

Studies in the History of Ethics

Unrequited Narcissism: On the Origin of Shame

Robert Metcalf (University of Colorado at Denver)

“This age of childhood, in which the sense of shame is unknown, seems a paradise when we look back upon it later, and paradise itself is nothing but the mass-phantasy of the childhood of the individual. This is why in paradise men are naked and unashamed [*nackt und schämen sich nicht vor einander*], until the moment arrives when shame and anxiety awaken [*bis ein Moment kommt, in dem die Scham und die Angst erwachen*]; expulsion follows, and sexual life and cultural development begins”—Freud, 1900.

In this passage from *The Interpretation of Dreams*¹, Freud directs our attention to the interweaving of shame, phantasy and anxiety—a complexity whose theoretical clarification attracted his energies, as it should ours. While Freud’s approach to these matters remains controversial among academic philosophers in general,² his influence on moral philosophy has grown considerably in the last two decades, in large part because of the thoroughgoing naturalism offered by his theory, as well as its ability to explain various moral pathologies.³ A Freudian approach to shame is especially promising, since shame, more than guilt, appears to lend itself to naturalistic explanation—as Bernard Williams argued⁴—and presents a variety of pathologies familiar to us from our literary tradition.⁵ Furthermore, as the quotation above suggests, Freud’s approach may serve to illuminate some of the oldest cultural narratives through which we understand shame, such as in the *Genesis* story of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from Eden. Philosophers from Augustine to our own contemporaries have continually gone back to the *Genesis* account to raise the question of shame’s origin and moral significance.⁶ Yet, if the content of the story is itself the product of phantasy, as Freud asserts, our philosophical interpretation of it may fail to go beyond this “mass-phantasy” and thus fail to arrive at a true

account of shame.⁷ To be sure, a Freudian approach may in the end only substitute different phantasies for the traditional ones—as Freud explicitly acknowledged in his analysis of religious ideas as “illusions”⁸—but even this may amount to progress of sorts, as some phantasies are, philosophically speaking, better than others.

To appreciate Freud’s approach to the origin of shame, we may begin by contrasting it with Augustine’s interpretation of the *Genesis* story in *The City of God*, Book XIV, chapter 17:

It is right, therefore, to feel very much ashamed of [sexual] lust [*merito huius libidinis maxime pudet*], and it is right that the members which it moves or fails to move by its own right, so to speak, and not in complete conformity to our decision, should be called *pudenda* (“parts of shame”), which they were not called before man’s sin; for, as Scripture tells us, “they were naked, and yet they felt no shame.” This was not because they had not yet noticed their nakedness, but because nakedness was not yet disgraceful, because lust did not yet arouse those members independently of their decision. The flesh did not yet, in a fashion, give proof of man’s disobedience by a disobedience of its own... When...in consequence their disobedience was chastized by a corresponding punishment, there appeared in the movements of their body a certain shameless novelty [*inpudens novitas*], which made nakedness indecent [*indecentis*]. It made them self-conscious and ashamed.⁹

This is a fascinating interpretation of the *Genesis* story, in part because Augustine introduces the peculiar explanation that Adam and Eve felt ashamed before God because of the “shameless novelty” of their pudenda. In other words, Augustine thinks that shame originated in our progenitors’ consciousness of their disobedient genitals, this disobedience being itself God’s

punishment for their having disobeyed Him. This story of Adam and Eve's unwilling arousal, and consequent feelings of shame, is thus made to fit the immediate context in the *City of God*, which presents something amounting to an extended Lament of the Defiant Erection.

Odd as it may seem, Augustine's gloss on the *Genesis* story does have the advantage of illustrating vividly the difficulties involved when we philosophize about the origin of shame—here, in particular, the hazard of reading into shame one's own idiosyncrasies. Even Max Scheler, resolved as he was to avoid this hazard, was led by the peculiarities of his own sense of shame to assert the natural shamefulness of having sex with the lights on, as well as the importance of averting one's eyes from the genitals of one's lover.¹⁰ In Augustine's case, shame came to be interpreted according to his signature preoccupation with the conflict between the spirit (or will) and the unwilling flesh. In the section of Augustine's *City of God* immediately preceding the passage quoted above, the philosopher's idiosyncrasies are fully displayed:

[T]here are lusts for many things, and yet when lust [*libido*] is mentioned without the specification of its object, the only thing that normally occurs to the mind is the lust that excites the indecent parts of the body [*nisi alla qua obscenae partes corporis excitantur*]. This lust assumes power not only over the whole body, and not only from the outside, but also internally; it disturbs the whole man, when the mental emotion combines and mingles with the physical craving, resulting in a pleasure surpassing all physical delights. So intense is the pleasure that when it reaches its climax there is an almost total extinction of mental alertness; the intellectual sentries, as it were, are overwhelmed. Now surely any friend of wisdom... would prefer, if possible, to beget children without lust of this kind. For then the parts created for this task would be the servants of his mind, even in

their function of procreation, just as the other members are its servants in the various tasks to which they are assigned. They would begin their activity at the bidding of the will, instead of being stirred up by the ferment of lust. (XIV, §16)

It is this phenomenon—the body’s insubordination [*inoboedientia*] to the will—that constitutes for Augustine the cause of shame, leading one to “shun the eyes of beholders in embarrassment” (ibid, §19).¹¹ When Augustine thereafter concludes that human nature is rightly ashamed of its sexual lust [*pudet igitur huius libidinis humanam...naturam, et merito pudet*] (ibid, §20), we can see the close connection between his account of shame as caused by the punishment of bodily insubordination to the will and his doctrine of original sin: “it was entirely fitting that this retribution should show itself in that part which effects the procreation of the very nature that was changed for the worse through that first great sin [*primo et magno...peccato*]” (ibid, §20).¹²

Yet what is altogether clear about Augustine’s account of shame is its *illusory* character—using “illusion” here in Freud’s sense: not a falsehood, but an idea whose value lies in wish-fulfillment. Here the interpretation of *Genesis* is made to serve Augustine’s wish that human genitalia transmit original sin.¹³ This means, then, if we accept Freud’s account in the epigraph to this essay, that there are multiple layers of phantasy in the story of Paradise, and the phantasy is only magnified by Augustine’s reading of *Genesis*. The “mass phantasy” of which the ancient tale is symptomatic betrays the wish to return to a time before shame, where there was no need to cover one’s nakedness, and furthermore it fulfills the wish to be punished for a transgression that is at least vaguely sexual in its meaning.¹⁴ Here, I take it, we are justified in being thoroughly skeptical as to whether this approach has gone back far enough to give us a true account of shame’s origin. Pace Augustine, shame will have originated prior to the meting out of punishment for transgression,¹⁵ and presumably it will have been prior even to the will by which

Adam and/or Eve are cognizant of their capacity to disobey. For, it is perfectly imaginable that one could, in the “beginning,” so to speak, bring shame upon oneself unwillingly—say, by something about one’s body, erectile or not, that has nothing whatsoever to do with disobedience because it is not something over which one has control. Shame in this state of nature outside the individual’s will requires not cognizance of one’s capacity to disobey, but only an attachment, and with it vulnerability, to the regard of another.¹⁶

Consider John Locke’s account of the shame experienced by children in his treatise, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. Locke begins the discussion by writing that “children *when little* should look upon their parents as their lords, their absolute governors, and, as such, stand in awe of them; ...when they come to riper years, they should look on them as their best, as their only sure friends, and, as such, love and reverence them” (§41).¹⁷ What Locke then goes on to counsel at some length is that the parents take care to make the children capable of deserving “the favor of their parents and the esteem of everybody else” (ibid), or what he later calls “the state of esteem and acceptation they are in with their parents and governors” (§53). A lengthy passage, worth quoting for its clarity, makes the point most relevant to our present concern:

Esteem and disgrace are, of all others, the most powerful incentives to the mind, when once it is brought to relish them. If you can once get into children a love of credit and an apprehension of shame and disgrace, you have put into them the true principle, which will constantly work and incline them to the right (§56)...

