997, Keltner & Harker 1998), e.g., have argued that the shame display is an appeasement display. I build on this view, arguing that shame has a common descent with the emotion that is expressed by submission in nonhuman animals. Considering the nature of this emotion in nonhuman animals gives us important information about human shame. In particular, it allows us to understand why an audience is central to shame, why social rank matters, and why the self is in focus. Furthermore, it adds to our understanding of the function of shame by helping us see the use of its expression. The argument is not that we can find the function of shame merely by looking to its descent, but that doing so helps us explain much about shame that is otherwise obscure. By contrast to Keltner, I do not argue that shame simply is appeasement. Shame concerns failure to live up to norms, ideals, and standards that are primarily *public*; shame concerns our lives with others. The descent of shame adds additional support to a group-oriented interpretation of shame, but also gives us a better idea of what is special about *human* shame. Ultimately, the account has implications for the morality of shame, which I outline, but do not develop here.

1. The Nature of Shame: Individuals vs. Groups

The most common view about shame is that it is an intensely negative emotion directed at the self as result of having failed to live up to some standard, ideal, or norm. By contrast to guilt, which focuses on the action performed, shame focuses on the self as a whole. Even when shame is precipitated by an action, it is not the action, as such, but being the sort of person who would perform such an action, that the person is ashamed of. Etiquette norms (being polite, wearing appropriate attire), moral norms (not stealing, not lying), and more personal standards and ideals (being unflappable, being the fastest runner on the track) are all instances of norms, ideals, and standards failure to live up to which causes shame.² Among college students in USA in the '90s, failing or performing poorly on exams and tests, hurting others, not behaving in accordance with one's role, failing to meet others' expectations, and not fulfilling one's duties are the most prominent causes of shame (Keltner & Buswell 1996). People are also ashamed of relatively permanent and unchangeable traits, e.g. physical deformities, obesity, or unattractiveness. It is also possible to feel shame by association; one can be ashamed of one's parents, of being American, or of being a philosopher (Walsh 1970). Shame is an extremely painful emotion, more so than guilt. It tends to make people who experience it feel small or inferior to others, and want to hide from them (Gilbert & Andrews 1998, Tangney & Fischer 1992, Tangney & Dearing 2002).

Central to shame is the idea of being observed or watched by others. Shame is associated with being observed doing things that, in the words of Richard Wollheim (1999, 159), no sane person is ashamed of doing, e.g. urinating, passing wind, personal grooming, or having sexual intercourse. Whether shame *requires* an audience, however, is debated. Some philosophers are impressed by the possibility of being ashamed of not meeting personal standards, or feeling shame in private, where there is little conscious awareness of an audience (O'Hear 1977, Taylor 1985, Kekes 1988). But even those who deny that an audience is required for shame affirm that it is connected with seeing

² Some philosophers attempt to delineate a particularly moral form of shame, e.g. John Rawls (1973). But when we consider the empirical evidence, the only difference between moral shame and other forms of shame (what Rawls calls 'natural shame') is that the object of shame is a moral failing. Lest we want to subdivide emotions according to their objects, e.g. athletic failings, intellectual failings, etc., we should content ourselves with the idea that shame has as its objects many different sorts of failings.

oneself as *others* would see one. Central to shame, then, is the notion of a seeing other, of an audience. This audience, however, can be an imagined one (Tangney & Dearing 2002, Williams 1993). People stop themselves from doing what is shameful out of fear of the *imagined* reaction of others.

Not any audience can make someone feel ashamed; it must be a group of peers or respected others, or even simply the social group that the person is part of. The audience in shame usually disapproves, although sometimes an approving audience can cause shame too. This appears to be peculiar to cases where people are being praised by a group that they would not want to be associated with, where they feel they do not deserve the praise, or where they feel objectified in some way (Sartre 1943, Scheler 1957).

With few exceptions (e.g. Sartre 1943/1992, Velleman 2006), everybody agrees that failing to live up to standards, norms, and ideals is absolutely central to shame, but disagrees about how to think of this. Some think that such failure causes the self to feel diminished, injured, or threatened (Deigh 1983, Williams 1993), others that it causes the person to lose her self-esteem or self-respect (Rawls 1973, Taylor 1985). In the former cases, the reduced or threatened self is solidly located in society; it is not merely by comparison to its former glory that the self is diminished, but also by comparison to other selves. In the latter, shame in essence concerns the agent's own standards, ideals, and norms.

The idea that people feel shame only if they accept the standards, norms, or ideals that they are measured against is quite representative of views about shame. Shame ultimately concerns how the agent relates to himself, to his aims, ideals, and standards. Thus, John Keekes (1988) claims that: (283)

[i]t is essential that we ourselves should accept the standard, otherwise we would not feel badly about falling short of it.

More elaborately, John Rawls says that: (1973, 444)

[i]t is our plan of life that determines what we feel ashamed of, and so feelings of shame are relative to our aspirations, to what we try to do, and with whom we wish to associate.

Gabriele Taylor (1985), too, follows this line of thought and argues that shame is tied to the *agent's* values through its essential connection with self-respect. We might call such theories 'agent-centered' because, although nobody denies that shame usually reflects commonly held values in the individual's community, it is necessary that those values be embraced by the person for her to be ashamed of not living up to them.

There is another way of thinking about shame where the opinion of others plays a fuller role. Common to such views is the idea that shame protects the agent from falling in the regard of others because she fails to live up to *public* expectations and norms. She might become ashamed of not living up to standards, ideals, and norms that she does not, herself, endorse. Typically, however, she endorses the same core standards, norms, etc. as her community or communities. In his defense of the morality of ancient Greek honor cultures, Bernard Williams (1993) argues that the common dichotomous way of regarding an agent's moral attitudes is profoundly mistaken. It is not that an agent *either* is only ruled by what she, herself, thinks is right and wrong, *or* that she is only concerned with public opinion. The opinion of others matters because it, by and large, reflects the agent's *own*. According to Williams, an agent internalizes an audience, whose opinions reflect genuine social expectations (98). When those opinions are unfavorable, the agent is prone to feel shame. Shame mediates between what an agent takes himself to be and what he is to others. The existence of judging others, with whom he has to live, is central to this conception. This form of morality is nevertheless not aptly understood as simply heteronomous, because the agent has a choice in the group that can shame her; only an audience that she respects can do so.

