

## Recensioni

### AlessandraFussi Per una teoria della vergogna

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Many assume that the emotions of shame and guilt are neatly distinct. Shame allegedly occurs, somehow superficially, when one's reputation is undermined: it is a self-centred emotion that responds to external norms and sanctions. Guilt, on the other hand, entails a sense of personal responsibility and relates exclusively to the conscience of the individual; thus, as opposed to shame, guilt features distinctively moral traits.

*Per una teoria della vergogna* sets off with a discussion of the traditional distinction between shame and guilt, building on Bernard Williams' defence of shame as developed in *Shame and Necessity* (see B. WILLIAMS, *Shame and Necessity*, Berkeley 1993). One of Williams' major aims is to criticise accounts, such as those of Bruno Snell and Arthur Adkins, which undervalue the complexity of ancient Greek social interactions and moral responses by endorsing a view that sharply distinguishes between shame and guilt. This distinction originates from the assumption that shame is only concerned with external sanctions and, as a consequence, is essentially non-moral. Such an assumption is at work in the shame/culture *versus* guilt/culture antithesis, whose classical formulation is to be found in Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (R. BENEDICT, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston/New York 1946; an earlier statement of the difference between external and internal sanctions appeared in M. MEAD (ed.), *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples*, McGraw/Hill, New York 1937, especially pp. 493-495) and which was first applied to classical Greece by Eric Dodds (E. DODDS, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, California University Press, Berkeley 1951). By questioning the traditional interpretative framework, Williams revitalises ancient Greek views and draws on them to provide a better understanding of contemporary emotional experience, rehabilitating shame and challenging the centrality of guilt in our ethical life.

In her book, Fussi explores the theoretical implications of Williams' defence of shame. She illustrates a fourfold accusation often levelled at shame: that it is a selfish, superficial, and heteronomous emotion that, by entailing an objective attitude (that is, the loss of one's authority to make claims on one another), precludes one from taking an inter-personal standpoint (what Stephen Darwall calls a "second-personal" standpoint: Fussi refers to Darwall's account of Strawson's distinction between reactive and objective attitudes and of the relation between reactive attitudes and accountability; cf. P.F. STRAWSON, *Freedom and Resentment*, in: «Proceedings of the British Academy», vol. XLVIII, 1968, pp. 1-25; S. DARWALL, *Essays in Second-Personal Ethics*, Vol. I and II, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2013). As far as heteronomy is concerned, Fussi argues in favour of a view that blurs the boundaries between shame and guilt: at least in some circumstances, shame puts emphasis on personal responsibility as much as guilt does, while shame's alleged requirement of an "external audience" is as well met by the agent's internalised moral standards as it is by his or her own self-judgment. The last section of CHAPTER 1 deals with the nature of the ethical sensitivity that one has internalised (what Williams calls the "internalised other") and with one's desire to be respected by those whom one respects or admires. By touching on the relation between shame and power, Fussi's concluding remarks open, at least implicitly, to key issues in recognition theory both on a psychological and on a normative level.

The elusiveness of a distinction between shame and guilt is further discussed in CHAPTER 2, which offers an exploration of Aristotle's analysis of *aidōs* and *aischynē* in the *Rhetoric* and in the ethical treatises. The author illustrates the reasons why *aidōs* is denied the status of virtue (*aretē*) and expands on the relation between *aidōs* and *aischynē* as two aspects of a single emotion concept with different temporal orientations. The main claim put forward in this chapter is that, from an Aristotelian perspective, shame includes guilt, but occurs in a broader spectrum of circumstances. As a matter of fact, not only does shame occur when one regrets his or her own immoral conduct, but also as a response to circumstances

for which one is not personally responsible, for instance when one is denied equal status by his or her peers or, more generally, when he or she is a victim of injustice and humiliation. In this respect, the crucial issue arises whether any sharp distinction should be made between one's concerns for one's own moral conduct (guilt-scenarios) and one's focus on his or her own self-image (shame-scenarios). Such a distinction explains a number of phenomenal differences between guilt and shame: such as, why personal responsibility is required for the former but not for the latter or why guilt, but not shame, calls for repayment. Still, as Fussi seems inclined to acknowledge, the definition of shame as an emotion concerned with one's ideal of the person he or she would like to be and that of guilt as concerned with one's own actions and conduct entails a somewhat artificial variance of focus: the evaluation of one's own conduct is a constitutive part of one's self-image and, conversely, one's self-image integrates substantial references to oneself as an agent.