[C]hildren (earlier perhaps than we think) are very sensible of *praise* and commendation. They find a pleasure in being esteemed and valued, especially by their parents and those whom they depend on. If therefore the father *caress and commend them when they do well, show a cold and neglectful countenance to*

them upon doing ill,... it will in a little time make them sensible of the difference; and this, if constantly observed, I doubt not but will of itself work more than threats or blows, which lose their force when once grown common and are of no use when shame does not attend them (§57) ... If by these means you can come once to shame them out of their faults (for besides that, I would willingly have no punishment) and make them in love with the pleasure of being well thought on, you may turn them as you please, and they will be in love with all the ways of virtue (§58).

Usually this discussion receives attention on account of Locke's highly ambivalent nod to corporal punishment, for he makes the case that such punishment is justifiable only inasmuch as it "serves to raise *shame* and abhorrence of the miscarriage that brought it on them" (§60). For our purposes, what is striking about this passage, beyond its ringing endorsement of what Annette Baier has called a "shame-morality,"¹⁸ is that shame is understood in terms of something more basic than the child's cognizance of his or her own ability to disobey. Throughout the passage, praise and esteem are associated with doing well, shame with "doing ill" and "miscarriage" and "fault"—none of which necessarily implies disobedience or the delicious freedom to disobey. Indeed, it belongs to the phenomenology of shame that one can be susceptible to it even about things for which one is not morally responsible, such as one's physical defects or something basic to one's nature (e.g., one's sexuality) or even one's family members or close associates.¹⁹ As Locke rightly observed, all that is necessary for "the apprehension of shame and disgrace" is what he calls a "love of credit," that is, an attachment and vulnerability to the regard of others, such that falling under their "neglect and contempt" will occasion the feeling of shame. If shame can be occasioned simply on the basis of this attachment

and its “vicissitudes,” then a philosophical account of shame’s origin must take us back before the emergence of will.

However, at this point we might wonder why shame should be considered a *moral* emotion if, indeed, it is often felt in relation to things for which one is not held to be morally responsible.²⁰ On this question there are sharp divisions between moral philosophers. One rather severe approach has it that, since morality is circumscribed by the notions of responsibility and obligation, shame per se is not morally relevant: as R. E. Lamb puts it, “shame cannot constitute the core of anything properly called morality.”²¹ Another approach, familiar from John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*, is to distinguish morally relevant instances of shame—what Rawls refers to as “moral shame”—from morally irrelevant instances, which he calls “natural shame.”²² A third approach, exemplified in moral “anti-theorists” like Annette Baier and Bernard Williams, looks to shame for evidence that morality must be understood more broadly than what is circumscribed by responsibility and obligation. To be sure, there is something to be said for each approach, and a detailed examination of the significance of shame for understanding the proper scope of morality cannot be pursued here.²³ Nonetheless, the third approach seems most promising for our purposes, particularly because, as John Deigh has argued, it will not fail “to recognize aspects of our identity that contribute to our sense of worth independently of the aims and ideals around which we organize our lives.”²⁴ I take this to be precisely the allure of a Freudian approach to the so-called “moral emotions,” like shame, and to moral philosophy more generally: namely, that in leading us back to the earliest stages of moral-psychological development, it offers us the possibility of understanding the moral significance of matters that fall outside the narrower conception of morality.

Admittedly, Freud's interest in the origin of shame is not entirely the same as that which drives the various accounts of shame by moral philosophers.²⁵ Rather, for the most part, shame appears in Freud's texts only as an object of therapeutic practice, so that it is not unusual to find it lumped together with religion, morality, disgust and other phenomena of psychopathology.²⁶ Nonetheless, in later writings Freud conceived shame to be as fundamental to human existence as walking upright. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, in a footnote to his explanation of how families were originally formed, Freud introduces shame into his account of the fateful psycho-sexual transformation that commenced when human animals became bipedal. He speculates, first, that by this transformation the role of olfactory stimuli in sexual arousal was superseded by that of visual excitations. Then, Freud hypothesizes, the assumption of an upright position meant that the protohuman's genitals, previously concealed, were now "visible and in need of protection [*schutzbedürftig*], and so provoked feelings of shame in him" (XXI, 99n; XIV).

No doubt this radical change of posture, if ever it was experienced as such, occasioned some very peculiar feelings in our prehistoric ancestors. But this armchair-evolutionist's hypothesis about shame seems so contrived, so much the product of unfettered phantasy, as to be difficult to assess philosophically. Its value lies in the direction it points: by interpreting shame as a *protective-mechanism*, it suggests that shame's origin might be found if we were able to say what it is that shame protects against, and in what way shame offers protection [*Schutz*]. The epigraphic quotation from Freud also points in this direction, for in conjoining shame and *Angst* in that prehistoric moment of "awakening," Freud anticipates his mature view that shame responds to, and protects the ego against, anxiety. In fact, Freud comes to understand the developed sense of shame as a response to "moral anxiety," that is, anxiety with respect to conscience, *Gewissensangst*. The *Gewissensangst* to which shame reacts is, in particular, an

evolved form of the young child's anxious vulnerability to the outside world and, most importantly, to his or her parents. Indeed, *Gewissensangst* owes its origins to the ambivalence felt by the young child toward his or her parents, who are at the same time protectors and threatening figures—the latter, since they threaten loss of love and/or corporal punishment, the initial inscrutability of which the child overcomes through various ways of making sense of it and coping with it.²⁷

We might even call this account of shame in terms of protection Freud's *Promethean* account of it, since we find an ancient version of it in Plato's *Protagoras*, where Protagoras discloses shame's origin in his tale of the creation of human beings. According to this "Great Speech" of Protagoras, Prometheus saves human beings from destruction in the aftermath of Epimetheus' momentous oversight in neglecting to assign humans any capabilities [*dunameis*] (321c). In order to make possible their survival in the world, Prometheus was forced to steal from Hephaestus and Athena practical wisdom along with fire (321d). From these stolen gifts, humans acquired the *technai* necessary for staying alive, but not the wisdom for living together in society, political wisdom, since that was in the keeping of Zeus (321d). So at first, there were no cities, and humans lived in scattered isolation, having *technē* sufficient to obtain food, but insufficient to protect them from animals, as they had no *politikē technē* (322b). Protagoras continues the myth as follows:

They did indeed try to band together and survive by founding cities. The outcome when they did so was that they wronged each other, because they did not possess *politikē technē*, and so they would scatter and again be destroyed. Zeus was afraid that our whole race might be wiped out, so he sent Hermes to bring justice

[*dikē*] and shame [*aidōs*] to humans, so that there would be order within cities [*poleōn kosmos*] and bonds of friendship [*desmoi philias*] to unite them. (322b-c)

The oversight attributed to Epimetheus at the beginning of the Great Speech is a play on words since his name literally means “afterthought” [*epimētheia*]. Presumably, the mythic point in putting Epimetheus in charge of distributing capabilities is to say that at the “beginning,” there was no divine *provision* for human survival, that the ability of our kind to survive on earth was an “afterthought” of our coming to be. In response to this desperate situation, Prometheus—literally, “forethought” [*promētheia*—comes to the rescue and procures fire and those practical *technai* by which human beings can eke out a survival, at least in isolation from one another. Accordingly, Protagoras presents shame [*aidōs*] as a sense given to all human beings to compensate for the oversight involved in coming to be without adequate provisions. Zeus’ hand in apportioning this sense to us makes shame appear as truly a “divine anxiety” [*theios phobos*], as Plato’s *Laws* has it (671d), or at least something in-between the human and the divine, like Hermes or even Prometheus himself.