Calhoun (2004) embraces the heteronomy of shame more fully. We do not, she argues, have a choice of the audience that can shame us, nor do we need to embrace the norms, ideals, or standards that we are measured against. To feel ashamed it is sufficient that others, with whom we share a moral practice, disapprove of us. We do not choose a moral or social practice; we enter into a pre-existing one that we have relatively little power to change. Others occupy representative viewpoints within the moral practice wherefore it is natural that we should be sensitive to their opinion. Indeed, such

sensitivity is a sign of moral maturity (2004, 129). Like Williams, Calhoun thinks that shame's dependence on the opinion of others is a largely positive feature. It helps ensure that the agent is not insulated from social reality; it imparts some degree of objectivity to her standards and ideals. A person who only judges herself by her own standards runs the risk of living in a value-bubble: (2004, 145)

To attempt to make oneself invulnerable to all shaming criticisms except those that mirror one's own autonomous judgments or that invoke ethical standards one respects is to refuse to take seriously the social practice of morality.

By contrast to Williams, it is the fact that morality is a practice guiding how we live together and how we do things that explains an agent's sensitivity to others' opinion. Here the self is understood as profoundly social. What a person is, is not something that she determines herself, but is a function of her social position and standing. Her standing is not standing in her own eyes, but in the eyes of the community. Her self-esteem is, and should be, sensitive to the esteem of others. A view such as this is aptly called a group-centered view of shame.

Although agent-centered views of shame have been more popular, they are not unproblematic. The demand that the person endorse the standards and norms that she is measured against is not borne out by common sense (Calhoun 2004). People claim to be ashamed of things that they avow that they should not be ashamed of. For instance, many people are ashamed to masturbate even if they think that masturbating is a perfectly acceptable activity if conducted in private. Following Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson (2003), we might call emotions that an agent experiences despite his beliefs being in conflict with them *recalcitrant*. Some instances of recalcitrant shame may simply be the result of the subject being ambivalent about the standards in question. A woman raised in a very religious household may come to think premarital sex is perfectly acceptable, yet feel the sting of shame when she engages in it, because she has not quite relinquished the relevant norm. Not all cases of recalcitrant shame can be understood as mere ambivalence, however.

It is common for victims of abuse to be ashamed (Andrews 1998, Lewis 1998), and some attention has been paid to the shame felt by people of repressed groups, such as African-Americans (Piper 1996, Calhoun 2004, Velleman 2006). What I want to focus on, however, is the shame felt by survivors of genocide. Consider this testimony from Jean Hatzfeld's interviews with survivors of the Rwanda genocide: (2005, 28)

I do not think this will ever be over for me, to be so despised for having Tutsi blood. I think of my parents who had always felt hunted in Ruhengeri. I feel a sort of shame at having to spend a lifetime feeling hunted, simply for being what I am. The very moment my eyelids close shut on all this, I weep inside, out of grief and humiliation.

Francine describes her emotion as “a sort of shame” because she feels ashamed of being Tutsi although she does not think she ought to be ashamed. Her shame is recalcitrant. If there is a standard that she fails to live up to—being Tutsi—she does not accept it. Why, then, does she feel ashamed? The obvious answer is because others disapproved of her so much that they tried to exterminate her and the ethnic group to which she belongs. Similar reports can be found from Holocaust survivors, who describe shame at being Jewish as one of the many sentiments they felt at the time (Levi 1988, Tec 2001). The right way to think about this shame, I think, is *not* that Nazi standards have been adopted, but that shame is a heteronomous emotion, profoundly sensitive to the opinion of others. Agent-centered views therefore fail as accounts of shame.

Positing *unconscious* acceptance of relevant norms might help explain why victims are ashamed of how they are treated, but it is problematic for other reasons. If people are ashamed only of not living up to norms or standards that they have already internalized, then shaming others can only serve to reinforce someone's pre-existing motivation to meet such standards or follow such norms. In the words of Jean-Paul Sartre (1943/1992), the seeing eye of another helps draw attention to one's act as being of a sort that one, oneself, disapproves of. One sees that one is a peeping Tom, e.g. But shaming is often

taken to be a much more powerful weapon; it is thought to play a role in moral progress.³
Anthony O'Hear, e.g., thinks that: (1977, 79)

one can perceive through the shame resulting from the disapproval of others whom one respects (or even from merely being confronted with some example of a standard immeasurably higher than one's own), not that one is failing to meet one's own current ideals, but rather that one should adopt new ones.

Something like this idea underlies public attempts at shaming. Unfortunately, the power of shame to change people's outlook need not be positive or morally progressive (Nussbaum 2004).

That people are susceptible to being ashamed, without already accepting the relevant norms, ideals, or standards, is particularly clear when people move between cultures. In India, a common expression of friendship for men is to walk hand in hand. Being transported to the USA and continuing the practice would likely result in them being ashamed, given the widespread disapproval that they would encounter. The fact that they do not already accept the relevant standards does not insulate them against shame.⁴ Even people who change positions within a more-or-less uniform culture are easily ashamed about things they never before thought unacceptable or strange. People from traditional working class areas (e.g. the East End, Brooklyn or New Jersey) who go to prestigious universities are frequently shamed by their peers into losing their accents. Not all of them think there is something wrong with their accents. Yet, they are uneasy with the widespread derision that they produce. This fits with what we know about socialization and moral development. For better or for worse, parents use shame to induce their children to accept certain norms and standards (Tangney & Dearing 2002). In short, the fact that people can be induced to feel shame about aspects of themselves,

³ This quote, from *The Washington Post*, captures a very common view about the power of shame: (Kim 2006) "There's no question that publicly shaming someone, whether it is a politician or a company, is the best way not only to get their attention but to change their behavior," said Jeff Chester, executive director for the District-based consumer-advocacy group Center for Digital Democracy. "People are going to be very sensitive to it."

⁴ Even when the other culture comes to one, there is plenty of scope for shame. It is very interesting to see the changed attitudes towards cannibalism in tribes where this practice was common, as a result of outside exposure. Once fearsome cannibals seem to shrink under the public scrutiny of a practice that they clearly reveled in only decades before (Schneebaum 1969, Shapiro & Shapiro 2001).

their behavior, or background that had previously formed a natural, unexamined part of their lives beyond reproach shows that no unconscious acceptance of norms is needed in order to feel shame.