Going further along these lines, CHAPTER 3 starts with a discussion of Gabriele Taylor's distinction between shame as an emotion that focuses on the whole self and is concerned with self-respect, and guilt as an emotion concerned with the self as an agent who is responsible for his or her acts or omissions. The examination of the idea that shame determines a loss of self-respect rather than of self-esteem is supported by an exploration of the former in terms of the danger of feeling excluded from social categories to which one would like to belong and which play an important role as markers of one's identity. One example that the author elaborates on is that of an athlete who has a high opinion of his abilities and is defeated in a competition: he loses some self-esteem, but does not lose self-respect insofar as he believes his performance was good enough to meet the standards required for being an athlete. Loss of self-respect and a feeling of shame result from events that cause us to doubt our legitimate belonging to a group we would like to be part of by showing that the grounds for our belief that we are, say, excellent athletes, good scholars or honest people are in fact shaky. Discussing how we determine whether a failure is so severe as to make us lose our self-respect, Fussi describes the dangers of both solipsistic and other-directed behaviours and emphasises the importance of bal-

ancing a third-person perspective with our own worldview. Building on this, she examines the rationality of shame and its relation to autonomy and heteronomy by emphasising the importance of being able to think from the standpoint of everyone else, illustrating this capacity with reference to Arendt's notion of "enlarged mentality". The second half of the chapter is dedicated to a critique of Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni's account of shame (see *In Defence of Shame*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011) and to the following issues in particular: when one is incapable of living up to the demands entailed by a self-relevant value, is perceiving oneself as being below a minimum acceptance threshold sufficient for one to feel ashamed? Or is it necessary that one apprehends a trait of his or hers as exemplifying the polar opposite of a self-relevant value? How should we pin down the difference between shame and self-disappointment? Does the reflexive stance on oneself that shame involves necessarily entail the adoption of someone else's perspective?

This last question sheds light on a crucial theme in moral psychology: could we ever know ourselves independently of others? Doesn't personal identity fundamentally depend on the feedback we get from other subjects? CHAPTER 4 deals with the ethical and political implications of the relation between recognition and identity formation by focusing on the emotion that Aristotle called *aidōs* ("pudore" in Italian; in English translations "modesty" can be used, but the meanings of the two terms do not precisely overlap). Based on phenomenological observations, Fussi remarks that shame makes one feel powerless and insignificant, but it can also make one feel the need to hide or disappear. She interprets this as an attempt at self-defence against misrecognition, that is, the distortion of one's relation to one's self that results from the discrepancy between what one is or wants to be and the way others look at one. Such an approach interestingly contributes to our understanding of the experience of causeless shame, that is, when we have nothing to be ashamed of and yet we feel ashamed. This emotion is well known to minorities and members of disesteemed groups: what goes on here is that we suffer from being prevented from displaying our own self-representations in an autonomous way, typically because of a demeaning picture of ourselves that is imposed on us by the dominant culture or group or by a powerful individual with

whom we are engaged in an asymmetrical relationship. Fussi's investigation of shame and modesty from the vantage point of the interaction between the private and the public sphere helps us greatly to understand this phenomenon and offers compelling remarks on the dynamics of shame and power.

Insightfully integrating historical reflections with theoretical analysis, *Per una teoria della vergogna* is worth reading for anybody interested in the psychology of shame and in the ethics of an emotion that, properly understood, can play a positive role in our lives.

*Pia Campeggiani*