Against the backdrop of this ancient archeology of shame, we can see how Freud’s Promethean account also theorizes shame as a kind of foresight or “fore-thought,” since it is precisely through its anticipatory vigilance that shame offers protection. For, if we take as our measure Freud’s ultimate account of anxiety as a reaction to trauma, and interpret shame as a protective measure in these terms, we would say that what shame protects against is traumatic vulnerability [*Ohnmacht*] or helplessness [*Hilflosigkeit*].²⁸ On Freud’s analysis, what distinguishes anxiety from fear [*Furcht*] is the fact that anxiety is a reaction not to a discrete object, but to a “danger-situation” [*Gefahrsituation*] where the “object” of anxiety is characterized either by its indeterminateness [*Unbestimmtheit*] or by objectlessness altogether

[*Objektlosigkeit*] (XX, 165; XIV, 198). The threat provoking anxiety is that of being overwhelmed or annihilated [*Überwältigung oder Vernichtung*] (XIX, 57; XIII, 287), and it is precisely the experience of vulnerability or helplessness in the face of such a situation that Freud calls trauma: it consists, he says, “in the subject’s estimation of his own strength [*Stärke*] compared to the magnitude [*Größe*] of the danger and in his admission of helplessness in the face of it [*das Zugeständnis unserer Hilflosigkeit gegen sie*]” (XX, 166; XIV, 199).²⁹ Accordingly, shame can operate as a protective mechanism by mitigating, at least to some degree, the experience of traumatic helplessness.

In his 1926 text, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, Freud explains this form of protection as follows:

The individual will have made an important advance in his capacity for self-preservation [*Selbstbewahrung*] if he can foresee and expect a traumatic situation of this kind which entails helplessness, instead of simply waiting for it to happen. Let us call a situation which contains the determinant for such an expectation a danger-situation. It is in this situation that the signal of anxiety is given. The signal announces: “I am expecting a situation of helplessness to set in,” or “The present situation reminds me of one of the traumatic experiences I have had before—therefore I will anticipate the trauma and behave as though it had already come, while there is yet time to turn it aside [*es abzuwenden*].” Anxiety is therefore on the one hand an expectation of a trauma [*Erwartung des Traumas*], and on the other a repetition of it in a mitigated form [*eine gemildete Wiederholung desselben*]. (XX, 166; XIV, 199)

The “capacity for self-preservation” mentioned by Freud at the beginning of this passage is something brought about by anxiety insofar as anxiety provokes, as its reflex, an attempt to avert the danger-situation, or at least bring the danger-situation under the subject’s control to the extent possible. In Freud’s words, “the ego, which experienced the trauma passively [*das Trauma passiv erlebt*], now repeats it actively in a weakened version [*wiederholt nun aktiv eine abgeschwächte Reproduktion desselben*], in the hope of being able itself to direct its course [*deren Ablauf selbsttätig leiten zu können*]” (XX, 167; XIV, 200). He likens it to the way that children “abreact a trauma” by reproducing the distressing experience in their play: “in thus changing from passivity to activity they attempt to master their experiences psychically [*psychisch zu bewältigen*]” (XX, 167; XIV, 200). On this developmental model, shame and other moral affects are responses to “anxiety of conscience,” *Gewissensangst*, and they function to make sense of this anxiety of conscience and cope with it in more or less successful ways. At each stage in this development, the threat that causes anxiety is a threat to that fundamental comportment or attitude [*Verhalten*] of the ego that Freud calls narcissism. Thus, to understand how shame as a response to *Gewissensangst* evolves out of more archaic stages of psychosexual development, one must understand what narcissism is and how it gives rise to a conscience with its attendant anxiety-formation.

In his 1914 essay, “On Narcissism: An Introduction,” Freud hypothesized a state of primary narcissism, an “original investment of libido in the ego” [*ursprüngliche Libidobesetzung des Ichs*] (XIV, 75; X, 140). The hypothesis is meant to explain, and receive confirmation in, the fact that very young children have as part of their charm a self-satisfaction [*Selbstgenügsamkeit*] and inaccessibility [*Unzugänglichkeit*], what Freud also calls “an unassailable libidinal position which we have since abandoned” [*einer unangreifbaren*

Libidoposition, die wir selbst seither aufgegeben haben] (XIV, 89; X, 155). Yet we must keep in mind that the self invested with libido in this original position is not aware of its being distinct. According to Freud, primary narcissism involves two original love-objects: oneself [*sich selbst*] and the woman who is one's nurse [*das pflegende Weib*]*—that is, mother or her “substitute”* [*Ersatz*] (XIV, 88; X, 153-54). The *indistinctness* of the self loved in primary narcissism, as well as the *substitutability* of its objects, are essential points in its analysis, as Freud makes clear when he draws out a schematic view: “A person may love... [a]ccording to the narcissistic type: (a) what he himself is (i.e., himself), (b) what he himself was, (c) what he himself would like to be [*was man selbst sein möchte*], (d) someone who was once part of himself” (XIV, 90; X, 156).³⁰ Pointing out that the inclusion of (c) can be justified only later in the essay, Freud then works toward this justification in his discussion of the “ego-ideal.”

The formation of an ego-ideal [*die Idealbildung*] is a necessary feature of Freud's account of how people recognize [*anerkenne*] cultural and ethical ideas as binding on them, and so submit [*unterwerfe*] to their demands (XIV, 93; X, 160). He writes that when, later in life, one is “disturbed by the admonitions of others” [*durch die Mahnungen gestört*], one seeks to recover the narcissistic self-satisfaction of childhood in the new form of an ego-ideal, what one would like oneself to be (XIV, 94; X, 161). What he projects before himself in this phantasy, Freud writes, is a “substitute for the lost narcissism of childhood” [*der Ersatz für den verlorenen Narzißmus seiner Kindheit*] (XIV, 94; X, 161), or an exchange of narcissism for “homage to a high ego-ideal” [*Narzißmus gegen die Verehrung eines hohen Ichideals eingetauscht*] (XIV, 94; X, 161-62). Here Freud offers us his account of the origin of conscience in conjunction with the formation of this ideal:

It would not surprise us if we were to find a special psychological agency which performs the task of seeing that narcissistic satisfaction from the ego-ideal is ensured and which, with this end in view, constantly watches the actual ego and measures it by that ideal ... A power of this kind, watching, discovering and criticizing all our intentions, does really exist. Indeed, it exists in every one of us in normal life... [W]hat prompted the subject to form an ego ideal, on whose behalf his conscience acts as watchman, arose from the critical influence of his parents (conveyed to him by the medium of the voice) [*durch die Stimme vermittelten kritischen Einfluß der Eltern*], to whom were added, as time went on, those who trained and taught him and the innumerable and indefinable host of all the other people in his environment—his fellow-men—and public opinion... The institution of conscience was at bottom an embodiment, first of parental criticism, and subsequently of that of society” [*im Grunde eine Verkörperung zunächst der elterlichen Kritik, in weiterer Folge der Kritik der Gesellschaft*] (XIV, 95-96; X, 162-63).

The crucial point in this passage is that the ego-ideal, along with conscience and the *Gewissensangst* that develops with it, have their origin in the “critical influence” coming from parents. In other words, the narcissistic love that targets one’s self no more distinctly than one’s parents is complicated very early on by the steady incorporation of parental criticism. Indeed, at the close of the essay, Freud writes that the bad conscience [*Schuldbewußtsein*] or “social anxiety” that comes from failing to fulfill the ego-ideal “was originally anxiety about punishment at the hands of parents, or more correctly, anxiety about losing their love, and later the parents are replaced by an indefinite number of fellow-men” [*ursprünglich Angst vor der Strafe der*

Eltern, richtiger gesagt: vor dem Liebesverlust bei ihnen; an Stelle der Eltern ist später die unbestimmte der Genossen getreten] (XIV, 102; X, 169-70).