Thinking about people who move between cultures or classes highlights something about shame, hitherto unmentioned, that is also evident in persecution shame. There is often a power-differential between those who shame and those who are ashamed. People who have low rank, little authority, or belong to a minority, are shamed more easily than those who have higher rank, belong to the majority, etc. Someone who moves to a culture that he disparages is unlikely to feel ashamed if people of that culture disapprove of him or his actions, cf. the British in India. Similarly, minorities have a hard time shaming the majority. The more dominant individual, group of people, or culture has a disproportionate amount of power to shame others. Here is another opportunity to bring individual choice back in to the picture, for it may seem that what explains this discrepancy in shaming power is the fact that the shaming audience's authority is *accepted*. One of the best proposals of this type is Williams's (1993).

Williams thinks that an agent can and ought to be ashamed if she fails to live up to standards or norms embraced by her honor group, even if she, herself, does not already accept such standards or norms. Nevertheless, a link is maintained between the individual and the relevant values by the choice of honor group. In effect, the individual chooses the group that can shame her. The assumption is that an individual will only choose to be member of a group whose values she can respect. Enough autonomy is saved, on this picture, to make shame a recognizable moral emotion. Williams's proposal, then, has the advantage of ceding more ground to group-oriented positions, whilst retaining a link to morality, as we tend to think of it. And although Williams, himself, does not propose that we adopt the values of honor cultures, we might nevertheless adopt his analysis of shame.

Williams's proposal, however, does not help explain persecution shame. If it is unlikely that Tutsis, Jewish people, etc. adopt the values of their persecutors, it is equally unlikely that they *choose* them as their respected audience or honor group. Furthermore,

the proposal underestimates the role our parents, relatives, and early childhood companions play in forming our internalized audience. This is particularly puzzling since Williams's central example is Ajax—from the *Iliad*—being ashamed when he thinks of how his father would think of him. Telamon is an authority for Ajax, but it is not plausible to suppose that Ajax chooses that his father be authoritative; rather, as his father, he *is* authoritative. Ajax acquires, in part, his standards and norms from Telamon. Our choice of group and, as a consequence, the standards and norms we are subject to, is limited or, in some cases, nonexistent. As Calhoun points out, we are brought into an already ongoing social and moral practice. To talk of choice of social and moral community misses the point. It also presupposes that the agent *already* has acquired values that she can use to evaluate the values of the group against (Calhoun 2004). Where an individual does have a choice in joining a group, it is not uncommonly based on just a few shared values— e.g. love of golf, an absorbing interest in history, or a group's capacity to enrich and empower the individual. Once the individual is a member of such a group, however, she is usually bound by a set of norms and ideals that may or may not bear an interesting relation to what she ultimately values (Walsh 1970, Calhoun 2004).

We are, it seems, left with squarely group-centered views of shame. But the current proposals give us only part of the picture. Take Calhoun's position. We can explain why victims of violence feel ashamed because, assuming that their perpetrators occupy a representative viewpoint within the moral practice, some weight must be given to the idea that victims are deserving of their cruel and unusual punishment. This might explain persecution shame. But the disproportionate ability of high-ranking individuals to shame low-ranking ones does not sit easy with Calhoun's account. Each individual occupies a representative viewpoint merely in virtue of being a co-participant in the practice (2004, 140-1). Some viewpoints, however, are more representative than others, presumably if they are shared by more members of the moral practice. Calhoun, however, appears to assume that the power differential that backs shaming is explicable in terms of such representativeness. It is not. First, if it were simply the fact that a view was more representative of the relevant social group than another, conflicting one, then everybody

holding that view should be equally capable of shaming. But not everyone is. Second, the powerful have the ability to shame others, even if the standards, norms, and ideals that they fail to live up to are not generally accepted. So-called minorities need not be minorities in numbers.

The situation is not much improved by looking at philosophical accounts that feature status and social hierarchy more centrally, such as John Deigh's. Deigh (1983) argues that shame is an emotion of self-protection. More precisely, it protects the individual from behaving in ways unbecoming to her status. Curiously, it does not protect against status loss itself, but against appearing to have less worth than one actually does. This is an ingenious way of getting around the fact that human social hierarchies appear to be relatively fixed. How people actually conduct their lives is relatively insignificant when it comes to their status, Deigh argues. This, however, leaves largely unexplained why shame is an emotion of self-protection. If a person can conduct her life any way she wants and not lose status, why should she be at all concerned to "restrain [her]self when [she] verges on the shameful" (1983, 242)? Deigh's proposal also does not account for the shame of the persecuted. On his view, persecution shame should be a fall-out of the more general tendency of shame to protect individuals against acting in ways that do not befit their position and rank. The problem is that the actions that are morally relevant in abuse, repression, and genocide are *not* those of the victims, but those of the persecutors. Nevertheless, it is the victims who feel ashamed. Shame, then, cannot simply be understood as protecting against *doing* things unbecoming to one's status. It must, at a minimum, also protect against *suffering* certain things.

The conclusion to draw from the preceding discussion is not, I think, that shame is a negative emotion experienced in response to failing to meet only public standards, norms, and ideals. We have ruled out that someone *must* accept the relevant standards, norms, etc., but not that shame is *also* caused by the subject failing to live up to some more personal—or less public, at any rate—ideals, norms, and standards. Group-centered views, however, are united in the idea that the primary, or central, case of shame is a response to shortcomings when it comes to *public* expectations. Shame is essentially

about our lives with others, about our identity in a group, and our standing within it. We see ourselves as required to live in accordance with, or strive to live up to, publicly avowed norms and standards. Those norms and standards are not merely externally imposed; as social creatures we are embedded in a life with others where we acknowledge the desirability of acting in certain ways and the consequences of not doing so. Acknowledging the desirability of living in a certain way with others does not amount to accepting all the individual norms and standards that are part of the public realm. As we have seen, we can feel ashamed if we flout norms or standards that we do not accept, merely because others disapprove of us. This is, as Calhoun aptly points out, part of the communal character of the moral life or, as I prefer to think of it, our life together, since not all shame-inducing failing involves specifically *moral* considerations.

Group centered views do not, however, succeed in explaining a number of the other puzzling features of shame. As we have seen, explaining why social status matters to shame is quite a tricky business. The mere fact that our lives with others require us to do things in certain ways, does not bear on the issue of status. If we look closer, there are more puzzles. If shame is an emotion, which tracks societal norms and standards and the person's ability to live up to them, why is an audience, mostly a disapproving one, central to it? Guilt is also about failure to live up to norms and standards, yet does not figure an audience in any central way. And why, we might ask, is the focus of shame on the self, rather than on how the self acts, even when shame is provoked by an action?

I propose that we can provide good answers to such questions if we consider the descent of shame. People often trace shame back to its manifestation in ancient honor cultures in an attempt to understand it (e.g. Taylor 1985). I trace it back even further, in Darwinian fashion, to its phylogenetically earlier manifestations, on the assumption that shame is a development of a trait of an evolutionary ancestor (1874/1913). Having no access to these ancestors directly, we can explore traits and abilities in nonhuman animals instead, particularly those closely related to us. Darwin, himself, attempted to understand emotions by considering emotion expression in nonhuman animals, although

he famously thought shame was a uniquely human emotion (1872/1998).⁵ More recent research, however, has linked shame to behaviors of submission and appeasement in a variety of species (Keltner & Buswell 1996, 1997).

I am not here claiming that we can read off, as it were, the nature of shame by looking at what it came from or for what purpose it evolved. In fact, I shall argue that there are special human adaptations that make shame differ significantly from related emotions in nonhuman animals. Nevertheless, there are important lessons to be learned about shame from its origins. In particular, we can understand why shame features an audience centrally, why status matters, and why shame concerns the whole person, not just her actions. These are features of original shame, if you like, that have been retained in human shame. Further, what appears to have been the original function of shame also helps us understand and, perhaps, appreciate shame better. This will not yet give us a full account of shame, but it is a promising beginning.

⁵ He linked shame closely to the blush, which he did not observe in other species.

2. Descent: Submission and Social Regulation

Shame has not traditionally been included among the emotions that have typical bodily expressions, like anger or fear. Keltner and colleagues, however, have identified the following expressions as being typical of shame, across cultures: downward gaze-avoidance, downward head movement or position, general collapse or contraction of the body, lowered corners of lips, blushing, covering of the face (with a hand, e.g.), and avoidant and closed body posture (Keltner et al. 1997, Keltner & Harker 1998). Shame-expressions are similar to facial expressions and body postures most commonly associated with submissive and appeasing behaviors in nonhuman animals. Gaze-avoidance, downwards head movement or position, and bodily collapse or contraction are typical in rhesus monkeys, macaques, baboons, rats, wolves, elephant seals, rabbits, crayfish, and a range of birds (Keltner & Buswell 1997). These expressions are highly correlated with a tendency to retreat from social contact. On the basis of such evidence, Keltner and colleagues propose that shame is appeasement, meaning that shame *behavior* is a form of appeasement behavior.⁶ The stronger claim—that appeasement and shame have descended from the same ancestral emotion—is not made, perhaps because the expression of shame alone is sufficient for appeasement.

Appeasement is “apologetic, submissive, and affiliative behavior” exhibited by an organism when it is exposed to, or anticipates aggression from, conspecifics (Keltner et al. 1997, 360). It prevents or reduces aggression in others, results in social approach, and reestablishes severed or threatened social ties. Shame has a signal or expression that is universally recognizable, and that has the effect of mollifying others’ aversive attitudes towards the agent (Keltner et al. 1997).⁷ Appeasement need not be submissive. Nevertheless, Keltner regards submission to be at the core of appeasement (Aureli & de Waal 2000, Keltner & Harker 1998). I prefer to talk of submission *tout court*, since not all

⁶ Keltner also thinks that embarrassment is a form of appeasement. But where shame appeases others by making them pity, or sympathize with, the ashamed person, embarrassment usually does so by causing mirth (Keltner et al. 1997).

⁷ Disgust, fear, happiness, surprise and sadness are commonly recognized with greater frequency than shame or embarrassment. In Keltner & Buswell (1996), shame-recognition was at 55.7% compared to disgust at 88.9%. Anger recognition lies more in the middle at 66%.

affiliative behaviors aim to appease (play, e.g.), and ‘apologetic behavior’ sounds too anthropomorphic to be a useful way to regard the behavior of the range of animals Keltner wants to include (crayfish, e.g.).

In nonhuman animals, submission is overwhelmingly associated with a hierarchical structure, where the subordinate animal submits to the dominant one. Social animals exhibit submissive behaviors frequently, often in the absence of any observable threat. For instance, subordinate wolves lick the muzzle of the dominant wolf as a greeting after an absence. Such active submission, ethologists argue, reinforces the social order without the dominant individual having to assert his or her dominance (Bekoff 2007). It serves to reduce the likelihood of conflicts over resources, most commonly food and mates. Ultimately, shame in animals is adaptive because living in groups is (Bekoff 2007).⁸

Paul Gilbert and Michael McGuire (1998) focus on the fact that submission takes place within a power structure. Only subordinate individuals must submit to dominant ones who, once they reach the top, do not have to submit to anybody, but can freely impose their will on others. This may be largely true, if we consider the trend in all social species. But it should be kept in mind that some species have much more despotic hierarchical structures than others.⁹ In some species, e.g. chimpanzees, dominant individuals are incapable of retaining their position without the cooperation of others. To motivate others to cooperate, however, the dominant individual must sacrifice coveted resources, including food and mating with receptive females (cf. de Waal 1982, 1994).

Where Keltner and colleagues restrict themselves to linking one sort of behavior—submission—with another sort—the expression of shame—I want to push the idea a little further and argue that shame and the emotion underlying the submissive displays of nonhuman animals are descended from the same emotion; they are both modifications of it. The assumption is that if an organism’s behavioral and postural expressions match

⁸ Where this used to be an untested assumption among ethologists, Bekoff (2004) found evidence for it. Over a 7-year study in the Grand Teton National Park, they found that 55% of coyote yearlings that left the group died compared to only 20% of those that stayed in the group.