We may now trace the aetiology of shame from out of primary narcissism. The “unassailable” self-satisfaction of earliest childhood, like the Paradise of scripture, is lost in one’s anxiety at the prospect of *Liebesverlust*, losing the love of one’s parents. To avoid losing this love, one projects a phantasied ideal of what one would like to be—and this ideal, prompted by parental criticism, is in large measure “the common ideal of a family, class or nation” (XIV, 101; X, 169).³¹ Thereafter one will strive to approximate the ideal, and failures in this effort will be monitored by that agency called “conscience.” The anxiety felt primitively at the prospect of losing parental love is thus transformed into that cultivated anxiety of conscience, *Gewissensangst*, that one now feels diffusely toward others who command one’s respect and admiration. To have such a conscience is to be perpetually “on guard” against the ‘danger-situations’ that would provoke anxiety, as Freud explains in his *New Introductory Lectures*:

The danger of psychical helplessness fits the stage of the ego’s early immaturity; the danger of object-loss (or loss of love) fits the lack of self-sufficiency in the first years of childhood; the danger of being castrated fits the phallic phase; and finally anxiety with respect to the superego, which assumes a special position, fits the period of latency. In the course of development, the old determinants of anxiety should be dropped, since the situations of danger corresponding to them have lost their importance owing to the strengthening of the ego. But this only occurs quite incompletely... Anxiety with respect to the superego should normally never cease, since, as the anxiety of conscience, it is indispensable in

social relations, and only in the rarest cases can an individual become independent of human society. (XXII, 88; XV, 95)

Shame, like guilt, is a response to such anxiety, protecting one's self by averting the anxiety and lessening its impact. These moral emotions displace anxiety by directing critical attention upon the self.³² This "recoil upon the self" in shame, as Scheler put it, allows for an active rather than passive response, for one can anticipate hostility from without and work pro-actively to transform oneself, or to conceal oneself and thereby avoid the threat.³³

We should now be in a position to see the "protection" that is offered by shame as displaced anxiety. In holding oneself responsible for what is suffered in shame, one is able to make sense of the suffering and thus gain some relief, in a way that is not available to one who suffers from the free-floating apprehensiveness of anxiety. To feel shame is to recognize shortcomings in oneself, or rather, as Aristotle keenly observed, it is to recognize in oneself signs of weakness [*malakias sēmeia*], of relative powerlessness or passivity (*Rhetoric* 1383b-1384a).³⁴ Weakness, vulnerability, passivity—these are the recurrent traits of what the Greeks experienced as shameful [*aischron*], and they are the principal triggers of shame for us today, which is to say that they make up an index by which we can make sense of its underlying anxiety, and perhaps turn aside the threat while there is yet time. With this attention to weakness, passivity and vulnerability in the affect of shame, we see a richly detailed example of what Freud saw in anxiety-phenomena in general: namely, that they are a kind of dress-rehearsal for the expected danger-situation, a repetition [*Wiederholung*] of traumatic vulnerability in a modified form. The modification here is nothing other than the transformation of traumatic vulnerability—in the face of which one is overwhelmed—into the "signs of weakness" on which one can act, precisely in the effort to root out one's vulnerability to the extent possible.

As should be clear, this traumatic aetiology of anxiety accounts for its “expectant” character [*ihre Beziehung zur Erwartung*] (XX, 166; XIV, 199)—that is, the fact that anxiety is always a matter of “*Angst vor etwas*” (XX, 165; XIV, 197).³⁵ Furthermore, Freud’s account of the role of others in the formation of conscience allows us to understand why shame is something to which one is susceptible only with respect to a particular audience. Aristotle captured this facet of shame in his *Rhetoric* when he writes that those before whom [*pros tina*] one is liable to feel shame are, principally, those who are “of account” because they are in some sense “superior” or “above one” [*huper*] (1385a4-5).³⁶ Of course, this specificity of audience is not simply a distinction between persons, for one’s susceptibility to suffering shame before another is also specific to context, as is shown by Scheler’s example of the nude model and the prurient artist.³⁷ Freud’s developmental account would explain this as the consequence of the fact that *Gewissensangst* emerges from internalizing parental figures, along with their peculiar repertoire of moral sensitivities, and then projecting these figures onto specific others—namely, those who are in some sense “above one.” Perhaps Freud’s most vivid analysis of this phenomenon occurs in his 1912 essay, “On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love,” where the shame experienced within sexual inhibition is explained by Freud as a matter of the sexual partner recalling one’s parental figure.³⁸ Here, Freud says, we have a case of someone overestimating [*überschätzen*] partners who recall parental figures, and for this reason needing a “debased” sexual partner, someone who cannot judge him or command his respect.

However, Freud’s developmental account of shame as a protective-mechanism has another consequence that has been emphasized and developed with great insight by Richard Wollheim. If shame is a response to anxiety in its developed form of *Gewissensangst*, then a key part of the Freudian account of shame will be the way in which one feels “assaulted” by moral

emotions, which implies aggression in its origin as much as narcissistic love.³⁹ In his well-known account of the Oedipus complex, Freud theorized that the young boy phantasizes his father as threatening him with castration for the sexual desires directed onto mother. “In terror,” Wollheim explains, “the boy introjects the father, thereby exchanging a frightening external danger for enduring internal torment. The superego now harangues, upbraids, chastises the boy according to standards that make no allowances for, indeed often expressly run counter to, the boy’s own wishes.”⁴⁰ As a consequence of this process of introjection, the moral conscience that forms is an heir to a figure whom the person fears:

Internal figures must be capable of realizing an agency that can be, from the point of view of the person whom it regulates, heteronomous, and yet possessed of the appropriate authority: that is, it can, through the impact that it makes upon the person’s sense of self, oblige him to adopt towards himself the attitude implicit in shame or guilt, alien though it may seem to him... The authority that they wield must be one that is undiminished by heteronomy, and they do not have to compromise on their heteronomy to acquire the authority they need... [I]t is because internal figures originate, through an incorporative phantasy, from external figures, that, once they have been internalized, they may well continue to address the person who now harbors them as an alien force. They may set themselves to make the person feel shame or guilt on occasions when the person finds no reason to do so.⁴¹

Since the formation of conscience through the agency of these internal figures brings with it a whole “repertoire,” as Wollheim puts it, of moral/aesthetic attitudes that belonged to the external figures (i.e., parents), it will always be possible for shame or guilt to be triggered independently

of the person's mature beliefs.⁴² The authority possessed by these internal figures, Wollheim says, "regulates the person's attitude without necessarily touching his opinion."⁴³ Wollheim calls this the *radical heteronomy* of shame, and urges us neither to deny this heteronomy out of an appreciation of the authority implicit in it, nor to deny this authority in light of its heteronomy.⁴⁴

Introjection represents a kind of "trade-off," Wollheim argues, inasmuch as setting up an internal critic in place of the external critic is carried out in hopes of having more control over the critical agency.⁴⁵ Yet Wollheim is quick to add that "the trade-off... is not a pact that we enter into as free signatories: rather it is part of the natural history of our emotions, and of ourselves."⁴⁶ To say that the child does not enter into this pact as a free signatory is to say that undergoing this primitive stage of moral development is not a matter of *will*. Rather, the introjection of parental figures into one's soul and the formation of conscience occurs prior to the emergence of will. Accordingly, the shame and/or guilt to which one is thereby susceptible is older than the will and, indeed, older than the will's relationship to obedience and disobedience. This account best explains why one's sense of shame is sensitive to criteria that are morally "primitive" in the sense that they do not allow for a precise distinction between the moral and the aesthetic. Here Locke's broad criteria of doing well or doing ill provide a workable modern translation of the ancient criteria, "fair" [*to kalon*] and "foul" [*to aischron*], as the operative terms to which one's sense of shame is sensitive. The contrast here between Freud's account and Augustine's should be clear: if the origin of shame is prior to the will, then shame is rooted in something other than the body's insubordination to the will.

Interesting in this light is the fact that David Velleman has made use of Freud's texts to argue for a conclusion quite at odds with that of Freud/Wollheim in a series of recent articles.⁴⁷

Indeed, Velleman acknowledges the Freudian foundation for Wollheim's account of "radical heteronomy" when he reviews Freud's debunking of the rational authority of morality: "In Freud's thoroughly naturalistic account, our obedience to moral requirements owes nothing to their meriting obedience; it's due entirely to incentives that appeal to our inborn drives."⁴⁸ Nonetheless, Velleman adopts Freud's developmental moral psychology in line with a completely different view of morality—and, specifically, a Kantian view of the authority belonging to moral requirements—using materials taken from Freud.⁴⁹ His strategy is to turn the question of the superego's authority into the Kantian *questio juris* of how the ego recognizes this authority as justified.⁵⁰ The answer supplied by his interpretation of Freud is that the superego's authority to make demands and to punish the ego was "granted by the ego itself" in forming an ego ideal, as the superego is simply a reflection of the ego acknowledging this ideal as a moral standard to live by.⁵¹ If the ego's response to the superego is to be that of a moral emotion such as guilt or shame, rather than simply the non-moral emotion of fear, the ego must *buy into* the superego's demands, as Velleman explains:

[A] child internalizes his parents' discipline in two distinct senses. On the one hand, he introjects his parents to form an inner agency of criticism and aggression. On the other hand, his admiration for these figures, both real and introjected, entails that his ego accepts and applies to itself the values that they express. So the child not only *takes in* the demanding figures of his parents but also *buys into* their demands.⁵²

In a footnote to the last sentence quoted, Velleman takes Freud to task for confusing, or at least being undecided about, the difference between *taking in* a parental figure and *buying into* its demands upon the ego, and asserts against Freud: "[B]uying into the demands of one's parents,

or of other authority figures, is indeed necessary if fear of their punishment is to be transformed into moral anxiety, or guilt.”⁵³

To bolster this argument against Freud, Velleman culls together passages from Freud’s texts to the effect that the child must himself have a substantial role in how figures are internalized. Indeed, Velleman presses his claim that Freud cannot explain how the child’s love or admiration for the parental figure can endow the internal figure with the requisite authority for inspiring moral anxiety if there is not already operating in the process of internalization what Velleman calls “an independent faculty of normative judgment.”⁵⁴ He explains this as follows:

Even if the raw materials of the ego ideal are derived from demands made on a child by others, he must somehow select among them, rank them, and organize them into a coherent image of a better self... Here is one point at which he must engage in evaluative reasoning. Freud himself appears to acknowledge the child’s use of such reasoning, for example, when he refers to “the awakening of his own critical judgment”... Freud often points out that the child gradually transfers his admiration from his parents to other figures, who are often of his own choosing.⁵⁵

Arguing that Freud never explains how this transfer of admiration takes place, Velleman inserts into the Freudian account his own view that child must, throughout this process, “apply evaluative concepts autonomously, even to the extent of re-evaluating the instances from which he first learned them.”⁵⁶ This has as its most important implication that the child must possess “an evaluative faculty that is independent of the received values preserved in the superego,” so that the superego is not the final or ultimate authority for morality, after all.⁵⁷ Rather, in keeping with Kant’s insistence upon the autonomy of moral authority, Velleman writes that the child’s “evaluative faculty lends authority to the superego but can also call that authority into doubt.”⁵⁸

Velleman explains further that the superego lacks ultimate authority “because it reflects the child’s infatuation with his parents, which is superseded in maturity by evaluative reasoning undertaken by the ego under norms of rationality.”⁵⁹ Nonetheless, the child’s credulous love for his parents does genuinely respond to something that is morally salient, as Velleman writes:

What the child experiences in being loved by his parents, and what he responds to in loving them, is their capacity to anticipate and provide for his needs, often at the expense of their own interests. And this capacity of the parents is nothing other than their practical reason, or practical good sense, by which their immediate self-gratification is subordinated to rational requirements embodied in another person. It’s their capacity to take another person as an end... Although the child may overvalue his parents as the noblest and loveliest specimens of humanity, he does not err in loving them, to begin with, as specimens of humanity, in the Kantian sense of the word. And when he later internalizes their tin nobility and paper loveliness, he must also internalize their humanity, which is pure gold—a standard not to be superseded by other ideals... When he internalizes this ideal, in the image of his loving parents, he internalizes the Categorical Imperative, which just is a description of the capacity to take persons as ends.⁶⁰

Clearly, the advantage of this account is that it locates within the “credulity of love” observed by Freud a morally authoritative ideal that can then inform the child’s independent faculty of evaluative reasoning. The disadvantage of it is that it relies upon an implausible view of the child’s role in what comes to be introjected into his developing psyche.

For one thing, we should notice that Velleman's appeal to Freud for his argument that the child must engage in evaluative reasoning during the process of forming a conscience—and specifically, his claim that “Freud himself appears to acknowledge the child's use of such reasoning, for example, when he refers to ‘the awakening of his own critical judgment’”⁶¹—is a rather questionable use of Freud's thinking in the essay, “On Narcissism.” In the paragraph from which the quotation is taken, Freud is discussing how the self-love enjoyed by the actual ego in childhood comes to be directed onto the ideal ego [*Diesem Idealich gilt nun die Selbstliebe*], so that narcissism is now displaced [*verschoben*] (XIV, 94; X, 161). Accordingly, the paragraph concludes with Freud's remarks on the effort to “recover” [*wieder zu gewinnen*] this narcissistic self-love through the ego-ideal: “What he projects before him [*vor sich hin projiziert*] as his ideal is the substitute for the lost narcissism of his childhood in which he was his own ideal” (XIV, 94; X, 161). Freud's remark as to “the awakening of [the child's] own critical judgment” seems to serve Velleman's purpose only because the English translation suggests more than the German text actually says: “...*in seinem Urteil geweckt*...” That is to say, Freud is pointing out that when the child, as he grows up [*während seiner Entwicklungszeit*], is disturbed by the admonitions of others and is wakened to his judgment [*Urteil*], his pursuit of narcissistic satisfaction will have turned into the never-ending project of becoming an ego worthy of his ideal. Another way of saying this is that the lost narcissism of early childhood is replaced by that very pale substitute of an ego-ideal, now invested with perpetually unrequited narcissism.⁶² Nothing in the passage suggests that this momentous transformation of narcissism involves the child's autonomous exercise of evaluative reasoning, as Velleman argues. Rather, it suggests precisely the *radical heteronomy* that Wollheim sees in the origin of conscience and the moral emotions, guilt and shame.