⁹ Rhesus monkeys have a very despotic hierarchy structure, where dominant males monopolize mating and do not share food. Dominant females can pick food from the mouth of a subordinate one. Cf. de Waal 1996.

those associated with a particular emotion, it is evidence that it is experiencing that emotion *ceteris paribus* (Darwin 1872/1998 and Ekman et al. 1969). We might add to this the following evidence. The physiological correlates of shame are linked to social subordination and submission. Margaret Kemeny, Tara Gruenewald, and Sally Dickerson (2004) have found that increased operation of cortisol and cytokine responses is associated both with subordination and frequency of submissive displays in nonhuman primates and with reactions to typical shame-inducing experiences in humans. Further, the situations that induce shame and submissive displays—disapproval of the social other—and the actions tendencies—social retreat—are quite similar. In sum, there is excellent evidence that what we observe in nonhuman animals has descended from the same emotion as human shame.¹⁰

Some emotion researchers, so-called appraisal theorists, insist that appraisals necessarily precede emotional reactions to situations (e.g. Lazarus 1991, Clore 1994). Some appraisals include rather sophisticated cognitions, particularly appraisals of such social emotions as shame. If appraisals concerning one's failure to live up to an ego-ideal, e.g., are required, most animals that display submissive behavior are unlikely to experience anything like shame. But the position defended here does not claim that emotions in humans are identical to emotions in nonhuman animals, only that both are descended from an emotion of a common evolutionary ancestor. Nobody denies that the emotions of our evolutionary ancestors underwent modification, sometimes significant. Those who lean towards appraisal theories of emotion may suppose that some of that modification is in the content of the relevant appraisals. I shall henceforth assume that human shame and the emotion underlying submission in nonhuman animals have descended from the same emotion. In what follows, I lump all forms of nonhuman animal shame together

¹⁰ One objection to ascribing emotions to animals has been skepticism about whether animals have *feelings*. If it does not feel like anything to undergo the physiological changes, etc. that are associated with experiencing an emotion, the organism does not have an emotion. It is a suspicion like this that Joseph LeDoux (1998) addresses when he proposes that animals may *experience* an emotion without *feeling* it. An organism only has feelings if it is aware of its emotions. Where feelings appear on the phylogenetic tree is not yet clear, but many animals are likely to have them. I leave discussion of the *feeling* of emotion in nonhuman animals aside.

under the title shame*, and the emotion that shame* and (human) shame descended from I call proto-shame.

Because of their common descent, we can hope to learn something about shame from shame*. Given the centrality of submission to shame*, we should look closer at this behavior and its function. Submission is salient in situations of conflicts, which arise naturally over resources and mates. A stable system of conflict resolution is important, particularly to social animals (Aureli & De Waal 2000). Resolution by brute force alone is costly and inefficient unless the competitors are evenly matched. Submission solves competition over resources in two ways. In situations of actual conflict, the organism that submits cedes the ground to the dominant individual, who, as a consequence, gains access to the resource in question. This is also known as active submission. So-called passive submission helps prevent conflict in the first place, by the subordinate individual signaling to the dominant one that he is not threat to his access to goods. Passive submission is like a promise of limited pursuit of resources.¹¹ By submitting, the subordinate animal indicates to the dominant one that he is no threat to his access to mates and food. As a rule, subordinate individuals are tolerated only if they show submission (Preuschoft & Schaik 2000).¹² It is notable that the physiology of shame* and shame is correlated with increased proinflammatory cytokine activity, which is connected to withdrawal and disengagement (Kemeny et al. 2004). A subordinate individual, if threatened in the context of pursuing a resource, withdraws *from the resource*, not just from a fight with the dominant animal.

Shame* protects an animal against physical harm from conspecifics because its expression appeases them, and it teaches the animal to refrain from certain behaviors. According to de Waal, monkeys and apes have a sense of social regularity, which amounts to: (de Waal 1996, 95)

¹¹ This is a bit of a simplification. Subordinate animals submit if attacked by dominant individuals, whatever the reason for the attack. Sometimes attacks are simply prompted by redirected aggression. However, as any individual can redirect its aggression onto any individual it is dominant to, it is not as predictable as the attacks prompted by actions such attempting to obtain a valuable food-source or mating with females.

¹² This is but an outline of the function of submission in nonhuman animals, primarily based on monkey and ape societies. Hierarchical structures work somewhat differently among females and in matrilineal societies. For females, access to mates is usually not an issue, although mate *choice* might be.

[a] set of expectations about the way in which oneself (or others) should be treated and how resources ought to be divided. Whenever reality deviates from those expectations to one's (or the other's) disadvantage, a negative reaction ensues, most commonly protest by subordinate individuals and punishment by dominant individuals.¹³

It is easy to see how this sense of social regularity is related to shame*, it being one of the dominant emotions governing division of resources. But does the sense of social regularity amount to knowledge of social rules or norms? The problem with this interpretation is the pervasive cheating that is observed in nonhuman animals (e.g. Whiten & Byrne 1988). An entire experimental paradigm relies on the propensity of subordinate individuals to access foods behind the dominant individual's back, as it were (Heinrich & Bugnyar 2007, Santos et al. 2006, Hare et al. 2001). This indicates that social animals—e.g. ravens, rhesus monkeys, and chimpanzees—do not generally internalize rules or norms concerning the distribution of resources, nor do they internalize an audience. They regulate their behavior so as to avoid conflicts with dominant individuals; they do not simply abandon their pursuit of coveted resources.¹⁴ This does not show that *no* species or *no* individuals other than humans internalize norms, rules, or an audience. Some breeds of dogs can be trained to refrain from certain behaviors even in the absence of their master—e.g. eating available food without permission (Freedman, 1961).¹⁵ Dogs also famously exhibit submission in advance of their owners discovering a rule-infraction,

¹³ Mothers also frequently threaten their offspring and group-members, who play too rough with them. Further, the group as a whole may attack a transgressing individual, e.g. a subordinate individual who turns on a dominant one (de Waal 1996, 158).

¹⁴ De Waal (1996, 2006) suggests that some nonhuman animals internalize norms because they avoid certain behaviors when they are seen by dominant individuals, even if they are incapable of interfering. For instance, subordinate male monkeys refrain from mating with females if the dominant male is visible behind a glass frame (Coe & Rosenblum 1994). Further, de Waal (1996, 110) observed an excess of submissive behaviors in subordinate rhesus monkeys after illicit mating, as did Christopher Coe and Leonard Rosenblum (1994) in bonnet macaques. It suggests that animals respond to social regularity not simply when it is enforced, but as a matter of course. I have no argument with the idea that we might regard the animal as adopting a norm of not pursuing certain resources in the presence of dominant individuals. But it is not a very useful notion of norms or standards, as far as I can tell.