Wollheim seems to have anticipated a position like Velleman's when he raises, as an objection, the possibility that the process of internalization might succeed in stripping internal figures of their heteronomous "externality." He replies as follows:

This objection fails to take seriously the nature of introjection. For, once we have internalized a figure, and a disposition to phantasize a counterpart figure as inside us has been established, then how, or when, or to what effect, we phantasize that figure are not matters over which we are likely to have discretion... [I]n internalizing a figure, we internalize, along with it, a whole repertoire on which its identity depends. Over time we can, as we shall see, bring about certain internal changes in ourselves, which in turn can modify or attenuate the strict repertoire that governs what an internal figure is phantasized as doing, saying, thinking. But that is an arduous, oblique, not an immediate process, and, in the meanwhile, the life of internal figures has its own momentum. Error is to think, against all the evidence that our inner life offers us, that everything that goes on in the mind, at least in the thinking part of the mind, is under our control. The repertoire of internal figures is often no more under our control than the rules of a foreign language...⁶³

The "evidence" of our inner life, to which Wollheim appeals in this passage, will surely be weighted toward various instances of *fragility* in our inner lives—phenomena that border on the pathological, if they do not fall altogether within it. Nonetheless, it is worth emphasizing Wollheim's point here that autonomy is an end aimed for and achieved only through arduous work, rather than something exhibited at the outset in a child's application of evaluative concepts. Indeed, when we look back at Velleman's claim that the child "must somehow select

among [the demands made upon the child by others], rank them, and organize them into a coherent image of a better self,” it would appear that Velleman is describing the work of an entire lifetime rather than something the child accomplishes in early development.⁶⁴

Furthermore, the love by which the child is supposed to internalize the Categorical Imperative is a love that seems unrecognizable within Freudian theory. In his essay, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” Velleman has analyzed love as something distinct from “the likings and longings that usually go with it,”⁶⁵ an attitude that he describes as “an arresting awareness of value in a person,”⁶⁶ so that love becomes, on his analysis, nearly indistinguishable from Kantian *reverence*. Of course, one may raise a host of questions about a philosophical account in which love is sharply distinguished from attachment. For our purposes, we may at least note the unlikelihood that such an account could explain the origin of shame in a way as compelling as that of John Locke, where, we may recall, the love relationship between child and parents is alive with likings and dislikings, longing and withering contempt. The latter should strike us as an account of shame that is much closer in spirit to Freud than is Velleman’s energetic attempt to bridge Freudian theory and Kantian ethics.⁶⁷

We first took up Freud’s account of the formation of conscience in order to get at the origin of shame *before* the emergence of will. Freud’s approach leads one to an appreciation of what Wollheim has called the *radical heteronomy* of shame, its rootedness in the internal figures who, independently of the ego’s own beliefs, have the authority necessary to threaten the ego with anxiety. On this theory, the ego protects itself against the threat of anxiety, in Promethean fashion, by adopting the attitude we know as shame. The attractiveness of Freud’s account lies in its ability to explain certain core features of shame that are otherwise perplexing, such as shame’s “recoil upon the self,” as Scheler puts it, where the self is scrutinized for signs of

weakness, as well as the specificity of the audience before whom one is susceptible to shame. While Velleman's very different reading of Freud would allow for the child's autonomous exercise in applying evaluative concepts as an intrinsic part of the formation of conscience, we may nonetheless remain confident that a philosophical account of the origin of shame must allow for a stretch of moral development prior to the emergence of will—an insight of Freudian theory that constitutes one of its most important contributions to moral philosophy.⁶⁸

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abu-Lughod, Lila (1986) *Veiled Sentiments*, Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.
- Baier, Annette (1985) *Postures of the Mind*: Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.
- _____ (1986) "The Moral Perils of Intimacy," in *Pragmatism's Freud: The Moral Disposition of Psychoanalysis*, edited by Joseph H. Smith & William Kerrigan, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- _____ (1991) *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume's Treatise*, Cambridge, Ma. & London: Harvard Univ. Press.
- _____ (1993) "Moralism and Cruelty: Reflections on Hume and Kant," *Ethics* 103: 436-57. Reprinted in Baier (1994).
- _____ (1994) *Moral Prejudices*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press.
- _____ (1997) *Commons of the Mind*: Paul Carus lectures, Chicago: Open Court.
- Bernasconi, Robert (1999) "The Truth that Accuses," in *The Ethics of Postmodernity*, edited by Gary B. Madison & Marty Fairbairn, Evanston, Ill: Northwestern Univ. Press.
- Cavell, Marcia (1992) "Knowing and Valuing," in *Psychoanalysis, Mind and Art: Perspectives on Richard Wollheim*, edited by Jim Hopkins & Anthony Savile, London: Routledge.
- Clark, Philip (2001) "Velleman's Autonomism," *Ethics* 111: 580-593.
- Deigh, John (1983) "Shame and Self-Esteem: A Critique," *Ethics* 93: 225-245. Reprinted in Deigh (1996).
- _____, (1996) *The Sources of Moral Agency*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Dilman, İlham (1999) "Shame, Guilt and Remorse," *Philosophical Investigations* 22(4): 312-329.
- Freud, Sigmund (1940-52) *Gesammelte Werke*, multi-volumed, London: Imago.
- _____, (1958) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, translated by James Strachey, multi-volumed, London: Hogarth Press.
- Gardner, Sebastian (1992) "The Nature and Source of Emotion," in *Psychoanalysis, Mind and Art: Perspectives on Richard Wollheim*, edited by Jim Hopkins & Anthony Savile, London: Routledge.
- Gibbard, Allan (1990) *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press.

- Heller, Erich (1984) "Man Ashamed," in *The Age of Prose: Literary and Philosophical Essays*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Isenberg, Arnold (1949) "Natural Pride and Natural Shame," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* X(1): 1-24.
- Kekes, John (1988) "Shame and Moral Progress," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* XIII: 282-296.
- Klaassen, Johann A. (2001) "The Taint of Shame: Failure, Self-Distress and Moral Growth," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 32(2): 174-196.
- Kohut, Heinz. (1966) "Forms and Transformations of Narcissism," in *Essential Papers on Narcissism*, edited by Andrew P. Morrison, New York: New York Univ. Press, 1986.
- Lamb, R. E. (1983) "Guilt, Shame, and Morality," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* XLIII(3): 329-346.
- Lear, Jonathan (1990) *Love and its Place in Nature*, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- _____, (1999) *Open-Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press.
- _____, (2001) *Happiness, Death and the Remainder of Life*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press.
- Locke, John (1693) *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, edited by Ruth W. Grant & Nathan Tarcov, Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett, 1996.
- Manion, Jennifer C. (2002) "The Moral Relevance of Shame," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 39(1): 73-91.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1945) *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris: Gallimard, translated by Colin Smith, *Phenomenology of Perception*, London: Routledge, 1962.
- Metcalfe, Robert. (2002) "The Word of Freud: Our God is Logos," *Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory* 3.2.
- _____, (2004) "Balancing the Senses of Shame and Humor," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 35: 432-447.
- Morrison, Andrew P. (1986) "Shame, Ideal Self, and Narcissism," in *Essential Papers On Narcissism*, edited by Andrew Morrison, New York and London: New York University Press.

- Murphy, Jeffrey (1999) "Shame Creeps Through Guilt and Feels Like Retribution," *Law and Philosophy* 18: 327-44.
- Nussbaum, Martha. (2004) *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.
- Pagels, Elaine (1988) *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, New York: Random House.
- Rawls, John (1971) *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press.
- Rorty, Richard (1986) "Freud and Moral Reflection," in *Pragmatism's Freud: The Moral Disposition of Psychoanalysis*, edited by Joseph H. Smith & William Kerrigan, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Rotenstreich, Nathan (1965) "On Shame," *Review of Metaphysics* 19: 55-86.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul (1943) *L'être et le néant*, Paris: Gallimard, 1943, translated by Hazel Barnes, *Being and Nothingness*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1956.
- Schapiro, Tamar (1999) "What Is a Child?," *Ethics* 109(4): 715-138.
- Scheffler, Samuel (1992a) *Human Morality*, Oxford & New York: Oxford Univ. Press.
- _____, (1992b) "Naturalism, Psychoanalysis and Moral Motivation," in *Psychoanalysis, Mind and Art: Perspectives on Richard Wollheim*, edited by Jim Hopkins & Anthony Savile, London: Routledge.
- Scheler, Max (1913), "Shame and Feelings of Modesty," translated by Manfred Frings, in *Person and Self-Value*, Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987.
- _____, (1954) *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Maria Scheler and Manfred S. Frings, Berne: Franke Verlag.
- Scruton, Roger (1986) *Sexual Desire: A Moral Philosophy of the Erotic*, New York: The Free Press.
- Strawson, Peter (1962) "Freedom and Resentment," reprinted 1982 in *Free Will*, edited by Gary Watson, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Taylor, Gabriele (1985) *Pride, Shame, and Guilt: Emotions of self-assessment*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Velleman, J. David (1999a) "Love as a Moral Emotion," *Ethics* 109(2): 338-374.
- _____, (1999b) "The Voice of Conscience," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 99: 57-76.

- _____ (1999c) "A Rational Superego," *The Philosophical Review* 108(4): 529-58.
- _____ (2000) *The Possibility of Practical Reason*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.
- _____ (2001) "The Genesis of Shame," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 30(1): 27-52.
- Williams, Bernard (1993) *Shame and Necessity*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press.
- Wilson, John (2001) "Shame, Guilt and Moral Education," *Journal of Moral Education* 27(1): 35-46.
- Wollheim, Richard (1984) *The Thread of Life*, Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard Univ. Press.
- _____ (1999) *On the Emotions*, New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press.
- Wurmser, Leon (1981) *The Mask of Shame*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins.

¹ In what follows, citations of Freud will refer first to the English translation—Freud (1958)—then to the German original in Freud (1940-52), indicating volume and page number: in this case, II/III, 250.

² Notable exceptions include Wollheim (1984, 1999), Baier (1986), Rorty (1986) and Lear (1990, 1999, 2001).

³ See Scheffler (1992b), Deigh (1996), and Velleman (1999a, b, c). Scheffler (1992a) makes the case that these two phenomena—which he refers to as the *resonance* and *fragility* of moral emotions—lend themselves to psychoanalytic explanation, 80ff. On this issue, compare Wollheim (1999), 205ff.

⁴ See Williams (1993).

⁵ Heller (1984), Scruton (1986), Williams (1993) and Wollheim (1984, 1999) are excellent on examples of pathological shame in our literary tradition. See also Nussbaum (2004) for contemporary shame-pathologies.

⁶ Contemporary philosophers who follow Augustine’s lead in this include Heller (1984), Dilman (1999), Murphy (1999), Wilson (2001), and most interestingly, Velleman (2001).

⁷ This problem was raised by Max Scheler in his phenomenological treatment of shame early in the 20th century—see Scheler (1913), 36ff. on the problem of “shame-deceptions.”

⁸ For a discussion of Freud’s account of religious ideas, see Metcalf (2002).

⁹ Translation slightly altered from that of Henry Bettenson, London: Penguin Books, 1972, reprint edition 1984.

¹⁰ Scheler (1913), 72-73.

¹¹ The sentence in full reads: “Hoc est quod pudet, hoc est quod intuentium oculos erubescendo devitat.” Compare XIV, §23: “the soul is ashamed of its body’s resistance when the body is subordinate to it by reason of its inferior nature” [*nunc vero pudet animum resisti sibi a corpore, quod ei natura inferiore subiectum est*].

¹² The passage continues, “This offence was committed when all mankind existed in one man, and it brought universal ruin on mankind; and no one can be rescued from the toils of that offense, which was punished by God’s justice, unless the sin is expiated in each man singly by the grace of God.” For an enlightening discussion of the doctrine of original sin and its impact on subsequent Christian thinking, see Pagels (1988), chs. 5 & 6.

¹³ For a relatively non-illusory discussion of sexual shame, see Scruton (1986), ch. 6.

¹⁴ Pagels (1988) traces the numerous and various interpretations of the story as signifying sexual transgression, particularly among early Christian writers. Moreover, the illusory character of Augustine’s interpretation is evident even in its tendentious straying from the text: for example, David Velleman has pointed out that in *Genesis* the shame felt by Adam and Eve precedes their punishment by God—after all, He discovers their disobedience when they hide from Him in shame, thus suggesting a kind of “detective work” on the Lord’s part. So, Velleman writes, “their shame was a predictable result of their eating from the tree of knowledge, not the result of any subsequent reengineering of their constitutions.” But despite the illusory character of Augustine’s interpretation, Velleman suggests the following reading: “the reason why Adam and Eve weren’t ashamed of their nakedness at first is not that their anatomy was perfectly subordinate to the will but rather that they didn’t have an effective will to which their anatomy could be insubordinate.” Velleman (2001), 33-34.

¹⁵ As Velleman (2001) argues.

¹⁶ The recent contributions of Dilman (1999) and Wilson (2001) are especially good for their emphasis on this point.

¹⁷ Locke (1693); the italics are Locke’s own, unless otherwise noted.

¹⁸ Baier (1993). See the discussion of Locke's account of shame in relation to Baier's endorsement of a "gentle" shame-morality in Metcalf (2004).

¹⁹ See Isenberg (1949), Rawls (1971), 444ff., Deigh (1983), and the more recent discussion in Manion (2002).

²⁰ On this issue see Baier's comparison of the scope of shame to that of guilt in Baier (1993), 446-448. Compare Wilson (2001).

²¹ Lamb (1983), 345. His central argument against the moral relevance of shame is that, because we feel shame at certain inabilities or incapacities that we do not consider matters of moral obligation, shame has "a much more peripheral role in morality than guilt" (1983), 342. Obviously, these implications follow only if one shares Lamb's conception of morality as delimited by matters of obligation and its accompanying concepts of responsibility, blame, etc. My own view of the distinction approximates that of John Kekes, who writes: "If we take a sufficiently broad view of morality to accommodate a wide enough range of moral experiences, this distinction [between natural and moral shame] becomes untenable. The distinction rests on the assumption that morality and the domain of choice coincide. Since the objects of natural shame are not chosen, natural shame is placed outside of morality. However, the domain of morality is wider than the sphere of choice. Morality is concerned with living good lives and there are many constituents of good lives about which we often have no choice..."—Kekes (1988), 285.

²² Rawls (1971), 444. See also Manion (2002) and Gibbard (1990), 293ff. for more recent discussion of this distinction.

²³ For a much more detailed examination of shame and the proper scope of morality, see my treatment of it in Metcalf (2004).

²⁴ Deigh (1983), 240.

²⁵ Of course, this is not to deny the point made by Deigh (1996), that Freud speaks as much to the questions of moral philosophers as to those of research psychologists, 39.

²⁶ As early as the "Christmas Fairy Tale" that Freud wrote to Fliess on new year's day, 1896, he set shame alongside disgust and morality as "powers of repression" [*Verdrängungskräfte*] (I, 221). For more recent psychoanalytic theories of pathological shame, see Morrison (1986).

²⁷ The importance of ambivalence for this explanation of shame's origin is made evident in Freud's ideas as to the relationship between child and parental figures, where the child's genitals are felt to be the focus of moral judgment, and a source of special vulnerability on the part of the child. This feeling of anxiety with respect to the genitals, which Freud termed the "castration complex," is retained in the developmentally subsequent danger-situations that emerge—most vividly in that which attaches to the danger-situation expected by one's adult sense of shame. In this way, Freud's account allows us to explain the "genitality" of shame as its earliest association in the developing mind., see Wollheim (1999) and Velleman (1999c). A contrary view is presented in Nussbaum (2004).

²⁸ Strictly speaking, there is no single, conclusive account of anxiety [*Angst*] in Freud's later writings. Rather do we find an evolving, continually revised account of anxiety about which the author expressed reservations even at the end. When Freud summarizes his views about anxiety in the *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, he concludes the summary by saying, "one has a feeling that something is missing here which would bring all these pieces together into a whole [*eine Einheit*]" (XXII, 85; XV, 91). The problem was not merely one of unifying disparate observations: "where we are dealing with anxiety," he writes, "you see everything in a state of flux and change" (XXII, 92; XV, 99).