¹⁵ Shelties, but not Basenjis, can be taught not to approach food uninvited (Freedman 1961). The ability to learn not to approach a food source only in the presence of a person who is associated with the relevant punishment has also been observed in rats (Davis 1989).

although ethologists vigorously debate how to interpret this fact.¹⁶ However, most animals learn not to pursue certain goals in the presence of dominant individuals; they do not learn not to pursue those goals *tout court*.

To summarize, many nonhuman social animals experience an emotion I have called shame*, which is experienced when the organism is attacked by, threatened by, or in the presence of, a dominant conspecific. This emotion is connected with a distinctive display, which is apt to terminate or reduce the severity of the attack, because the display reliably signals that the individual will retreat from the situation. The submissive display also signals that the individual is less likely to engage in the same behavior again. An animal that feels shame* is motivated to terminate the behavior that it is engaged in, and will learn to refrain from behaving in those ways, at least in the presence of a dominant individual.

¹⁶ The main argument against dogs having internalized a norm or feeling shame or guilt is that dogs show submissive behavior under certain circumstances even when they were not responsible for the damage done. For instance, a dog that ripped up newspapers and got punished for doing so at the return of the owner, showed submissive behavior when the owner returned even if the ripped newspaper had been planted there (de Waal 1996). The problem with experiments such as these is that dog-trainers agree that punishment is only effective in the actual situation or immediately after it. Showing the dog the damage it has inflicted (its poop, a torn newspaper, etc.) is not sufficient for making the dog associate its own actions with the punishment. As a result the dog learns to expect punishment in the presence of torn newspapers or poop, *not* that it should not tear newspapers or poop on the floor.

3. Using Descent to Understand Shame

If shame and shame* are both modifications of the same emotion—what I have called proto-shame—shame* helps throw light on shame and *vice versa*, particularly shame* in *pan* (chimps and bonobos). I want to put off the question of whether the *function* of shame* and shame is the same, and first consider the puzzles we ended section 1 with. Let us start with the role of social rank and dominance. As we have seen, shame* appeases social others, typically dominant ones, and reduces conflicts because it predisposes the animal to refrain from pursuing certain goods and resources in the presence of dominant individuals. If shame, too, possesses this feature, it likely does so because of its heritage; sensitivity to dominance was a feature of proto-shame. Incidentally, this also explains why some people feel ashamed in the presence of high-ranking individuals. According to Fessler (1999) this is particularly true of East-Asian cultures, but the tendency is readily observable in Western cultures also (Gilbert & McGuire 1998). Brute dominance is often sufficient to provoke shame*, with the aim of appeasement. But, as we have seen, shame* also provokes behavior modification aimed at reducing social conflict. This connects to social norms, standards, and ideals, which the literature tends to focus on.

Dominance probably plays an important part in persecution shame. In genocide, child and spousal abuse, the perpetrators are dominant individuals or groups that have the victims in their power. Through its connection to dominance, shame is a natural reaction to being persecuted and abused. It is unclear how much of persecution shame is attributable to a sense of failure to live up to a standard—e.g. being Germanic in Hitler's sense or being Hutu—and how much is due to brute dominance. Shame following rape, however, is usually better explained in terms of violent dominance than in terms of failure to live up to standards.

If shame originally aimed to appease social others, it helps explain why an audience is central to shame. The presence of a social other is essential for shame to serve its appeasing function. Where there is no angry competitor, there is no need for appeasement. Correlatively, we have observed that most nonhuman animals refrain from pursuing coveted resources *only when* they are in the presence of, or can be seen by,

dominant individuals.¹⁷ An audience, then, is central to shame*. Through the connection to proto-shame, we should expect an audience to be central to shame too. Note how this explains the focus on being seen, cf. Sartre's stress on the seeing eye of the other (Sartre 1943/1992).

Though the idea of an audience or a seeing other is central to human shame, humans are manifestly very flexible about the occupants of this position. People are ashamed of their *peers* seeing them in a particular way, in a certain position, and so on. Although the link between dominance and shame is kept intact, peer groups enter the stage of shame seriously in human shame. This is reflected in the internalized audience that is often identified with in a way that would be difficult to explain were one's internalized audience only composed of dominant individuals (Williams 1993). Why this should be true specifically of human shame is an interesting question. One speculation is that cooperation is central to human social organization. Humans are relatively monogamous, cooperative breeders, and they share food, particularly in smaller bands, even with unrelated individuals. Greater need for cooperation tends to go hand in hand with less despotic social structure, since some reward must be offered to motivate cooperation.¹⁸ If access to resources is partly dependent upon the cooperation of one's peers, then it is natural that the shaming audience should take the shape of one's peers or one's group members.

The form that others' disapproval takes in human shame is notable if we compare it to the aggressive threats or attacks that elicit shame*. Shame results more often from others displaying disgust, contempt, or simply ignoring or refusing to interact with the subject, than from angry threats or attacks. This fits the tendency of people to inhibit displays of anger. More often than not, people express their anger by ignoring, excluding, or dismissing the offending agent. In a hugely social and cooperative species like humans, the repercussions of such aggressive 'freezing out' may ultimately be as serious as a

¹⁷ Monkeys and chimpanzees are much more likely to take food from dominant individuals who cannot see them (Flombaum & Santos 2005), and dominant individuals can also extract submission by a simple stare.

¹⁸ Rhesus monkey groups are, according to de Waal (1996), utterly despotic and characterized by a high degree of violence and dominance by the alpha male. A dominant chimpanzee, however, plays a more beneficial role. He is more tolerant, shares food more, and helps prevent or reduce intragroup aggression.

violent attack on the body. It is therefore unsurprising that people should be sensitive to such subtle displays of anger or disapproval, and that social exclusion or isolation is, itself, a source of shame.

The cooption of disgust as an elicitor of shame is, perhaps, the most distinctively human modification to proto-shame. Disgust is rarely, if ever, observed in other primates and, consequently, appears to play no role in nonhuman primate social interaction (Chevalier-Skolnikov 1973).¹⁹ Disgust protects the subject against an object or substance that is potentially harmful if ingested, touched, or spatially adjacent, by disposing the subject to eject it or recoil from it, or from other objects or substances that have been in contact with it (Rozin et al. 2000). The action tendencies of shame and disgust fit one another perfectly. People who feel ashamed tend to retreat from the situation, and are disposed to modify their behavior. Retreat creates the distance that a disgusted subject desires. So, shame can serve its appeasing function in response to disgust as well as to anger.

The connection with disgust transforms elements of proto-shame. Disgust is not associated with conflict over resource distribution, but with harmful and polluting substances and objects. A subject might disgust others because his body is in a certain state (diseased, deformed, dirty), because of what he does (ingests disgusting substances, engages in certain activities), and so on. It may be via this route that shame becomes more closely associated with norms relating to cohabitation. It becomes concerned with what people who live together do, not just such as to reduce competition over resources, but also in order to reduce health threats. What is considered a threat to health might eventually become a very broad category, including things that cannot possibly harm someone physically (burping or smelling of sweat e.g.).

Although people are more likely to feel shame in public than in private (Smith et al. 2002) and are not altogether unhappy about flouting social and moral norms as long as they are not found out, they nevertheless feel shame in private. Furthermore, in private shame, people are still concerned with others' opinion of them. For instance, they may

¹⁹ However, Panksepp has detected what he calls 'olfactory disgust' in virgin female rats to the smell of infant rats (Panksepp 1998, 252).

see themselves as if seen by another, and feel shame. It therefore seems that people, as opposed to most other animals, *internalize* the potentially shaming audience.

It is tempting to think that the internalized audience is merely a foil for some set of norms or standards. For there is a sense in which the subject internalizes the audience's norms and standards because they are mirrored in their disapproval. Nevertheless, to internalize norms and standards in this sense is not to accept or embrace them, as we have seen. There is a potential difference between what the internalized audience approves and disapproves of and what the subject thinks is right and wrong. As Williams (1993) and Calhoun (2004) both point out, this is necessary if shame is to give the subject an objective grasp on how society regards him and his action.

Even if shame primarily tracks the disapproval of others and only secondarily the norms or standards that back such disapproval, it should not therefore be concluded that shame is really *about* the disapproving attitudes of social others and not about failure to live up to social norms and standards. Shame may have the function of indicating a failure to live up to public expectation *via* detecting others' disapproval (Dretske 1981). To the extent that shame is about failure to live up to norms and standards, however, it is about the community's norms and standards, as represented by the external or internalized audience, not about norms and standards autonomously arrived at.²⁰

The last puzzle mentioned in section 1 is that shame focuses on the global self as opposed to actions that the agent performs. If the focus in shame is failing to live up to standards and norms why, one wonders, would the focus not be on one's actions, one's performance? How could it be useful to think of the self as globally bad? It is hardly a constructive way of viewing oneself (e.g. Tangney & Dearing 2002, Keekes 1988). Considering the descent of shame provides part of the answer. Shame derives from an emotion that governs resource access *not* according to what an individual does, but according to the position she is either born into or has achieved. The circumstances under which she experiences proto-shame will be relative to her position in the social

²⁰ This is not to say that a subject cannot come to accept norms and standards, and subsequently come to feel ashamed by falling short of them. However, if the standards and norms are not somehow connected, in the subject's mind, to the disapproval of others, failing to live up to them will not cause *shame*.

structure. It is less about what she does—a dominant individual might be able to do what she proposes to do—than about who she is. As such, it is natural that shame should focus on the self. The tendency to focus on the self in shame is reinforced by its connection with disgust, which, as we have seen, appears to be a specifically human modification. Disgusting substances or features contaminate by proximity or contact (Rozin et al. 2000). Therefore, when someone finds something that you do or something that you've touched disgusting, they tend to find you disgusting too. Naturally, therefore, the focus is on the self as a whole in disgust-induced shame.

There is one last feature of shame that is beautifully accounted for by its descent: the phenomenology of shame. Feeling small, feeling inferior to others, and wanting to sink into the ground, seem little more than the awareness of the physiognomy of submission: its slumped, contracted, and diminished posture, head and eyes directed at the ground. It may seem natural to think that when you have failed in some way, you *should* feel small. On reflection, however, it is hard to see why. Its descent in submission explains why being ashamed feels the way it does. In many respects, then, it is felicitous to think of shame in terms of its descent. It explains otherwise puzzling features of shame: the centrality of status, the idea of an audience, and the focus on the self.

Now, Keltner and colleagues understand shame in terms of its original function, which is presumed to be more or less identical to that of shame*. According to such theories, the expression of shame is submission or appeasement or, for the more adventurous, an emotion of submission and appeasement. It is too simplistic, however, to construe shame merely as an emotion of submission or appeasement. It ignores the sometimes significant developments this emotion has undergone. Even thinking about shame more in terms of shame*'s appeasing function fails to do justice to it. Human shame has to do with living together in the complex ways characteristic of human societies, and is not limited to situations of conflict over resources. As I argued in section 1, shame is a response to shortcomings when it comes to public expectations; it is about our lives with others, our identity and position in a community. Our susceptibility to shame is an implicit acknowledgement of a demand to live in accordance with public

norms and standards. This bears some relation to submission insofar as we submit to social expectations. Through its sensitivity to social rank and status, shame has retained elements that are clearly connected to submission. Shame, however, is clearly a much more complex emotion than shame*. Shame is less about submitting to a dominant individual to ensure our continued membership of the group, and more about submitting to a way of life, with its strictures, prohibitions, and demands. Nevertheless, to the extent that shame retains features of proto-shame, it is a mistake to think shame is all about public standards and norms but no longer about rank and submission. It is not incorrect to think of shame in terms of failure to live up to standards and norms that are generally accepted in one's social milieu. But, as we have seen, shame is not limited to situations where there are identifiable norms or ideals in play. Shame can be experienced when one is forced to do others' bidding or when one is physically overwhelmed by them, e.g. in persecution or rape. These forms of shame are best understood in terms of its descent in submission, wherefore it is not entirely correct to think of shame merely in terms of a failure to live up to standards and norms, however perverse they might be.