²⁹ Freud writes: "The essential thing about...every situation of danger, is that it calls up in mental experience a state of highly tense excitation, which is felt as unpleasure and which one is not able to master by discharging it. Let us call a state of this kind, before which the efforts of the pleasure principle break down, a 'traumatic' moment... It is only the magnitude of the sum of excitation that turns an impression into a traumatic moment [*Nur die Größe der*

Erregungssumme macht einen Eindruck zum traumatischen Moment], paralyzes the function of the pleasure principle and gives the situation of danger its significance. (XXII, 93-94; XV, 100)

³⁰ Here I am glossing over the distinction Freud draws between the narcissistic type of love and the “anaclitic” or “attachment” type of love, under which type he includes (a) the woman who feeds him and (b) the man who protects him. The distinction between these two types is not made altogether clearly in “On Narcissism: An Introduction.” Nonetheless, for our purposes, the indistinctness and substitutability of the self loved in narcissism is sufficiently clear in the quotation above, since narcissistic love includes other people besides oneself as well as oneself in a very broad sense (who one was, who one would like to be).

³¹ Deigh (1996) captures this point when he writes that “an individual unconsciously defends himself against the blow a loss of love causes that by identifying so strongly with the person he loved that he introjects the latter into himself,” 71.

³² The key to understanding this may already be found in phenomenological accounts of shame. Shame is, as Sartre famously writes, shame of the self [*est honte de soi*]—or, as Scheler (1913) puts it, in shame there is a “recoil upon a self” [*Rückwendung auf einen Selbst*]. One need not go so far as to say, with Scheler, that the self recognizes its own value in feeling shame, or that a certain amount of self-esteem is presupposed by shame, to accept the basic phenomenological insight that shame is “of the self.”

³³ The significance of self-concealment for an adequate philosophical account of shame is stressed by Deigh (1983), 242ff., and Velleman (2001). See Wurmser (1981), for the etymology of “shame,” deriving from an Indo-European word meaning “to conceal oneself.” But the “oneself” that is concealed through shame is closely associated with genitalia, as is evident from etymological connections between “shame” and “genitals”: *Scham* in German is one example; another is the close connection in Greek between the word for shame, *aidōs*, and that for genitalia, *ta aidōia*. For an excellent discussion of analogous connections in Arabic, and their significance for contemporary Bedouin culture, see Abu-Lughod (1986).

³⁴ Rawls (1971), 440-46, interprets shame as an emotion one feels upon the loss of self-esteem, as does Taylor (1985); but on this point, see Deigh (1983).

³⁵ In like manner, Freud explains that the traumatic situation of helplessness recalled by the danger-situation is what accounts for the indeterminateness and objectlessness of anxiety (XX, 165; XIV, 199).

³⁶ Aristotle’s discussion of how shame is occasioned in relation to those who are “of account” [*hōn logon echein*] is worth examining, particularly for its interesting observation of the analogy with *erōs* at the end of the quotation: “Now one has regard for [*logon echei*] those who admire him [*tōn thaumazontōn*] and those whom he admires [*thaumazei*], and those by whom he wishes to be admired, and those who are his rivals [*pros hous philotimeitai*], and those whose opinion he does not despise [*kai hōn mē kataphronei tēs doxēs*]. One desires to be admired by those, and admires those who possess anything good that is honored, or from whom he urgently requires something which it is in their power to give, as is the case with lovers [*hoi erōntes*]” (*Rhetoric* 1384a31-38).

³⁷ See Scheler (1913), 15ff. For more recent discussions of Scheler’s example, see Taylor (1985), 60ff., & Wollheim (1999), 159ff.

³⁸ The essay, which appears in Volume XI of the *Standard Edition*, has an English title whose translation of the German, “Über die allgemeinste Erniedrigung des Liebeslebens,” is somewhat misleading.

³⁹ For Wollheim, shame is a reflexive attitude that arises in response to the anxiety triggered by a perceived threat to one’s “sense of self,” as he puts it—see Wollheim (1999), 180.

⁴⁰ Wollheim (1999), 195-96. But see Deigh (1996), 76ff., for contrast between this “standard account” of the formation of conscience and the more “Nietzschean” account offered in Freud’s *Civilization and its Discontents*.

⁴¹ Wollheim (1999), 178-179.

⁴² Wollheim (1999), 186.

⁴³ Wollheim (1999), 153.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 154. Compare Dilman (1999) on this point: “Our early relationships are relationships of dependence, where we take our cues from parents, etc... But gradually we learn to think for ourselves. We acquire separateness, independence, we become individuals... But this is not a severance of our relationship with them—I mean of the relationships of reciprocity which we have established with them... [I]f we fail them, they are present to us in our feelings—in our shame, for example. It is that part of us which we owe to them,...which speaks in and through the shame we feel,” 317.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 197.

⁴⁶ Wollheim (1999), 198.

⁴⁷ See the closely linked articles: Velleman 1999a, b & c.

⁴⁸ Velleman (1999c), 530.

⁴⁹ Velleman (1999c) explains this gambit as follows: “Of course, the Freudian story of moral development can thus be assimilated into Kantian ethics only if it is significantly revised... But I believe that Freudian theory needs to be revised in this direction anyway, and that the materials for such a revision are provided by Freud himself,” 532.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 541.

⁵¹ Ibid, 542.

⁵² Velleman (1999c), 543.

⁵³ Velleman (1999c), 544n.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 551. On this point, contrast the “Nietzschean” explanation discussed in Deigh (1996): “according to the Nietzschean account, the child identifies with one or both parents in their role as authorities who govern his life. It is authorities *per se* with whom the child identifies... Hence the Nietzschean account goes directly to explaining how the superego is invested with authority and thus how a child acquires a conscience,” 78.

⁵⁵ Velleman (1999c), 552. The Freud quotation is from the essay, “On Narcissism,” *S.E.* XIV, 94.

⁵⁶ Velleman (1999c), 554. Velleman regards his use of Freud here not as revision so much as “supplementation, at precisely the point where Freud loses interest,” 556. Compare Velleman (1999b), where he explains that the superego is “a differentiating grade in the ego,” and the process of introjection by which it is formed is a way of identifying with other people, which is necessarily a deployment of the self,” 61.

⁵⁷ Velleman (1999c), 554-555.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 555.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 556.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 556-557.

⁶¹ Ibid, 552.

⁶² Kohut (1966) blazes the trail here by theorizing shame in all its forms as “transformations” of narcissism: “The unqualified intellectual and emotional acceptance of the fact that we ourselves are impermanent, that the self which is cathected with narcissistic libido is finite in time...rests not simply on a victory of autonomous reason and supreme objectivity over the claims of narcissism but on the creation of a higher form of narcissism...a cosmic narcissism which has transcended the bounds of the individual,” 81.

⁶³ Wollheim (1999), 179.

⁶⁴ Here my criticism of Velleman parallels that advanced by Clark (2001), who argues that Velleman has made autonomy so basic to intentional action as such as to preclude its serving as a standard of rational assessment for action.

⁶⁵ Velleman (1999a), 342.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 362.

⁶⁷ On this point see Annette Baier’s enthusiastic endorsement of a “shame-morality” (Baier, 1993), as well as her embrace of both Freudian moral psychology (Baier, 1986) and Locke’s theory of child development and education (Baier, 1994).

⁶⁸ On the implausibility of Velleman’s view of the child’s role in the process of internalization, and particularly his view of the love that is supposed to make this internalization possible, see Schapiro (1999)—an essay cited approvingly in Velleman (1999c)—where it is stated explicitly that “children do not really have wills of their own,” 734; also, p. 730.