Everything said, the appeasement hypothesis is nevertheless important to understanding shame. Keltner has shown that it is a fact that the shame display *does* appease. Given its descent, this is not likely to be an accident. Appeasement continues to form part of what shame is. As such, it is an important addition to the shame picture. In a way, appeasement looks at shame from the point of view of other people rather than from the point of view of the individual. The person who is ashamed shows to others—through the shame display—not just a recognition that they have failed to live up to public expectations, but also that they have an adverse emotional reaction to it. The experience of shame confirms the social grounding of the subject. She demonstrates to others that their opinion matters as to how she conducts herself, how she decides to live her life. Her shame indicates she can be counted on to live a life with others within the constraints set by the community. Appeasement is the other side of the coin of the recognition that one has failed to live up to social norms, standards, and ideals. It reconfirms the interpretation of shame as being a group-oriented emotion. This does not imply, of

course, that shame cannot apply to failure to live up to more individualistic ideals and norms. A top athlete, e.g., can feel ashamed of failing to live up to an ideal he, and no one else, sets himself. Experiences of shame like this, however, are secondary to the socially embedded shame experience described above.

The above characterization of shame raises the question of whether something of importance to our ordinary conception of shame—the idea that shame is sometimes appropriate and sometimes not—has been sacrificed in favor of being able to explain and predict the varieties of shame experiences. According to the account, there is nothing extraordinary or misguided about victims of persecution and violence feeling ashamed; it is, as it were, a leftover of the function of shame’s evolutionary ancestor. However, it seems just wrong that someone like Francine should feel ashamed. Surely, there is an important difference between someone feeling ashamed because they failed to help someone in need, e.g., and someone feeling ashamed because they were raped. The account has nothing to say about this intuitive difference. And that might seem like a serious shortcoming. The charge can be leveled against group-centered views as a whole.

It is tempting to think that because group-centered views leave little room for appropriateness conditions, accounting as they do for shame experiences like persecution shame along with more appropriate shame experiences, agent-centered views honor such conditions by leaving inappropriate shame experiences outside the ken of shame. In fact, agent-centered views may be regarded as designed to account for appropriateness conditions primarily.²¹ Appealing though it is, this proposal ignores that agent-centered views, too, have problems accounting for appropriateness conditions. For instance, agent-centered views cannot account for the appropriateness of shaming. To say that someone like Ted Bundy should be ashamed of himself, we need something like a group-centered view of shame. According to agent-centered views, people should only be ashamed of failing to live up to standards and norms that they themselves accept, wherefore Bundy ought not be ashamed. Appropriateness conditions, then, are tricky, and both agent-centered and group-centered views have problems accounting for them.

²¹ This worry was raised by an anonymous reviewer for this journal.

What role should appropriateness conditions play in accounts of shame? I propose that they play a relatively minor role. The reason is that appropriateness conditions vary widely culturally, where the conditions under which people actually feel ashamed vary less. This suggests that appropriateness conditions are often less indicative of intrinsic features of shame as an emotion than of the cultural and moral outlook of the community in which the individual finds herself. Take the phenomenon of being ashamed of having been raped. Few people in North America think that rape victims should be ashamed. Despite this belief, we do find such shame to be a pervasive phenomenon. By contrast, people in places such as the Darfur region of Sudan and the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan regard it as appropriate for rape victims to be ashamed. They believe that being raped is shameful. Indeed, it brings shame on the entire family. However repugnant one might find this idea, it highlights that the way people think about shame, but not necessarily the conditions under which they are likely to feel ashamed, are profoundly colored by their moral outlook on things. It is here, I propose, that we locate the appropriateness conditions of shame.

A culture's moral outlook determines, at least partly, when it is appropriate to feel ashamed and also has an effect on when, as a matter of fact, people feel ashamed, but the two may not line up very nicely. As we have seen, one might feel ashamed of something that one thinks one should not feel ashamed about, e.g. being persecuted. It is a very interesting issue why that is so, but it is not one I can address here. To the extent that we are concerned with an account of shame that is not relativized to a particular moral outlook and that has cross-cultural validity, I think we do best to make note of the issue of appropriateness, but not let it direct our research. The group-centered view that I have presented here has the great advantage of explaining and predicting a greater range of shame experiences than most theories of shame, whilst not, I think, having substantially more problems with appropriateness conditions than other theories.

4. Conclusion

In this article, I have argued in favor of a group-oriented view of shame according to which shame is largely about failing to live up to *public* norms, standards, and ideals. Tracing the descent of shame, we added to this picture the idea that shame appeases social others and reconfirms to them the social commitments of the person ashamed. Shame features an audience, focuses on the shortcomings of the whole self, and is sensitive to social rank because of its descent in submission. This provides us with a good picture of what shame is, although it is a picture that is still in need of elaboration. It does not explain why people feel shame at the approval of others, of public nudity, of their sexual desires, etc. Nevertheless, the account has, I think, succeeded in explaining a number of central features of shame. Attempts to provide perfectly tight and coherent accounts fail where my account succeeds simply because it explains puzzling features not in terms of necessary features of the shame experience, but in terms of its descent.

In the debate about the genealogy and psychology of morals, the focus has been primarily on altruism, empathy, sympathy, and a sense of equality (e.g. de Waal 1996, Sober & Wilson 1998, Wright 1995, Boehm 2000, Preston & de Waal 2002, Hoffman 2000, Nichols 2004, Brosnan 2006). This is only part of the story, however. The focus in Western liberal democracies on the individual is in danger of blinding us to the basic sociality of our moral emotions. To understand morality—its psychology and its origin—we must understand shame. As Darwin pointed out, a “powerful stimulus to the development of the social virtues, is afforded by the praise and the blame of our fellow-men”, sensitivity to which he traced back as far as to dogs (1874/1913, 133). The role of shame in morality cannot be determined without first understanding its nature and development. By undertaking some of this work, this paper can be regarded as a prolegomena, if I may use so grand a word, for an exploration of the role, descriptively and normatively, of shame in morality.

Primarily concerned with the opinion of others, shame is heteronomous. It can, therefore, not be the case both that morality is an essentially autonomous practice and that shame plays an important role in it. We must either reject shame as an emotion that we want to play a role in morality (Isenberg 1980, Kekes 1988), or we must resituate

morality in a more community-oriented space (Calhoun 2004). However, shame has come under attack for its destructive consequences. June Tangney famously argues that shame really ought to be abolished, since it is highly correlated with aggression, withdrawal, depression, and other psychopathologies (Tangney & Dearing 2002). These are issues that the practically oriented moral philosopher should have a great interest in. Shame is a topic that promises great things for those interested in morality, whether this interest is genealogical, psychological, or normative. I hope to have contributed a little towards future work in this area.

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